

RUSSIAN-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA:
BELONGING, POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY, AND STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores various aspects of how Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto negotiate their sense of belonging, social identities, forms of political participation, and citizenship. The particular topics that I address include: the dominant forms of historical imagination in the community and its preoccupation with contested historical topics, especially in regards to World War II; immigrants' disagreement with liberal gender politics and sex education programs at public schools, which I interpret as a manifestation of their insecurity about their children's identities and their parental rights; ideas about education among Russian-speaking immigrants, which reveal their concerns about social class and privilege and their striving to ascertain a sense of belonging to a higher social status in their new country; and, finally, the aspirations for inclusion and full participation in Canadian society that drive their political and cultural activism. I examine how class aspirations based on a high level of education conflate with cultural and moral values of the Russian-speaking community and form the basis for their political mobilization and struggle for their right to be included in the society as a group with their own distinct cultural and historical narratives. I study political participation of Russian-speaking immigrants as a diasporic group in Canada and show how their citizenship practices are simultaneously informed by their Soviet and post-Soviet experiences and by the Canadian political discourse, including the politics of multiculturalism.

My research contributes to the understanding of Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada and their experiences of participation in Canadian society. My dissertation also addresses how Canadian multiculturalism policies impact various groups of Canadians who struggle for their right to be included in the society as a group with their own distinct cultural and historical narratives. Exploring the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Canada, I analyze how their allegiance to their new country and the ways in which they embrace its citizenship practices co-exist with a sense of belonging and allegiance to their homeland. Overall, my study of Russian-speaking immigrants contributes to understanding how diasporas negotiate their multiple ways of belonging in a world where multiple political allegiances are often seen as threatening and questionable.

Lay Summary

This dissertation studies the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Toronto. I address how the community members integrate in Canadian society and develop forms of political participation in their new country, while at the same time maintaining their sense of belonging and allegiance to their countries of origin. I discuss such topics as immigrants' disavowal of liberal gender politics and sex education programs at public schools in Ontario; participation in celebrations of the Soviet victory in WWII; concerns about their parental rights; and ideas about education and social class aspirations. I study political participation of Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada in order to understand how diasporas negotiate their ways of belonging in a world where multiple political allegiances are often seen as threatening and questionable.

Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Anastasia Rogova. The fieldwork reported in the dissertation was approved by UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board (certificate number H16-03136) with Dr. Alexia Bloch as Principle Investigator. All photos used in this dissertation are by the author.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Lay Summary	iv
Preface	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Chapter 1: A Russian-Speaking Immigrant Community in Toronto	1
A Global Russian-Speaking Diaspora	11
Russian-speaking Immigrants in Toronto	17
Russian Toronto	20
Digital Ethnography	28
Russian-Speaking Immigrant Organizations	33
Structure of the dissertation	43
Chapter 2: Protectors of the Great Victory:	
Commemoration of World War II in the Russian Community of Toronto	44
Concerns over History and Community Mobilization	49
The Immortal Regiment	53
A War Memorial	74
Conclusion	77
Chapter 3: At the Frontier of the Family:	
Children’s Bodies and Moral Concerns in the Russian-speaking Community	80
Festival of the Orthodox Christian Family	89
Body	96
Morality	102
Conclusion	109

Chapter 4: The Labours of Literacy:	
Class and Education among Russian-Speaking Immigrants.....	111
Social Distinction in Socialist and Post-Socialist Societies.....	117
Russian Schools, Hard Work, and Discipline.....	122
Social Agency as Class Privilege.....	126
Cultured Consumption and the Consumption of Culture.....	130
Learning and Performing Literacy.....	136
Conclusion.....	141
 Chapter 5. To Be Russian in Canada:	
Understanding and Performing Citizenship among Russian Canadians.....	143
Becoming Canadian Citizens.....	148
Political Mobilization.....	151
Canadian Multiculturalism and the Narrative of Recognition.....	156
Political Discourse.....	167
Conclusion.....	174
 Conclusion.....	176
 Bibliography.....	182

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 A Russian grocery store in Toronto.....	24
Figure 1.2 A Russian pharmacy in Toronto.....	26
Figure 1.3 Celebrations of Family Day at the Russian House, July 2017	37
Figure 2.1 The Immortal Regiment at the Old Town Hall in downtown Toronto, May 6, 2017	45
Figure 2.2 The Immortal Regiment in the Russian neighbourhood, May 7, 2017	56
Figure 2.3 The Immortal Regiment in the Russian neighbourhood, May 7, 2017	57
Figure 2.4 Parade at Earl Bales park, May 7, 2017	59
Figure 2.5 The Immortal Regiment in downtown Toronto, May 6, 2017	63
Figure 2.6 The Immortal Regiment in downtown Toronto, May 6, 2017	65
Figure 3.1 Festival of the Orthodox Christian Family, June 2017.....	90

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I thank Dr. Lisa Sundstrom, who stepped in and joined my committee in September 2019. I appreciate her willingness to join at that late stage and her commitment to read my dissertation in a short period of time and to provide very valuable feedback. Lisa's background as a political scientist provided many new perspectives and her comments helped me clarify my thinking. I am grateful to Dr. Patrick Moore, whose feedback on my chapters challenged me to shape my argument and make it stronger. I also thank other faculty and staff at the Department of Anthropology, as well as the graduate student community at UBC for their support throughout these years. Financial support for this research was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, as well as by the UBC Department of Anthropology.

Most importantly, I am thankful to the people who participated in this research, volunteered their time to talk to me, shared their stories of immigration and life in Canada, including their fears and worries, and their proud moments and joys. I appreciate their openness and willingness to answer my questions and engage in sometimes difficult

discussions. I hope that if you read this dissertation you would agree that I created a fair and honest account of your community.

I would not be able to complete my doctoral research without the support of my family. My parents, Elena and Sergei Rogov have always been supportive and believed in me. My husband, Alexey Golubev, was often the first reader of my texts and with his extensive expertise in Soviet history he often provided invaluable comments and suggestions on how to strengthen my argument. Thank you for your support, your belief in my work, and your endless optimism. I am also very grateful to my children for being patient with their mother who spent most of the weekends and evenings working instead of spending time with them. My oldest son, Misha, started kindergarten on the same day as I started my graduate program. He is now an inquisitive ten-year old middle-schooler who will most likely attempt to read my dissertation and comment on what I could do better, unless he thinks it is too boring. My daughter Masha has always been my support and helped me keep my sanity by being the most kind, gentle, and loving person. I did a lot of writing this year waiting for her at the swimming pool where she was practicing with her swim team several days a week. Her commitment to her sport and endurance were my motivation. My youngest daughter, Anna, was born in the middle of my fieldwork. I would be lying if I said this addition to our family did not complicate my research, but sometimes an adorable baby in my hands helped me start conversations and break the ice during my first encounters with future research participants. You all were the reason I was able to finish this part of our journey and I am excited to see where it takes us next.

Chapter 1. A Russian-Speaking Immigrant Community in Toronto

This dissertation studies a politically active and conservative segment of the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Toronto, Canada, focusing on their practices of political participation and community mobilization, and informed by their multiple senses of belonging, class aspirations, and social identities. “Politically active” and “conservative” are not the terms that always best characterize these people, but I have chosen to use them, since they provide us with a general understanding of what ideas and values are shared by many people in this segment of the community. These terms also allow me to emphasize the internal diversity of this immigrant community, where political views and forms of public engagement differ greatly and are not limited to those I address in the dissertation. Political activism in the Russian-speaking immigrant community is a relatively recent phenomenon, and it is particularly interesting to see how it has permeated various spheres of community life in recent years. While one of the biggest community events in the early 2000s was a beauty pageant, since the mid-2010s, it has been replaced with highly politicized public celebrations of the Allied victory in World War II. These particular celebrations borrow extensively from Soviet and post-Soviet political imagery and rituals, yet, as I argue in this thesis, political activism of Russian-speaking immigrants is largely informed by Canadian multiculturalism policies and political discourse, and it is intimately linked to their demands for full citizenship, a dignified cultural representation, and cultivation of their identities in Canadian society. However, attempts by this diasporic group to participate in the public sphere of Canadian society have often been met with criticism, misunderstanding, and suspicion.

On October 4, 2017, *The New York Times* published an article titled “Canadian Lawmakers Say Pro-Russia Group Tried to Derail Sanctions Law” (Levin and Becker 2017). This article covered a heated debate that developed in Canada following the adoption of a new law that allowed the Canadian government to sanction any foreign citizen engaged in corruption and human rights violations. While technically the Bill S-226 “Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act” did not target any particular country, its unofficial name – the Sergei Magnitsky Law – was a clear reference to the Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky who died under suspicious circumstances in a Moscow jail in 2009 following his discovery

of large-scale tax fraud among Russian officials. As a result, the law was passed to target primarily Russian officials and businesses suspected of corruption and money-laundering. Similar laws had been passed earlier in Europe and the United States, so Canada was following an international pattern. *The New York Times* article focuses on the criticism of the Sergei Magnitsky Law and attempts by a Russian diasporic organization called the Russian Congress of Canada to lobby against it. The RCC submitted a petition to Canadian MPs asking them to withdraw their support for the proposed legislation. Quoting several MPs, as well as a foreign policy expert and a human rights activist, the author accused the Russian Congress of Canada of taking orders from Moscow and dismissed as “a pure nonsense” the RCC claims that they were a grassroots organization representing the Russian community in Canada. The NYT journalists wrote that “[t]he pro-Russia group denies any connection to the Kremlin, but lawmakers say the push fits a pattern of Moscow-backed interference in the West.”

I wrote a significant portion of this chapter in spring 2018 when the political conflict between Russia and the United States was on the rise, and Russian propaganda was a topic of the Senate hearing with the Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg. In this context of ever-increasing suspicion and mistrust, it is important to remember that people who accept the views and values disseminated by state propaganda are not lacking their own agency and independent decision-making. If we attribute the spread of these pro-Russia groups simply to efficient propaganda on the part of the Russian state, we end up with a simplistic explanation of this phenomenon, which might appeal to us rhetorically (and politically) but does not have an empirical basis. Moreover, such an interpretation also misrepresents this complex cultural, social, and political phenomenon of immigrant mobilization. Instead, if we approach these groups anthropologically, we might observe a different picture, which provides us with a much more accurate understanding of the political mobilization in Russian immigrant communities all around the world. An ethnographic approach allows us to study their participation in the public sphere as a diasporic group with multiple senses of belonging and to focus on their agency as they embrace citizenship practices of their new country and establish their sense of belonging from a position of difference.

Allegations that Russian immigrant groups are not grassroots organizations representing real people with their own opinions and political loyalties, but are rather mere

puppets orchestrated by the Kremlin, are typical not only of the mainstream North American media, but also of certain scholarly research. For example, in 2017, an influential Russian interdisciplinary journal *NZ: Debates on Politics and Culture* published an article by a prominent historian of late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, Nikolai Mitrokhin, who interpreted the pro-Putin segments of the Russian-speaking community in Germany to be controlled by the Kremlin and its propaganda machine. Mitrokhin's article examines political mobilization among the Russian-speaking diaspora in Germany by focusing on alleged, hidden mechanisms that were used to organize "pro-Putin" Russian speakers into political activism. He explains their activity by invoking "political sentiment instigated by the Kremlin" and ends his article with a claim that the Kremlin had been actively using the Russian-speaking population in Germany to reach its strategic goals. The voices of the Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany who, according to the author, are being used, manipulated, and controlled, are completely missing from his analysis.

I use the term "Russian-speaking immigrants" rather than Russian immigrants in my dissertation. As I discuss later, this group is comprised of people of various ethnicities and nationalities, but they share a common language and culture, defined in part by common systems of schooling, government, and overall ideology, as well as common socialist and post-socialist experiences. I earlier described the particular group of Russian-speaking immigrants I studied as politically active and conservative. It is hard to find any precise terms to define this community, as its boundaries are fluid, and most people who commit to some of the ideas and practices I analyze in my dissertation would not share all of them. At roughly one hundred thousand people, Russian-speakers in general are a relatively insignificant proportion of the Greater Toronto area's population, which in 2016 was 6.4 million people, or almost 20 percent of the population of Canada (Statistics Canada 2016b); the politically active and conservative portion of the Russian-speaking community is even more difficult to gauge in terms of numbers, but it is just one small part of this diverse group, and their views are not representative of the whole group, where people share very different, often contrary, political opinions. The influence of the politically active, conservative portion of the Russian-speaking community on politics or social trends in greater Toronto is therefore limited. Still, these people struggle for acceptance and for spreading their views and values. They are working hard to be seen and heard, and these struggles are real and important for them. They

have not always been able to reach their goals, but they have become more visible in the political and cultural landscape of Toronto over the last few years. One might not necessarily share these people's views and values, but this does not mean that they can be dismissed as Kremlin's marionettes with their actions simply attributed to Moscow's instructions. Treating Russian-speaking immigrant organizations as "a proxy for Putin" is too reminiscent of a conspiracy theory, which social theorist Karl Popper described as "exactly the opposite of the true aim of the social sciences." (2006: 13).

Social scientists have long discussed the issue of unequal access to citizenship and unequal possibilities for participation and access to rights (Fassin and Mazouz 2009, Lamont and Molnar 2002; Rosaldo 1994; Ong 1996). Even though people I worked with did not use the terms and concepts of "belonging" or "citizenship" that are typical among social scientists, they often had a very accurate understanding of the issues that they encounter when trying to belong in their new society. I argue that, among Russian-speaking immigrants, political activism has become an important means to perform their Canadian citizenship and to struggle for their right to be included in the society as a group with their own distinct cultural and historical narratives. Russian-speaking immigrants' experiences of participation and inclusion in the new society entail their perception of social inequality and privilege. Their focus on education, hard work and moral integrity as preconditions for a desired high position in the social hierarchy of Canada reflects their adherence to cultural and social practices they internalized prior to immigration. Their struggle for a higher social position also reveals larger anxieties among immigrants around what it means for them to be displaced and vulnerable to norms and expectations of the new state and society. High social status is rightfully seen as a key to social and political power, which for most community activists is inseparably linked to the preservation of their cultural identities and heritage. Therefore, when talking about political mobilization and activism in the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Canada, it is important to recognize the agency of its leaders and participants, their understanding of how Canadian politics work, and their struggle to position themselves as worthy and respectable members of the society.

When I began my field research in Toronto in summer 2016, I did not expect to see much activity in terms of any immigrant organizations and public events. I was planning to work with people whose community-building activities were centered around small Russian

schools where they brought their children to learn the Russian language and culture. Having read and heard a lot about immigration from Russia being on the rise in 2014 with the growing limitation of political freedoms in Russia after the annexation of Crimea, I expected to meet people who left the country because of being disappointed with its economic development and political leadership. My first experience of Toronto, however, showed that my ideas of the Russian-speaking immigrant community there were quite off the mark. There were, of course, people whose life stories were similar to what I had pictured. One of them was Lena, who moved to Toronto from Moscow about a year before our conversation in 2017. We met at a Starbucks at the corner of Steeles and Dufferin streets, part of Toronto's Russian neighbourhood, close to Lena's new home. She and her husband were very different from those immigrants from the ex-USSR who started their lives in Canada living in cheap rental apartment buildings in the Russian neighbourhood. Instead, they bought a house when they moved to Toronto, yet they chose to be close to the Russian part of the city, hoping that it would help them to find friends and some support, as Lena's husband shortly moved back to Moscow to "earn some more money." They both had highly paid professional jobs in Moscow; their standard of living was significantly higher than that of an average Muscovite. As Lena explained to me, they moved to Canada because they wanted to leave Russia, and they did not want their two young children to grow up there. They knew that they would most likely lose in financial terms, but they were ready to do it in order to avoid an ideological climate they did not like.

While there are other stories and experiences similar to what Lena told me, what surprised me most was an active and visible segment of the Russian-speaking immigrant population in Toronto that had a very different political agenda. One Saturday morning in December, I went to downtown Toronto to attend a flash mob that one of the Russian immigrant groups was organizing that day. I learned about this event from their Facebook group, and decided that it would be a good introduction to the immigrant community. I knew that they were planning to sing the song "Khotiat li russkie voiny" ("Do the Russians Want War?" with lyrics by the renowned Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko and music by Eduard

Kolmanovsky), but other than that there were not many details.¹ I came there as an observer; I did not take part in the flash mob, nor did I contact any of the participants. This event became my first introduction to a politically active segment of the Russian-speaking community in Toronto. I took the subway from my home in the Russian neighbourhood to downtown Toronto and walked to the centrally located Union Station where participants were gathering that day. I came right before they were planning to start, and I saw a group of people standing in a small circle close to the entrance under the roof. The weather was not conducive to public gatherings that day: it was cold and windy, and snow mixed with rain started falling. I was standing nearby, waiting for them to start, and then I realized they were only rehearsing for their main performance that they had planned to hold inside the station. At some point a man who was obviously the main organizer of the flash mob told everybody to go inside. He was giving instructions, urging people to move fast and to stay close to each other. As I followed them from a distance, I was not sure what exactly was going on. They entered the station, went to a large hall where train schedules were displayed, and ticket booths were located. There they gathered together again, formed a semicircle and started singing. There were about two dozen people, with someone filming and another person taking photos. While singing, they put up posters with an English translation of the song:

Their answer rises loud and clear
For all men, everywhere, to hear.
The message now is as before:
The Russians do not long
The Russians do not long
The Russians do not long for war.

They ended the song with a loud chanting: “Russians do not want war! Russians do not want war! Russians do not want war!” After they finished their performance, their organizer rushed everybody to leave the station, commenting that they did not want to break any rules.

¹ For a larger historical and cultural context, in which this and other Soviet anti-war songs were deployed, see (Braginskii 2011).

This event was an important starting point for my research in the community. It was the first time I observed Russian-speaking immigrants publicly expressing their political views and addressing a broader audience, not just their own community. Before starting this research, I was thinking and writing about my positionality and possible problems arising from the fact that I was researching “my own people.” Being a Russian immigrant myself, I expected to encounter people who had similar life experiences and similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds; I expected to meet people from whom I would find it difficult to distance myself. The people I was looking at that day were not a part of my everyday world. As I was listening to them singing and later chanting “Russians do not want war,” I was feeling increasingly uncomfortable. This discomfort partly resulted from my ambiguous position as an observer as I was just starting to conduct my fieldwork and was adjusting to my status as a researcher in the community. However, and more importantly here, I was also feeling uncomfortable because, as a Russian-speaking immigrant to Canada I was, in some way, one of them, but at the same time I could not imagine myself being part of that flash mob. I was trying to understand what motivated these people to spend their weekend coming to sing a song at the central railway station of Toronto, and not just any song, but the one that would associate them with a country and a political regime that at that moment was engaged in a political confrontation with a lot of Western powers, including Canada, through its ambiguous role in the Syrian civil war and continued presence in eastern Ukraine. I could clearly see how passionate these people were about spreading their views, claiming their loyalties as righteous, sharing their multiple senses of belonging. I was walking back home along snowy Toronto streets that day, thinking what made these people fight for their right to openly express their allegiance to Russia, their right to be Russians and be able to freely and proudly claim this. It was not about their ethnic identity, which is often discussed when talking about immigrant communities (Buijs 1993; Fortier 2000; Brah 2005; Brettell 2000; Sargent and Larchanché-Kim 2006). Instead, it was about political allegiances, about their citizenship, and about their need not only to speak Russian in the privacy of their homes and teach their children aspects of Russian culture, but also to act publicly as Russians and to not feel ashamed; they sought to openly express their origin and not feel bad about it.

Following this somewhat unexpected introduction to a politically active part of the Russian-speaking immigrant community, I continued my fieldwork as I planned by

establishing contacts with Russian schools, but I also started to reach out to immigrant organizations that were involved in organizing public events, ranging from Easter celebrations in a city park to political rallies in front of the parliament building. I met with many Russian-speaking men and women in Toronto. Not all of them shared any “pro-Putin” or “pro-Russia” sentiments, but those who were most actively involved in the community mobilization usually did. They were the people with whom I had my most intense, most involved conversations. These people and their arguments were thought-provoking and unsettling. They made me re-think my initial research questions and instead to follow their lead. It was a challenge for me both as an anthropologist and as a person with different political and ethical views to work with these immigrant groups. However, I have chosen to write about these people, because I believe that it is important to understand them, even if I did not always share their political opinions, cultural tastes, and social attitudes. Katherine Verdery, an anthropologist and historian specializing in socialist and post-socialist societies, claims that “condemnation... would wall off possibilities for understanding,” and I suggest that this is what often happens when we discuss Russian-speaking immigrant groups and their support of unpopular ideologies (Verdery 2018: 190).

Anthropological research on politically active groups whose ideals run counter to those of the mainstream is relatively limited. For example, very few anthropologists work with ultra-right and right-wing activists, even though popularity of these ideas has been on the rise in recent years (some exceptions to this trend are Blee 2002; Banks 2006; Kalb 2009; Holmes 2010; Gingrich and Shoshan 2016). Sindre Bangstad suggests that a lack of interest in these topics in anthropology is related to the fact that anthropologists “tend to investigate topics and work with individuals and groups whom we are able to sympathize with” (Bangstad 2017). This attitude is related to disciplinary traditions of long-term ethnographic fieldwork, which entails the establishment of relations of solidarity and ethical commitment with our informants. Anthropologists learn to prioritize the interests of research participants and to become their advocates or voices of their communities. However, “the moral virtue of collaboration, reciprocity, and advocacy fades in the study of oppressive or privileged populations. In such cases, showing solidarity with those we study may make us accomplices to acts of symbolic or real violence” (Teitelbaum 2019: 414). Benjamin Teitelbaum, who studied radical nationalists in Scandinavia, advocates for the need to maintain scholar-

informant solidarity in spite of these moral contradictions. He claims that “[t]his affirmation of our need to prioritize commitment to the people we study also amounts to a critique of moralism in our field” (415). However, this position is rather questionable, and work with these groups leads to an array of ethical and methodological problems.

People I was working with were not exactly the kind of groups Teitelbaum writes about; they were neither far-right extremists, nor neo-nationalists. However, their values and social and political views were often very different from my own. During my fieldwork, I was asked (once directly and more often indirectly) about my political position. When asked directly, I answered that I was neutral, and I did not want my political views to influence my work. It was not a lie, I did try hard to be neutral, as I felt a moral obligation to appreciate the values of people who worked with me. I succeeded in this effort to a certain extent; however, there were limits to this attitude. I still find it hard to accept people who wear shirts with Stalin’s face on it, or those who demonstrate utter intolerance towards the LGBTQ community. In the beginning, my reluctance to sympathize with certain members of the community bothered me a lot, and I was not sure how to deal with my inability to develop a sense of ethical commitment to people I was working with, but eventually I came to accept it. In his lecture, sociologist Mario Small discusses cognitive empathy as “the ability to understand another person’s predicament as they understand it” (Small 2018). He emphasizes the need to distinguish it from sympathy and, also, from emotional empathy and argues that “it is not necessary to agree with a perspective to come to see it precisely as another sees it.” Throughout the time of my fieldwork and my close contact with some of these people, my aim was to understand why and how they developed these views, but not necessarily to accept and share these views, or justify them.

Throughout my dissertation I am writing mainly from this perspective, attempting to understand political, cultural, and social views of my informants even when I do not always agree with them. At some points, though, I do advocate for this community and what they stand for, as there are a lot of misrepresentations in the ways Russian-speaking immigrants are pictured in the Canadian mass media (see Kolga 2019). I spent a lot of time with Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto in 2016 and 2017, attended their public events and private meetings, interviewed some of the current and past activists, and talked to them informally on multiple occasions. I feel confident in claiming that the denial of their belonging to

grassroots organizations, as portrayed in the 2017 New York Times article, leads to a serious misunderstanding of how Canadian society works. Canada is a country where immigrants play an immense role in all spheres of life. Immigrant communities differ in size, and also have their unique histories and various ways of integrating in the larger Canadian society (Basok et al. 2014; Creese 2011; Creese and Wiebe 2012; McLaughlin 2009; Noh and Noh 2012; Rajkumar et al. 2012; Man 2004; Dossa 2004, 2009; Dhamoon 2013). We cannot simply dismiss some of these communities based on the current international political agenda. The diasporic belonging of Russian-speaking immigrants shapes their identities and loyalties as not being exclusively connected to a single territory, but as having strong affinities with their countries of origin while at the same time positioning themselves as loyal Canadians.

James Clifford discusses how diasporas are defined against nation-states and argues that they construct “forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference” (Clifford 1994: 308). He further emphasizes the diasporic sense of belonging as being inside but being different. Writing about the black diaspora in Britain, he “discusses how they “struggle for different ways to be ‘British’ – ways to stay and be different, to be British *and something else*” (308). Researchers who study diasporas and transnationalism argue that immigrant groups today remain increasingly attached to their homelands, developing a dual sense of belonging (Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008; Basch et al. 2005, Vertovec 2010, Coutin 2007). As I further discuss in Chapter 5, these multiple belongings, participation in ethnic organizations, and ties to homeland do not prevent immigrants’ civic engagement in their host country and, instead, even help them to develop a feeling of belonging to their new country. As I show in my dissertation, while Russian-speaking immigrants do demonstrate their support of Russia and emphasize their Russian origin, they position themselves as primarily Canadians. Yet they are dissatisfied with certain tendencies that they observe in Canadian society, and they choose to unite with their former countrymen to work for a better society and a better future for themselves and their children.

One of the issues that links various groups of Russian-speaking immigrants are moral concerns they share about new liberal tendencies in gender expression and sexualization of society, a subject which I discuss in Chapter 3. Sex education programs at public schools, in

particular, are interpreted by a lot of people I met in Toronto as a mechanism through which the government interferes with what many immigrants perceive to be the normal and desired reproduction of their families. In response to this understanding, gender, which is seen as inseparable from bodies and reproduction of traditional families, becomes one of the central themes in immigrant activism. This imagined need to protect their children's bodies and minds from the corrupting influence of the liberal state becomes a strong driving force behind political mobilization among immigrants.

The fact that their ideas of a better society do not coincide with some of the mainstream Canadian social and political tendencies does not automatically mean that Russian-speaking immigrants are simply the Kremlin's marionettes. Even though diasporas have become a widespread phenomenon in today's world, the importance of their existence and contributions to their host societies continue to be either overlooked or considered undesirable and even dangerous (Sheffer 2010). Even in Canada, governed by the policies of multiculturalism, the existence of a diaspora whose members demonstrate loyalty to another state is seen as unnatural, and their citizenship practices are then misread as menacing, even when they embrace political sensibilities and citizenship practices in their new country. In my research, I discuss how diasporic ties suggest multiple ways to belong, including transnationally, and why new citizens' ties to their homeland should not be interpreted as a sign of lack of allegiance to their host societies.

A Global Russian-Speaking Diaspora

Globally people are on the move like never before, with the current number of migrants estimated at 244 million people, an increase of 71 million since 2000 (United Nations 2016). The plethora of anthropological scholarship that has emerged over the past 20 years on the global movement of people, commodities and ideas has focused in particular on Mexican, Filipino, Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant communities in the U.S., Canada and Western Europe (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Min 1998; Foner 2001; Le Espiritu 2003; Ong 2003; Chavez 2013). This research has contributed new perspectives on how such key social categories as race, ethnicity, class and gender work in a globalized world where human, financial and media flows have intensified over recent decades.

However, communities and new social formations emerging from contact between post-socialist nations of Eastern Europe, Russia and western nations have been less visible in anthropology.

In the grand picture of world migration, Russia occupies an intermediate position. It is third to only the United States and Germany in terms of immigrant population, which in 2015 amounted to nearly 8 percent of Russia's population.² At the same time, Russia is a significant source of emigration to the developed nations of Western Europe and North America. In the United States and Canada, for example, the number of Russian speakers is over one million people (Sadowski-Smith 2018: 1). The emigration rates from Russia were very high throughout the 1990s, slowed down during the relatively affluent period of the 2000s, and have once again been on the rise since 2011–12 (Rosstat 2016: 86). Not surprisingly, emigration has been an important topic of public discourse in Russia in recent decades. Recent research indicates that 38% of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 have considered emigrating from Russia at some point (VtsIOM 2015).

The Russian immigrant community in Canada has a fairly long history. Prior to the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, immigration from the Russian Empire to Canada was mainly political and religious with the largest groups of immigrants being persecuted minorities such as German Mennonites (ca. 8000 settled in Saskatchewan between 1874 and 1880), Dukhobors (7500 settled in Canada in 1899), and Russian Jews who started to emigrate from the Russian Empire beginning in the 1890s (Pierce 2013). By the 1911 Census, the overall number of immigrants of "Russian origin" reached a significant 43,142, or 0.6 percent of the population of Canada. Following the Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War, a large wave of refugees arrived from the former Russian Empire, and according to the 1921 Census, the number of immigrants from Russia increased to 100,064 (Jeletzky 1983: 203).

The second large wave followed in the aftermath of World War II, when in 1947 the Canadian government announced a program to bring displaced persons to the country. Many of them were citizens of the USSR or of the countries and regions that it had annexed by that time, and they were either in opposition to Stalin and the Soviet state, or had been sent to Germany as forced labour during the War (Pierce 2013). By the 1961 Census, the number of

² 11,643,276 people, or 7.7% of the population of Russia are immigrants (United Nations 2016).

people who indicated Russia as their country of origin reached 119,168. However, the data did not specify the ethnicity of immigrants and most likely included other groups such as Poles, Finns, and Ukrainians who emigrated from the former Russian Empire. The Census of 1971 registered a dramatic decrease from the 1961 figures with just 64,475 people counted as Russian immigrants, a number which was probably a more accurate estimate of the number of ethnically Russian immigrants in Canada at that time (Jeletzky 1983: xii). From the late 1930s to the late 1980s the Soviet government de-facto banned emigration from the USSR with the exception of a very limited and controlled Jewish emigration. Thus, prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain the number of new immigrants from the USSR was very low, with only about 1,500 Soviet Jews being admitted to Canada by the late 1980s (Pierce 2013). It was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, followed by economic crises and political turmoil in the post-Soviet states that re-established these states, and especially Russia, as a major source of immigration to Canada. According to the 2016 Canadian Census, 82,555 people living in Canada were born in Russia (the overwhelming majority of them came to Canada after 1991), while the number of Canadians who reported Russian ethnic origin was significantly larger and amounted to 622,445 people (120,165 reported Russian as their single ethnicity) (Statistics Canada 2016a).

Post-socialist countries have experienced radical industrialization during the twentieth century and they belong to the global North in terms of their levels of social security, widespread public education, and a degree of secularization, yet they still have fundamental cultural differences from their western counterparts, including Canada and the United States (Verdery 1994; Hann 2002; Humphrey 2002; Chari and Verdery 2009). These cultural differences have been at least partially inherited by many Eastern European immigrant communities in North America, and still define their everyday life. The historical experience of the twentieth century in Eastern Europe was framed by building socialist societies that were ideologically, politically and economically different from societies of Western Europe and North America; two or three generations of people in these societies lived through the historical experience of a socialist welfare state, a one-party political regime, and official Marxist ideology. Consequently, when people from post-socialist states move to Western Europe or North America, they face societies that bear many similarities to their own, but at the same time they differ a lot, even though these differences might not be immediately

obvious, neither to observers nor to the immigrants themselves (Buck-Morss 2000). Even though Russian-speaking immigrants have a noticeable presence in both the US and Canada, their communities have so far been underrepresented in social science research.

One of the issues that has attracted most attention on the part of social scientists writing about Russian-speaking immigrants is the concept of community. Fran Markowitz, who studied Soviet Jewish émigrés in New York City in the 1980s, explored the question of community in her book *A Community in Spite of Itself: Soviet Jewish Émigrés in New York* (Markowitz 1993). This concept is very controversial when applied to immigrants from the former Soviet Union, but Markowitz argues that Russian-speaking immigrants have established a community and she organizes her narrative as an effort to prove this claim. She is interested in the process of establishing a specific collectivity, which emerges when certain social and symbolic commonalities become meaningful after immigration. Markowitz shows how post-migration adjustment is not only an individual process, but also a social one, characterized by “the ironic emergence of community among immigrants who never expected this to happen” (3). Throughout her book, she provides a description of this group in the context of their pre-migration experiences, as well as their post-migration experiences, and their relations with the local population, including American Jews. She shows how certain experiences they have gained as Soviet citizens, their knowledge, and their values define their position in the United States. However, in spite of their shared experiences, Soviet Jews never established any formal organizations. Markowitz analyses possible reasons for this situation, going back to their Soviet background and suspicion of the state and bureaucracy, as well as any form of social activism (227). She also notes that Soviet immigrants did not come to America to create any community of their own; they came there to become Americans. However, things did not always work the way they imagined and expected them to work, and although “they had no intention of doing so, they came to form a community” (258). In a lot of ways, this description still works for the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Canada several decades later. As I show in my dissertation, these people did not have an intention to create their own community when they moved to Canada. However, their experiences of immigration, as well as the political and social practices they learned in their new society, together with international political developments, led them to form a community.

The concepts of community and “invisibility,” or blending with an unmarked, dominant population, are among the principal questions in Helen Kopnina’s *East to West Migration* (2005) where she studies Russian immigrants in Amsterdam and London in the 1990s and early 2000s. She claims, however, that this concept is not applicable when discussing Russian-speaking immigrants. Kopnina provides an in-depth ethnographic description of many immigrants both in London and in Amsterdam, and she argues that neither Russian immigrants themselves, nor other members of the host societies see them as a community (80). She introduces the notion of invisibility to describe Russian immigrants, as she argues that outsiders do not usually recognize the presence of Russian immigrants in the two cities. Kopnina names several reasons why they remain “invisible,” including the low number of immigrants, the fact that the group is very diverse, and its members do not possess a shared “cultural capital” on arrival, as well as superficial similarity to the unmarked local population, as the people she studied largely identified as “white” Europeans.

In the most recent research on Russian-speaking immigrants in London in the 2010s, Andy Byford argues that Kopnina’s analysis and claims of “invisibility” are no longer true. He maintains that “[t]he attainment of a certain critical mass has led many members of this immigrant population to start engaging very actively in various modes of institutional self-organization and collective identity-(re)invention. Considerable amounts of different kinds of resources are now being invested in the theatrical enactment of a ‘community’, involving unprecedented levels of mobilization and stagecraft” (Byford 2014). As I discuss in this dissertation, there is a similar trend in the positionality of the Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada who have recently engaged in active community building activities. However, I do not focus specifically on the meaning of the term “community” and whether we can apply this term to Russian-speaking immigrants, as I think it is not analytically important in this context. This word does not exist in the Russian language, and while there are several possible translations of it, they do not exactly match the meaning of the word “community.” Russian-speaking immigrants themselves use the words *obshchina* or *soobshchestvo*, which can be translated into English as *community*, but they also often avoid using any specific terminology and simply speak about “us,” or “our people” (“my,” “nashi liudi,” “svoi”). I use the word “community” and “community mobilization” in my dissertation out of convenience,

but I do not find it particularly useful to problematize this category for the purposes of my current research.

In some ways, Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto have been historically “invisible” in Kopnina’s understanding of this concept: the overwhelming majority of them do not belong to a visible minority, and their class practices and aspirations place them squarely within the borders of the Canadian middle class. At the same time, as I show in this dissertation, Russian Canadians these days have quite different expectations of their positionality in Canadian society. The question of visibility is an important concern for a politicized segment of the Russian-speaking community, and a lot of the community mobilization is organized around their need to be seen and heard. They interpret their visibility as a way to resist what they perceive as a misrepresentation of their community in Canada.

Other questions that often become addressed in research on Russian-speaking immigrants are those of language and identity. These are especially important for Ludmila Isurin. In her book *Russian Diaspora: Culture, Identity, and Language Change* she writes about Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel, Germany, and the United States (2011). Her research is based primarily on interviews with Russian-speaking immigrants in these three countries, where she examines each group, focusing on their culture, language, and identity, as well as differences between Jewish and non-Jewish Russian-speaking immigrants. Her main focus is on the immigrants arriving in host countries in the early 2000s. She looks into their backgrounds, reasons for immigration, as well as their later experiences in host countries, including self-identification, sense of belonging, and language attitudes. Ludmila Isurin explores some particular cultural experiences, such as friendship, nostalgia, and collectivism versus individualism. She looks for similarities as well as differences in experiences among immigrants depending on their own background and the country where they live after emigration. Her focus on their identity transformation and language change provides an interesting overview of immigrants’ experiences in various countries. Her discussion serves as an important starting point for my study of immigrant experiences in Canada and the value they attach to Russian culture and its preservation in their families.

Identity has also been a concept of particular interest in studies of Russian Jewish immigrants. Like Isurin, Dina Siegel (1998) also studies immigrants from the former Soviet

Union to Israel, and how they have integrated into Israeli society. Siegel is particularly interested in how new identities are shaped in new cultural and social environments. Likewise, Larissa Remennick (2007) studies the lives of Soviet Jews who emigrated from the Soviet Union and settled down in Israel, as well as in Canada, the United States, and Germany. She offers an overview of “what happened to the Jewish émigrés from the former Soviet Union some fifteen to seventeen years from the inception of their last exodus and in all major countries of their resettlement” (1). This all-inclusive approach allows her to create a broad picture of the life of the Russian Jews, but at the same time it only provides a very superficial picture of the community she was working with. For example, in the chapter on Canada, which is thirty pages long, Remennick discusses a range of topics, including causes of immigration, immigrants’ participation in the labour market, living standards, family matters, as well as immigrants’ relations with Canadian society. Russian-speaking Jews are a large part of the Russian-speaking immigrant community today, and this includes both families who relocated to Canada long ago and recent immigrants who grew up in Russian-speaking families in Israel and moved to Canada in the last few years. This group is also diverse, and while some of the Russian Jews distance themselves from immigrants from Russia and other post-Soviet countries, others became part of this community. While questions of ethnic identity are not central for my research, they are important to consider, in particular, when discussing the diverse nature of this community, comprised of people of various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds.

Russian-speaking Immigrants in Toronto

Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto can be found in any walk of life, living in any part of the city, renting a cheap apartment, owning a spacious house with a beautiful backyard, taking public transit or driving an expensive car, working at a Russian neighbourhood store or at a large corporation as top executives. Some of them regularly shop in Russian grocery stores, while others do not even know where these stores are located. Some of them spend their weekends struggling through the infamous Toronto traffic so that their children can attend Russian schools to make sure that they will be able to read and write in Russian. Others speak English to their children. I can continue this list almost endlessly, but my point

in listing all these differences is to show that Russian-speaking immigrants do not form a single group with shared values, life experiences and expectations, and their everyday practices vary greatly. Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto come together as a community in a number of areas, but it is a rare person who would inhabit all these spaces, and moreover, there are some who do not share any of these spaces and practices. There is a continuum on one end of which one can meet people who were born in Russia and speak Russian as their mother tongue, but they do not have any involvement in the life of the Russian-speaking community of any kind, and on the other end one can meet people whose life in Canada is completely immersed in the life of the Russian-speaking community.

In my dissertation, I use the term “Russian-speaking immigrants” rather than “Russian immigrants,” as it is a more accurate description of the community. As I mentioned above, according to the 2016 Canadian Census, the number of people in Canada who reported Russian ethnic origin was 622,445 people, although only every fifth, or 120,165 in total, reported Russian as their single ethnicity. Russian is the mother tongue for 186,910 Canadian residents, and 194,310 reported that they primarily speak Russian at home, with the difference in these two figures explained by the fact that it remains a language of home communication in many families from the former USSR even when one or both partners report another ethnicity. Of those who reported speaking Russian at home, 104,510 live in Ontario, and 86,495 – or 44.5% of all Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada – live in Toronto (Statistics Canada 2016a). As the data shows, the numbers of people who were born in Russia, who report Russian ethnic origin, and who speak Russian as their main language differ a lot. As Tamara Jeletzky argues in the introduction to her edited volume *Russian Canadians*, the term “Russian” is not always easy to define, as in a multinational state such as Russia, “citizenship is shared by people whose language, religion and cultural backgrounds are entirely different” (Jeletzky 1983: xi). She then writes that the situation is “further complicated by population migrations, mixed marriages and sociopolitical influences, both within and outside the Soviet Union” (xii). Her explanation of a complex nature of the term “Russian” is still applicable to today’s situation, and it is important to keep it in mind when discussing this community.

Some of the people I met in Toronto used the word “Slavic” to describe their ethnicity and their immigrant community. While this term might be more inclusive in some

ways, I do not use it in the dissertation, as it will be misleading, since it potentially includes a lot of other, non-Russian-speaking ethnic groups, who would not identify themselves with the community that is the focus of my research. Most of the people I met during my research were born in Russia. However, there were also people who were born in Ukraine, Belarus, or Moldova, and were citizens of those countries; there were also people who were born in Russia during the Soviet era, but left it before the collapse of the Soviet Union and never had Russian citizenship, as well as people identifying as Jewish who emigrated from the former Soviet Union to Israel and from there to Canada. All these people held different citizenships prior to their immigration (most of them still have another citizenship in addition to their Canadian one), belonged to different ethnic groups and spoke different mother tongues, but they all identified themselves as culturally belonging to a larger Russian-speaking (*russkoiazychnoe*) community, an entity not limited to those who identify as ethnically Russian. As one of the community members told me, “Russian is not a nationality, it is a *sostoianie dushi* (state of soul).” This rather poetic description of what it means to be Russian reflects the complexity of the situation. There are some people who identify themselves as Russian, both ethnically and in terms of their citizenship. There are others who were born in Russia, are Russian citizens, but are not ethnically Russian. They would identify as Russians in one situation and emphasize their different ethnic origin in another situation. Some people I met in Toronto were from Ukraine, Moldova, or Israel, but they identified as ethnically Russian. Some people I met were very particular about the complexities of their ethnic and national identity, while others did not discuss it at all. In this situation, the term “Russian-speaking immigrants” helps me to avoid misrepresenting people I discuss in my dissertation.

As my argument proceeds, and especially in the last chapter, I focus more on citizenship practices and forms of civic engagement among my respondents, and I shift to using the term “Russian Canadians” as I find it more specific and relevant for my respondents’ idea of citizenship. After all, this is the term that they use themselves when speaking about their participation in the public sphere, since it emphasizes their Canadian identity, which is particularly important in the discussion of their citizenship claims. The group of people whom I refer to as “Russian Canadians” is comprised not only of ethnic Russians. It is still a diverse group that includes people of different ethnicities and nationalities, but they all identify themselves as “Russians” in one way or another.

Russian Toronto

Historically, certain parts of North York have been known as the Russian neighbourhood of Toronto. It is probably more correct to call it a Russian Jewish neighbourhood, as it appeared next to Toronto's Jewish neighbourhood at Bathurst Street when Soviet Jews started to resettle to Canada from the Soviet Union and Israel from the early 1970s onward. This pattern of establishing a Russian neighbourhood in a previously Jewish one is similar to the development of Brighton Beach, a neighbourhood in Brooklyn, New York, which is probably the most famous "Russian" neighbourhood in North America. Brooklyn, a city that had a high percentage of Jewish inhabitants, became the most popular destination for Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union beginning in the early 1970s, when Brighton Beach became known as "Little Odessa by the Sea" (Abramovitch and Galvin 2002: 7). Annelisa Orleck writes that the first Soviet Jews were settled in Brighton Beach by The New York Association for New Americans (NYANA) which "... hoped, since most of those already living in Brighton were also Eastern European Jews, and many of them born in Russia, that the settlement process would proceed smoothly" (Orleck 2002: 99).³ However, the relationship between old and new Jewish immigrants in the area very soon became tense. One of the biggest obstacles was the unwillingness of the Soviet Jews to embrace their Jewish identities and educate themselves about religious practices and traditions (100). Orleck vividly describes Brighton Beach as bustling with Russian stores, restaurants, and hair salons, all places where one needs to speak Russian to feel comfortable.

In spite of the parallels with Brighton Beach as a site of coexisting Jewish and Russian communities, the Russian neighbourhood in Toronto is also very different from Brighton Beach. It does not have a similarly long history of immigration, there are fewer total recent immigrants and, most importantly, the population in this area of Toronto is much more mixed. Moreover, Russian-speaking immigrants are dispersed across a larger area, which is a pattern more typical of Canada with fewer monoethnic enclaves than one can find in the United States. North York is a district of Toronto located north of its downtown, and

³ The New York Association for New Americans was founded in 1949 by the Jewish Federation of North America to assist refugees (Cohen 2007: 21).

the Russian neighbourhood occupies the area along Bathurst Street from Sheppard Avenue in the south to Steeles Avenue in the north, occupying about a quarter of North York. Located on the southern rim of the Russian neighbourhood is its most important outdoor area, the Earl Bales Park, which is today home to the Russian House and a locale for many of the events that the Russian-speaking community organizes, as I discuss later in this chapter. The biggest event, a public celebration of the Allied victory in World War II, traditionally takes place in this park, and it is also often chosen as a location for other events, such as festivities around Russian Orthodox Easter.

Historically, the neighbourhood coalesced around several apartment buildings with relatively low rents where new immigrants settled when they moved to Toronto. In the 1990s, they did not have many sources of information about where to settle or how to find their first housing or the first job, and most often their information came from other immigrants who moved to Toronto shortly before them. People rented apartments in the same buildings where their friends or acquaintances lived, and stayed there for a short period of time, or for the rest of their lives. Areas further north have also become favoured by Russian-speaking immigrants in recent years as they choose to move to the cities of Vaughan and Richmond Hill to buy houses and townhouses. Today, Russian-speaking immigrants are spread across the Greater Toronto Area, yet a relatively large proportion of the Russian-speaking population still resides in the “Russian neighbourhood”.

Russian stores are, perhaps, the most visible marker signaling a strong presence of this ethnic community in the neighbourhood. Located at most large intersections in this area of Toronto, these stores sell food, books, clothes, and shoes; there are even pharmacies that serve clients in Russian and sell familiar medications popular in Russia. Grocery stores have long been discussed as important and complex diaspora spaces (Bonus 1997; Mannur 2007; Vallianatos and Raine 2008; Lindgreen and Hingley 2012; Jochnowitz 2014; Kershen 2017). Immigrants not only buy their food there, but also create spaces of familiarity and “discourses of the homeland” (Mankekar 2002: 81). Describing stores in Brighton Beach, Annelise Orleck argues that they serve as “daily gathering places where a sense of group identity is forged and reinforced” (Orleck 2002: 102). There are many smaller Russian stores in the area, but the most prominent one is called *Yummy Market*. There is also another store, a newer one, known as the “northern” *Yummy Market*, located several kilometers away to

target the parts of the Russian-speaking community that have moved to the northern suburbs of Toronto. *Yummy Market*'s function in the community, even though it is not exactly a small neighborhood store, is quite similar to grocery stores in other immigrant communities, which serve as a gathering place for community members. This is a large supermarket where people come to buy food on their way home from work and where most customers and staff do not know each other personally. However, its role in the preservation of diasporic community is still important, as a place where people speak the same language and buy familiar food that gives them a sense of home and pangs of nostalgia. Researchers have emphasized the role of grocery stores and food in general in the preservation of ethnic identity and diasporic communities, and in this sense, *Yummy Market* has been an important location for the Russian-speaking immigrant community (Vallianatos and Raine 2008; Holak 2014).

It is interesting, however, that while this store is the best-known "Russian store" in the Russian-speaking community, there is nothing in its name that would suggest this. "Yummy Market. European Food Experience" is what is displayed at the entrance to the store. Its website tells the story of the store, claiming that "founded in 2002 by a European family, Yummy Market set out to bring familiar and traditional tastes to the growing number of Eastern Europeans living in the Toronto North York neighbourhood" (Yummy Market n.d.). Their website is entirely in English. The "In the Community" section tells about the company's fundraising for the SickKids hospital and donations to the Vaughan Food Bank, and there is only one news item that demonstrates Yummy Market's connection with the Russian-speaking community, stating the "... integral role our stores play in the Russian-speaking community of North York and Vaughan. From its inception to the present day, Yummy Market remains a piece of home away from home for many new Canadians seeking longed-for, familiar tastes, sights and even sounds" (Yummy Market 2015). However, the moment one enters, there is no doubt why this store is known as a Russian store. At the entrance, there is a wide selection of Russian-language newspapers, mainly containing advertisements, but also some local and national news and local interest stories. Right next to the entrance an inside wall is covered with posters advertising various concerts, plays, and shows happening in Toronto. Again, most of them are in Russian. They mainly feature Russian celebrities, including actors, entertainers, and singers, who come regularly to

Toronto to perform. Some of the posters also advertise shows by local Russian-speaking theater troupes and various performances by local music groups.

When you shop there, you always hear people, both staff and customers, speaking Russian around you. *Yummy Market* is an important site on the map of Russian-speaking Toronto, and it often becomes an object of heated discussions on Facebook groups, where Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto communicate. Both customer service and the quality of food sold there are often being criticized for being “typical Soviet,” and pictures of spoiled candies or “plastic” caviar collect hundreds of comments on social media. Nevertheless, the popularity of the store is not decreasing. Some people go there for their regular grocery shopping, while others go there from time to time to buy specific products, which they cannot find in their local grocery stores. Moreover, the *Yummy Market* and other such “Russian” stores also serve as important communication centers, where one can always learn about public events in the Russian-speaking community.



Figure 1.1. A Russian grocery store in Toronto.

The market of Russian (or more broadly “Soviet”) food and food entrepreneurship is not limited to Russian grocery stores. There is a large network of services offering homemade food, ranging from fancy birthday cakes to everyday comfort food, such as pelmeni, a Russian version of meat-filled dumplings. These businesses mainly rely on word-of-mouth marketing and, more recently, social networks to advertise their services in local Facebook groups, where one can find any staple food from any part of the former Soviet

Union. In addition to the stores, there is also a large network of Russian restaurants, mainly located in the northern parts of Toronto. These restaurants not only serve food, but also provide banquet halls where Russian-speaking residents celebrate birthdays, weddings, and New Year's Eve. Even though they have a mixed reputation in the Russian-speaking community, as the service is often seen as below average Toronto standards, they remain popular places for Russian-speaking immigrants to celebrate milestones.

Another important sphere of Russian-speaking business in Toronto is the beauty industry, which, as for immigrant women in North America more generally, is an important employment niche. While nail salons have emerged as a site where Asian immigrant women were often employed in urban North America in the 2000s (Kang 2010; Eckstein and Nguyen 2011), for Russian-speaking women in Toronto beauty salons are also key sites of employment, and also community interaction. An even greater number of nail technicians and hairdressers run their businesses from home, advertising their services in Russian-speaking Facebook groups and on other social media. Russian-speaking women tend to specifically look to Russian-speaking professionals for their beauty needs, claiming they do not trust anyone else and that the Russian-speaking beauty services are of a better quality than others. Specialized clothing stores, including online boutiques, belong to the same sphere of beauty industry that targets Russian-speaking immigrants. They sell clothes imported from Europe and these are popular among a certain segment of well-heeled Russian-speakers; these stores are often recommended online by Russian-speaking immigrant women as having more aesthetically appealing wares as compared to Canadian mass market clothing.

Another important location for Russian-speaking immigrants in the Greater Toronto Areas is a well-developed network of Russian *banyas* (public bathhouses) that provide wellness services to the community. While historically they have appealed predominantly to men, recently nearly all of them have also established “women only” days (*zhenskie dni*) and “family days” (both sexes are allowed if wearing bathing suits or towels). All these sites – from beauty salons to clothing stores to public baths – serve as sites of community. In particular, they are important meeting places for the community to reproduce some of the bodily, aesthetic, and wellness practices that were widespread in the former USSR and remain popular today (Starks 2008; Bogdanov 2010; Pollock 2010, 2019). That the body, its

culture, and its wellness are central to the diasporic life is also visible through another important network of the Russian-speaking immigrant community: that of professional health care represented by Russian-speaking doctors and health care practitioners, including family doctors, gynecologists, midwives, lactation consultants, pediatricians and other specialists. A lot of Russian-speaking immigrants specifically look for Russian-speaking doctors, either because of linguistic barriers or due to a belief that they are better professionals than those who received their medical training in Canada.



Figure 1.2 A Russian pharmacy in Toronto.

Finally, another important site for Russian-speaking Toronto revolves around education, including Russian schools and various art studios and sports clubs led by Russian-speaking educators. There is a large network of after-school programs that provide activities for children and offers exposure to Russian language and literature. These schools usually operate on evenings and weekends, but also provide daytime classes for preschool age children. There are also several Russian bookstores in Toronto, and all of them have a large selection of books for adults and children, as well as various textbooks and workbooks for all

ages. As I argue in chapter 4, these Russian bookstores especially appeal to the class aspirations of their customers.

It is important to emphasize that even though these sites are especially popular among Russian speakers, and are considered part of the “Russian neighbourhood” by Russian-speaking immigrants themselves, these areas have very mixed populations, both ethnically and linguistically, and Russian speakers do not represent the largest group in these parts of the city. Yet all these places create an urban landscape within Greater Toronto that serves as the material foundation of the Russian-speaking community. While my informants use the same highways, public facilities, and department and hardware stores, and their children go to the same schools and playgrounds as other residents of Toronto, the register of community-specific places described above structures the everyday life of my informants. The contours of Russian-speaking Toronto often determine routes around the city, influence schedules, and bring people together as they forge a sense of belonging and new diasporic political sensibilities.

I conducted my fieldwork in Toronto from November 2016 to August 2017. During these months, I attended a plethora of public events, which I describe later in the dissertation, such as the Immortal Regiment and other events commemorating World War II, the Festival of the Orthodox Christian Family, the Spring festival (Maslenitsa) and others. I shopped in Russian grocery stores, read Russian newspapers, followed Russian-speaking immigrant social media, and was otherwise immersed in the life of this immigrant community. I have conducted around 30 formal interviews and had hundreds of conversations with people during community events. These events greatly differed in the number of participants who took part, with the largest being the Immortal Regiment processions, which attracted several thousand people in 2017. Most of the people I met in Toronto were women, but there were also some men who were actively involved in the immigrant community activities. Their ages ranged from young adults in their early twenties to people in their sixties; some of them were recent immigrants, and others lived in Canada for over two decades. I attended meetings of two immigrant organizations and talked to their active members on multiple occasions, both during formal interviews and at their events. I also conducted research in a Russian school, which provides Russian-language classes for preschool and school-aged children, where I interviewed teachers and parents and visited several classes. Since Russian-

speaking immigrants in Greater Toronto do not live in a close-knit community and are rather dispersed throughout the large metropolitan area, it was sometimes difficult to establish connections and maintain continuous relations with research participants. It often took me an hour or two to travel one way to meet with someone for an interview. This situation reflects the dynamics of life in a big city, where long commutes are a part of daily life for many people, and they often travel long distances to get to work, but also to attend a community event, to take their children to a Russian school or simply to shop at a Russian grocery store. However, I did establish close relationships with some people I met in Toronto during my fieldwork, including Russian-speaking parents at the neighbourhood school my children attended. Our daily conversations during the after school pick-up time or at a local park were not a part of my formal fieldwork, but they often served as an introduction to the Russian-speaking community and a source of key information on the inner workings of the immigrant community. This combination of more formal research methods in various immigrant organizations with participant observation via informal personal networks provided me with a more balanced overview of the immigrant community comprised of people with different political views and different ways of establishing their senses of belonging and participation in their new society.

Digital Ethnography

Digital media and its effects on local and global cultures, people's daily routines, and especially human communication have been extensively discussed in recent decades. Beginning in the 1990s scholars began to carefully analyze the impact of digital media on cultural practices (Appadurai 1996, Escobar et al. 1994, Fischer 1999). Arjun Appadurai famously coined the idea of "mediascapes" as one of the five dimensions of global cultural flows that enable an accelerated production and dissemination of information, people, and finances throughout the world. Social scientists have also argued that digital media is particularly important for diasporic groups in creating and supporting transnational networks, as well as for establishing connections in their new locations (Bernal 2005; Coleman 2010; Madianou and Miller 2012; Panagakos and Horst 2006; Schrooten 2012). Social media not

only allows migrants to remain connected to their friends and families, but it also affects “the nature of migration and the conditions of life as migrant” (Schrooten 2016: 83).

I also found that digital media played an important role in the political mobilization of the Russian-speaking community. It provided an easily accessible communication platform for community members who never, or rarely, met face-to-face, but it is also important to be careful not to overestimate its significance. While it is an important medium of communication and a source of information for Russian-speaking immigrants, they are not entirely dependent on digital media. For example, when organizing the first Immortal Regiment in 2015, one of the central events in the process of community mobilization, its organizers were printing flyers and distributing them at a Russian store to inform people about the event. One of the organizers told me later that they went to the parking lot at the *Yummy Market* to give out flyers and to talk to people, asking them to share this information with their families and friends. Now that the Immortal Regiment is a rather well-known event in the community, people primarily use Facebook for publicity purposes, but they also continue to use other, non-digital media to communicate with segments of the community with a limited online presence or just to strengthen their message.

I have actively used social media in my research to supplement my data collected by traditional face-to-face ethnographic work in the community. In addition to being a source of information about various events, social media represents an important part of immigrant community life. It is where community members discuss news, share information, plan events, form alliances, support each other, make friends, and fight with each other. Initially, I joined the online groups popular among the Russian-speaking immigrant community for research purposes, as an important source of knowledge about the community. However, I soon realized that reading the news and updates and communicating with their members immersed me in the community life, decreasing the distance between me as the anthropologist and my interlocutors. I was invited to some of these groups by their administrators, and I found other groups while looking for information on-line about Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto. (One group was recommended to me by a friend who shared the site thinking I would find information there to help me and my family settle in Toronto.) Integration of online and offline ethnography was not only effective, but to a certain extent, required. I met a lot of people through social media, but even those whom I

met face-to-face at various community events or through personal contacts would often invite me to join their Facebook groups, like their pages, and add me as their Facebook friend. During one interview, I realized that the person whom I met for the first time knew quite a lot about me, and I later figured out that she carefully studied my Facebook page before meeting with me for the interview. I felt somewhat uncomfortable about it, but during my fieldwork I learned to accept that in the age of social media my informants could easily find my information online, thus rupturing the researcher-subject dynamic of the pre-digital age characterized by a much greater inequality of knowledge between anthropologists and research participants. In the course of my research I often added people I met in Toronto as friends on my Facebook page, and while I was not always comfortable about it, I could not avoid doing it. Being a member of multiple immigrant Facebook groups, as well as having their active members and leaders as my Facebook friends, was helpful for my research, but sometimes also made it difficult to establish a boundary between my personal life and my fieldwork.

Facebook and YouTube have also proved to be particularly helpful when writing about the early days of Russian-speaking immigrant mobilization, which was taking place in 2014, about two and half years before I started my fieldwork in Toronto. Facebook discussions and numerous YouTube videos acted as de-facto digital archives documenting the first political rallies and the first Immortal Regiment procession. These materials provided a unique opportunity to create a somewhat limited, but immediate access to those events that I could not attend myself. In a similar way, after I left Toronto, I could follow this community from my home; I was able to watch their videos on YouTube and view their live videos, as well as access numerous photos taken at all their major events when these photos appeared on Facebook.

Facebook is primarily a platform for communication between community members, and it is also a source of information for them, as a lot of these immigrant groups regularly repost news and various articles, mainly focusing on Canada and Russia. This is an important aspect of their use of digital media, which is related to their access to information, including both Canadian and Russian mass media. Accessibility of the Internet made their access to the Russian sources of information easy even after they moved to Canada. This is an important aspect of today's world, when the fact of living on another continent does not prevent

immigrants from remaining fully immersed in Russian media (Khvorostianov et al. 2012; Remennick 2017). In this way, Facebook groups and other media technologies are crucial for maintaining their transnational relationships and their immersion in Russian cultural and political contexts. Social media was a significant part of my research, but I mainly approached social media as an additional source of information about the community, and not as a subject of my research. The role of digital technology in the mobilization of a diaspora and how access to information is shaped by digital technology or how it affects political behavior is a fascinating area of work (see Alonso, Oiarzabal 2010); while the role of social media in shaping migrant communities was not the primary focus of my research, I did study the ways an online presence was an inseparable part of the offline activity for Russian-speaking Canadians.

Facebook groups also reflect the dynamics of the relationships within the Russian-speaking community. I have witnessed a lot of online arguments that unfolded between various groups in the community, for instance, who were fighting over the location for holding the Immortal Regiment, arguing about the new leadership of an immigrant organization, or accusing a certain member of the community of illegal business activities. In other words, the relationships between various actors in the community are not always cooperative and agreeable, and sometimes its activists establish competing community organizations working for the same goal or organize parallel events (for example, in 2017, three independent Immortal Regiment processions were organized in Toronto, see Chapter 2). Although I have chosen not to focus on these dynamics of inter-personal relations in the community and how they were affected by social media, and especially by Facebook, social media was helpful for me as I navigated my research, and it aided in figuring out how people related to each other, who left a particular organization after a conflict with other members, or who belonged to the same organization. Thus, I avoided some uncomfortable questions and came to better understand my interlocutors' stories.

The incorporation of online sites into ethnographic research provides multiple advantages, but it is also complicated by ethical questions, which arise from the need to adjust existing methods in data collection and analysis to online fieldwork. As Mieke Schrooten writes in a reflection on her own research on social network sites with Brazilian migrants in Belgium, “[e]thnographers must learn how to apply standard principles of human

subject protection to a research environment that differs in fundamental ways from the face-to-face research contexts for which they were conceived and designed” (Schrooten 2016: 80). She discusses such issues as difficulties of obtaining informed consent and guaranteeing respondents’ anonymity, among others. Some researchers approach everything posted on the Internet as defined by principles of public access, meaning it can be used without individual permission (Slater 1998; Schaap 2002; Magnet 2007; quoted in Schrooten 2016: 86). Others argue that some online locations are more private and require informed consent (Schrum 1995; Döring 2002; Kozinets 2010; quoted in Schrooten 2016: 86). While I tend to agree with the second approach for some situations, in my case most of the groups I was following were public groups, which means that anybody can see what was posted there. It was not possible to obtain informed consent from several thousand members of a Facebook group, especially considering the fact that I was sometimes reading old discussions, and people who posted there were not members of those groups any longer. I have considered this problem and have chosen to follow several guidelines in my online ethnographic research. First, I never initiated any discussion in those groups. Second, I avoided using any direct quotes from online discussions I read. All quotes from these discussions in my dissertation are rephrased and are most often translated from Russian into English, which makes it impossible to trace it back to a person who wrote it. In addition, I mainly use quotes that reflect rather popular opinions and are sometimes a compilation of several quotes. Also, none of these quotes contain any personal information that could reveal anyone’s identity or be harmful in any other way. I followed this approach to protect participants of these online communities and their anonymity, and I believe this was sufficient in this particular situation.

I have a somewhat different approach to some Facebook posts, mainly written by leaders of immigrant organizations and organizers of specific events. I treat these posts as public information, as they are aimed at a broader audience and are written to inform the public about their events or to share their position officially. In these cases, I quote these posts directly (or in English translation if the post was originally in Russian) and provide the name of the Facebook group where it was published.

Russian-Speaking Immigrant Organizations

As early as 1991, a few organizations in Toronto sought to bring a diverse and rapidly growing Russian-speaking population together. However, none of these organizations were particularly successful prior to 2014, as their activities failed to produce any kind of large-scale community impact, and they largely remained known only to a small number of people. During my fieldwork I heard several times from different people that things changed dramatically in 2014 following the Russian annexation of Crimea. At this time Russia's support for pro-Russia and anti-government groups in the eastern regions of Ukraine led to a very strong condemnation of these actions in the West, including by Canada, which became manifest in strong international sanctions, harsh diplomatic language, and an outpouring of support for Ukraine. In many ways, 2014 was a year of a radical rupture in the dialogue between Russia and the West. The year 2014 also marked a significant change in the ways Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto positioned themselves in Canadian society and represented their Russian-speaking origins. There was a significant increase in the number and popularity of public events, including demonstrations with political demands, as well as commemorative events such as Victory Day (May 9), marking the end of World War II in the USSR. Starting in 2014, the number of both formal and informal immigrant organizations burgeoned, and their activities became more active, increasingly public and politicized.

The Russian-Canadian Cultural Aid Society and the Russian House (Russkii Dom)

Historically, the first Russian organizations in Canada appeared in the 1930s, when Russian Farmer-Workers' Clubs were established. These clubs were closed by the government in 1939 on the grounds that they were pro-Communist, but in 1942 the clubs later reconstituted and reappeared as the Federation of Russian Canadians, or FRK. According to Richard Pierce, the Federation had over 4000 members by 1944, but by the late 1980s its membership was less than 800 (2013). Another Russian-speaking immigrant organization in Toronto that has a long history is the Russian-Canadian Cultural Aid Society (RCCAS). It was founded in 1950 by immigrants who came to Canada after World War II. Many of them were forcefully removed from their homes in Europe by the Nazis and after the war they became displaced persons in the Western zones of occupied Germany; fearing what might await them upon

returning to the Soviet Union, they eventually resettled to Canada. The unwillingness of these people to return to the Soviet Union led Soviet leaders to accuse them of being traitors and Nazi collaborators. This reputation followed them to Canada and proved to be long-lasting, even extending to the time of my fieldwork in Toronto. More recent immigrants sometimes referred to these post-war immigrants as *vlasovtsy*, the followers of the Red Army General Andrei Vlasov who defected to Nazi Germany and later fought under the German command. Not surprisingly, when these people came to Canada in the late 1940s, they were not welcome at the FRK, which was a pro-communist organization. As Vasilii Malikov writes in his memoirs, “members of this organization treated the newly arriving refugees with disrespect (*s prezreniem*), calling them Fascists and enemies of the people (*vragi naroda*)” (Malikov 1999). Looking for a place to “come together, to talk, to ask for advice, to find a job,” many new immigrants joined The Russian Orthodox Church of Christ the Saviour, which was founded in Toronto in 1915 (Canadian Orthodox History Project 2017a). The church has served as both a religious gathering place and also as a cultural center for Russians living in Toronto. As the Church website explains:

The new Christ the Saviour Russian Orthodox Cathedral had become the hub of Russian Orthodox church life in Toronto. The community had choirs, dance groups, children's orchestras, youth concerts and youth cultural groups, and sisterhoods. Cadets and hussar officers from the Russian Imperial Guard of old Russia also held grand balls there. Every Sunday after the Divine Liturgy, downstairs in the church hall the faithful would congregate around the Russian classical library over "chai" (tea) with delicious food like "piroshki", "pelmeni" and "borshch" cooked by the sisterhood. It was a time of joyous fellowship. Lectures and talks with heated discussions on what was going on in Russia were inevitable. The former minister of education to Tsar Nicholas II, had become a member of the parish, and on 6 April, 1933, at 8:30 p.m., Count Pavel N. Ignatieff and his son Count Nicholas Ignatieff gave a lecture on "Russia-Yesterday, Russia-Today" at the reference library on the corner of Saint George and College Streets (Canadian Orthodox History Project 2017a).

New immigrants started to attend this church, but they soon decided they preferred to establish another parish within the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, and in 1949 the

Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church was formed.⁴ The following year, the Russian-Canadian Cultural Aid Society (RCCAS) was established by the newly arrived immigrants. It was a place where they could meet with each other, as well as maintain and promote Russian culture and language. It also provided some settlement support for immigrants from the Soviet Union. Since the end of the 1980s the RCCAS, in co-operation with the Holy Trinity Church, focused even more deeply on settlement services for newly arrived immigrants and “it became an important centre in the community, helping newly arrived Russians with the difficult but vital challenges of adjusting to their new surroundings, finding employment and housing and learning the English language” (Canadian Orthodox History Project 2017b).

The history of the RCCAS remained closely related to the history of the Russian Orthodox church in Toronto, as these two organizations were established and developed simultaneously by largely the same group of people. As Maria Blagoveshchensky, the President on the RCCAS wrote in 2010, “[m]any, having found themselves across the ocean, wished to assimilate with the local population as quickly as possible - there could have been objective reasons for that - people were still afraid of being handed over to the soviets. But we did not want to and could not forget that we are Russian. Of course, one of the most important binding factors was and to this day remain[s] our Orthodox Church, which gave all of us consolation, and the Faith gave us strength to build a new life” (Blagoveshchensky 2010). In her memoir, published to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the RCCAS, she tells about the society, how it was organized and what they did. She describes balls, lectures, concerts, and a theater club among many other cultural and social events. For years, their major event has been the Russian Ball, which they have organized annually. It is a formal event that celebrates Russian culture and Russian pre-revolutionary aristocratic ball traditions, including a debutantes’ presentation and dance. The Society also published a magazine, *Русское Слово в Канаде - Russian Word in Canada* from 1951 into the early 1970s.

Some of their events were more political, and it is not surprising that the RCCAS occupied a staunch anti-Communist position. One such event described by Maria

⁴The Church of Christ the Saviour remained a part of the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North America, until 1946 when it broke ties with the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (Canadian Orthodox History Project 2017a).

Blagoveshchensky was the Day of the Irreconcilable Position (*Den' Neprimirnosti* in Russian) that was “in memory of our disapproval, our irreconcilable position against the Bolshevik, communist power in Russia, which appeared as the result of the 1917 revolution, and the established godless, totalitarian and bloody regime. Usually, on this day - November 7th - all churches had *panikhidas* (memorial services) for all, who were killed and tortured during the soviet time, and in the evening, social organizations had meetings in memory of those, who perished, and as a sign of unity with those, who were in opposition to the communist regime” (Blagoveshchensky 2010).

Both anti-Soviet sentiment and a strong religious component were among the reasons this organization did not appeal to the new wave of immigration that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990s. While this organization remained very important for a smaller Russian community in the second half of the 20th century, they failed to become a unifying centre for the Russian immigration after 1991. The Russian Orthodox Church has also lost its importance as a community organization and mainly returned to its function as a place of worship. The idea of Russian-speaking immigrants being Orthodox Christians is an important basis for community mobilization, but only a few of its members attend church on a regular basis these days. Even though the RCCAS is the oldest immigrant organization, and it never ceased its activity from the time it was established in 1950, today it is not the most visible entity in the mobilization efforts of the Russian-speaking community.

In 2015, however, the Toronto municipal administration provided the RCCAS with a small house located in the Earle Bales Park in Toronto. After they received the house, which has come to be referred to as the “Russian House”, the organization became once again more actively involved in the life of the community, organizing various events in their house and in the park nearby. The house itself is a small two-story wooden building, decorated with all sorts of Russian symbols, including *matreshkas* and *samovars*, and it has a small Russian library on the second floor. They host a range of public programming, including Russian language courses, a choir, a social club for older immigrants, and a book club. They also serve as a site for public events and celebrations, such as for the commemoration of the 80th birthday of Vladimir Vysotsky, a beloved Soviet balladeer, or for a video conference with the prominent Tvardovskii museum in Russia.



Figure 1.3 Celebrations of the Family Day at the Russian House, July 2017.

For a relatively short period of time between 2007 and 2009, the RCCAS published a magazine, called *Heritage*. They described it as a “cultural-aid magazine for those, who live outside of Russia, but who are spiritually connected to its culture, history, and traditions” (Blagoveshchensky 2007a: 3). The magazine mainly focused on pre-revolutionary Russian history, the history of the Orthodox Church, and the stories of the Russian immigrants who came to Canada after World War II. It was obviously an attempt to rejuvenate the earlier *Russian Word in Canada* magazine published by the RCCAS. In the introduction to the first issue of the magazine Maria Blagoveshchensky, who at the time was not only the president of the RCCAS, but also the editor-in-chief of the magazine, wrote:

The founders of the Russian-Canadian Cultural Aid society, especially those who published the magazine, were mostly parishioners of Russian Orthodox churches in Toronto. Since the Russian Orthodox Church has been a fundamental part of the Russian culture, this aspect has influenced the content of the magazine. We will be following this tradition when covering topics connected with the Russian history, which still needs an objective and unbiased interpretation, as well when addressing other issues such as society, morality, family and education. These are some of the topics that interest any modern educated person (Blagoveshchensky 2007b: 6).

Even though this organization is less overtly engaged in politically mobilizing the Russian-speaking community today than it was earlier, this passage contains a list of topics, or issues, that are important for the Russian-speaking immigrant community, in general, and for its current political mobilization, in particular: traditional morality, history, family, and education. By invoking these concepts, the RCCAS seeks to prescribe a set of cultural norms for their audience and to establish itself as a source of moral authority. Maria Blagoveshchensky asks: “how do we avoid losing our identity, how do we not become simply *Russian-speaking*, how do we preserve the essentially important things that unite Russian people, how do we awaken the modern individual, who is supplied and satisfied with the comfort of modern life?” (Blagoveshchensky 2010). Her answer is in the need to maintain Russian culture, to remain a community of people interested in their common past, in their culture, and Orthodoxy. These forms of engagement distinguish the RCCAS from newer community organizations, such as the Russian Congress of Canada, that are more explicit about their political aims.

The Russian Congress of Canada (Russkii Congress Kanady)

The Russian Congress of Canada was created in 2014 and, according to Svetlana Thomas, one of its first leaders, the idea of its organization belonged to Protopriest Vladimir from the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church. Thomas recounted the early days of the Congress in an interview she gave in 2015 to the website *Russkii Vek* (Russian Century), established by the Russian Foreign Ministry (Efimova 2015). She said in the interview that events in Ukraine were their strongest motivation, and from the very beginning they planned to build an organization that would first and foremost be a political one. One of the biggest events organized by the Russian Congress has been the Immortal Regiment, an event designed to commemorate the Soviet victory at the end of World War II and to pay tribute to the people who fought in this war. As I discuss further in Chapter 2, this is a highly politicized and controversial event, but it is also one of the central events that brings thousands of Russian-speaking immigrants together annually for a march in Toronto’s downtown core.

In 2016-2017, during my field research in Toronto, I attended several events organized by the Congress. The first one was a celebration of February 23, Defender of the Motherland Day, in Russia, called “Pesni, opalennye voinoi” (*Songs Scorched by War*). The

celebration of February 23 is formally related to the history of the Russian army and its role in the defense of the country, but it is traditionally understood in Russia also as a day when all men and boys are honoured. The formal part of the event usually includes widely recognized WWII commemoration rituals, but a more popular part of the holiday includes giving gifts to men and boys and celebrating their masculinity and potential role as the “defenders of the Motherland.” It is interesting that in 2017 the Congress chose a more formal path for their celebration, as their event almost entirely consisted of WWII-era songs and they continued to emphasize the role of the WWII veterans who were central to this celebration. Other significant events they organized that year included the Immortal Regiment, which I mentioned above, and the Festival of the Orthodox Family, an event which I further analyze in Chapter 3.

The Russian Congress of Canada (RCC) has also been actively engaged in claiming its status as a lobby group for the Russian-speaking community in Toronto. I started this chapter with a story published by *The New York Times*, in which the author accused Russian-speaking immigrant organizations of being the Kremlin’s tools for spreading their influence in Canada, and especially targeted the RCC (Levin and Becker 2017). This understanding of ethnic organizations suggests that even though processes of diasporic and multiple ties of belonging and ties to homeland have long been addressed in the social sciences, this idea is still not easily appreciated by a wider audience. As James Clifford (1994) argues, identification with world political and cultural forces is an important aspect of diasporic consciousness. He writes: “The process may not be as much about being African or Chinese, as about being American or British, or wherever one has settled, differently” (312). Participation in the public sphere from a position of difference often leads to suspicion, like that invoked in *The New York Times* article accusing these immigrant organizations of not being the grassroots organizations they claim to be, but rather groups orchestrated and sponsored by the Russian government. My research suggests, however, that such participation in the public sphere represents an example of a growing citizen movement, as evident in the following example.

I met Anna, one of the organizers of the Immortal Regiment, at one of the events the Russian House hosted in spring 2017. I briefly introduced myself to her, explained my research and asked if she could tell me about the Immortal Regiment and how she got the

idea to organize it in Toronto. She seemed happy to talk about it, but she said that the story was short. She explained that she was sitting in her kitchen with a few friends, and they were talking about what was happening (it was in 2014, so she was referring to the Russian annexation of Crimea, the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and the international reaction to these events), and they decided that they had to do something. She told me how they printed some simple posters and spent weekends giving them out at the Yummy Market, not knowing whether they would receive much support or not. They were pleasantly surprised by the number of people who came to the first Immortal Regiment in May 2015. They also started to celebrate Maslenitsa, a traditional celebration of spring, about the same time. “I spent a whole day in the kitchen, making *bliny* (pancakes). I made huge piles of them. And then we were just giving them away for free. People asked how much they cost, and we would just say no, they are free, we just gave them for free. I later understood that we have to charge some money, because it’s just not possible to make it all on your own, but that time we were giving them for free.”

I heard numerous such accounts of the labour and personal finances people invested in carrying out their initiatives; like most community organizations, their operation expenses are generally small, as are their budgets. They rely on membership fees, as well as on other small sources of income, for example selling food during their events. Their relationships with the Russian embassy and consulate are also rather formal. Representatives of the Russian consulate are always invited to these events, and they often attend, but again, being present at those events, I had the chance to observe the interaction between the representatives of the consulate and members of the community, which clearly positioned those officials as honorable guests, and not as hosts. Based on my experience with the immigrant community, I want to emphasize once again that suspecting these organizations of being Moscow-orchestrated groups might work well as a conspiracy theory, but not as a part of anthropological research.

Russian Canada (Russkaia Kanada)

Another major grouping of Russian-speaking Torontonians revolves around its virtual identity as *Russian Canada—Russkaia Kanada*, which is the name of their Facebook group.

Its leader, Leon Mitsner, is a well-known person in the Russian-speaking community in Toronto. One of his first initiatives was the organization of a festival called “Matryoshka,” which its organizers represented as a festival of Russian culture, even though its major event was a beauty pageant. This festival was a rather popular event in the Russian-speaking community, and it took place annually between 2003 and 2008. In 2014, Leon Mitsner and other participants of this group became very actively involved in the process of political mobilization of the community and organized one of the first political rallies. In the following years, they organized the somber Immortal Regiment procession in downtown Toronto. In this way activists, who at one time posed with young girls in bikinis at beauty pageants, became involved in the organization of one of the key symbols of political mobilization among Russian-speakers in Toronto; these days their typical social media posts consist of photos with World War II veterans, Soviet flags, and politically laden images with the St. George’s ribbon pinned to their chests.⁵ I found this transformation of the forms of involvement in immigrant community fascinating and emblematic of how the nature of immigrant community has changed in recent years. While this change can be (and often is) interpreted as an immigrants’ investment in national discourses that are promoted by the Russian government, in the final chapter of my dissertation I argue that this is a much more complex process endowed with its own class logic and citizenship practices.

Returning to *Russian Canada* and its broader profile beyond its leader, the group is very active in its online presence, with members regularly re-posting news and opinions regarding Russia, Canada, and Ukraine, mainly from Russian-language mass media. They also post jokes and anecdotes, some random questions addressed to other members, and advertise their businesses. In general, this group is very politicized, and I used its materials to better understand such important questions related to the immigrant community as its dominant forms of historical imagination, its dual loyalty to Russia and Canada, and its citizenship practices. The majority of members of this group are pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian. They are also very critical of liberal politics in Canada, including progressive gender discourses, LGBTQ rights, and support for refugees. The leadership of this group

⁵ A St. George’s ribbon, or *georgiyevskaya lentochka* in Russian, is a Russian military symbol consisting of black and orange stripes that is widely recognized in Russia and used to commemorate those who perished in World War II.

organizes several events in Toronto every year, including the celebration of spring, the *Maslenitsa*, and the Immortal Regiment, which I return to later in the dissertation.

Toronto Mommies and other online groups

There are multiple other groups that differ in target audience, have different rules and styles of communication, and different political agendas, as well as different connections to the offline immigrant community. In addition to Russian Canada mentioned above, one of the largest groups, called *Toronto Mommies*, is mainly a Russian-speaking group designed for mothers living in the Greater Toronto Area. This group is extremely diverse, and a lot of its members live outside of Toronto or even Canada. The administrators of the group do not usually allow any political discussion, and most of the discussions focus on practical aspects of life in Toronto, with women asking advice on choosing schools for children, finding a doctor, comparing Toronto neighborhoods, dealing with annoying neighbours, or looking for a babysitter. There are several other groups that were created to bring together Russian-speaking mothers, such as *Mir Mamochki*, *Mamy Ontario*, and *Nashi detki v Kanade*, which are very similar to *Toronto Mommies* in a lot of ways, but they have significantly lower numbers of participants.

These groups are less focused on any offline activity, even though they sometimes organize events, such as New Years' Eve celebrations, or networking events for Russian-speaking businesswomen. These Facebook groups are also very important platforms for advertising Russian-speaking businesses, including medical services, beauty and selfcare services, and those focused on food preparation, construction and renovation, artistic expression, and gifts, among others. In my research, ethnographic work first in these groups and then with their members and at their events provided important insights into such aspects of community life as parenting, education, and class. These groups are also extremely gendered, and they were instrumental for my understanding of some of the community-specific forms through which gender is negotiated and performed by Russian-speaking immigrants.

Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation examines social and cultural practices among the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Greater Toronto, with a focus on the issues that bring Russian-speaking immigrants together. In particular, I examine how Russian Canadians perform Canadian citizenship in the form of political and cultural mobilization that is meant to ensure the transfer of cultural heritage between generations. In chapter 2, I analyze the role of history and memory among Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto, in particular as related to the memory of World War II, a highly contested and politicized subject in the wake of the Russian contemporary occupation of Ukraine. The memory of these historical events has become instrumental in mobilizing Russian-speaking immigrants as a community. In spite of the political nature of these celebrations, they are also very personal and focused on family and a need to maintain connections between generations and to transfer their historical memory to their children and grandchildren. Family is a central concept I discuss in chapter 3, where I explore immigrants' attitudes towards sex education in school and towards what they perceive to be liberal gender politics of the Canadian government; in this chapter I also discuss how immigrants' concerns about their children's bodies reveal deeper anxieties of being displaced and vulnerable to new social norms. Chapter 4 addresses the topic of social class and how it shapes immigrants' approaches to education and understandings of morality. Their focus on education and moral integrity as a precondition of reaching a higher position in the social hierarchy is closely related to their expectations of full participation and dignified representation in Canadian society. The concept of citizenship and how it is performed by Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada is the subject of final Chapter 5, where I discuss how Russian Canadian political activism is rooted in Canadian multiculturalism policies and political discourses, and how activism is intimately linked to their demands for full citizenship.

Chapter 2. Protectors of the Great Victory:

Commemoration of World War II in the Russian Community of Toronto

On a Saturday afternoon in May 2017 a large group of people gathered in the centre of downtown Toronto, at the intersection of Yonge and Dundas streets. Shop signs and large screens advertising popular clothing brands and new Hollywood movies were mixed with Russian and Soviet flags, white balloons, and portraits of Soviet servicemen and servicewomen, many of them featuring the orange and black stripes of the St. George's ribbon, a popular symbol of WWII remembrance. The people were wearing clothes portraying Russian and Soviet symbols, as well as elements of Soviet military uniforms; one man wore a t-shirt with a large portrait of Joseph Stalin on his chest. Some participants held banners such as "Stop Sanctions against Russia!" and "Thanks to the Red Army for the Victory over Fascism! 1941-1945." A large banner stretched over the group read, "The Immortal Regiment Toronto" in Russian. People were waiting in small groups and talking to each other, or distributing balloons and flowers, and rearranging posters. At some point, someone brought a sound system and turned it on, and conversations and urban noise drowned in Soviet-era war songs. At 1 pm, police officers blocked a section of Yonge Street, and people started walking in an organized procession. It continued for about an hour, passing along several central streets of downtown Toronto and finishing at the old Town Hall. This event, the Immortal Regiment, originating in Russia in 2012, and now a feature of transnational Russian-speaking diasporic ritual practice, was designed to celebrate the anniversary of the end of World War II and to commemorate Soviet veterans' sacrifices and heroism. It was being organized by Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto for the third time in 2017. This procession was just one event in a large-scale Victory Day commemoration of World War II and its heroes that the Russian community of Toronto had organized regularly since 2015.



Figure 2.1 The Immortal Regiment at the Old Town Hall in downtown Toronto, May 6, 2017.

Activities commemorating World War II play a key role in the expression of patriotism in Russia and the Russian-speaking diaspora. As a celebration of the Soviet and Allied victory over Nazi Germany, Victory Day takes place in Russia on May 9, and is a massive public event drawing millions of people to commemoration ceremonies and parades across Russia. It includes commemorative components, opportunities to remember those who fought in the war and sacrificed their lives for the victory, but it also celebrates the national effort and unity that are seen as the key to victory. In recent years, this holiday became heavily politicized both by Russian authorities who are eager to use its potential for unifying and mobilizing the nation and for pushing forward their political agendas, and by the critics of Russia's current government who emphasize the political abuses of the war commemoration. What are often lost in these battles of political interpretation pursued by politicians and the mass media are the actual people who celebrate this day, take part in the parades, and wear the Saint George's ribbon. North American mass media coverage and scholarly research on the celebration of World War II is predominantly focused on the Russian state, the hidden or open motives of its political establishment, and how the latter

uses this holiday as a propaganda tool to promote its political agenda. Regular participants' motivations for participating and their emotions attached to the celebrations, as well as the meaning they find in them, remain an obscure part of this picture. Yet, as we know from scholarship on commemoration practices in different locations, social actions such as participation in public rituals, interaction with material objects and landscapes, and traditions of class struggle, act as a way of passing historical knowledge through generations, and not necessarily the hegemonic forms of historical knowledge (Connerton 1989: 51-58). As the historian Jay Winter argues in his work on remembering the Great War in Britain, “[c]ollective remembrance – or, if you will, collective memory – is rarely what the state tells us to remember. There are always too many people who construct their own narratives which are either at a tangent to those constructed by politicians or their agents, or which are totally inconsistent with what the state wants us to believe happened in the past” (Winter 2006: 277). In other words, practices and forms of remembrance are neither commensurate with, nor fully defined by the state politics of history.

This chapter examines how the history and memory of World War II have become instrumental in mobilizing Russian-speaking immigrants as a community in Toronto. I ask why these historical events have become so important for many immigrants, what forms of war commemoration Russian-speakers perform, and what these commemoration practices mean for the community and individuals who participate in them. I also analyse how Russian-speakers' engagement with history is related to their experience and performance of class and citizenship in both the former Soviet Union and Canada.

The current scholarship on forms and practices of commemorating World War II in Russia and among Russian diasporas tends to interpret these, with a few notable exceptions, in instrumentalist and functionalist ways. One of the pioneering and most influential works that established this trend was Nina Tumarkin's *The Living & the Dead* (1994). Tumarkin argued that the official Soviet memory of World War II was a product of a cynical manipulation of history by Soviet propagandists, “a carefully orchestrated symphony in a major key, promoting an image of national unity and harmony,” (189) an interpretation that, as she argued in her later writing, also holds true for Russia after Vladimir Putin's ascension to the presidency in 2000 (Tumarkin 2010). A similarly instrumentalist approach has informed other scholarship on WWII commemoration, including a large-scale Humanities in

the European Research Area-supported research project *Memory at War: Cultural Dynamics in Poland, Russia and Ukraine* where public celebrations of Victory Day in Russia are discussed in terms of the politics of memory and memory wars where political elites are represented as the dominant players (Fedor et al. 2017: 8-20; Manilova 2017: 44-47, 55-66; Kurilla 2014: 36-43). One of the project's contributors, Julie Fedor, writes on the Immortal Regiment movement, which she sees as co-opted by Russian state authorities, as, "in the service of an authoritarian vision of the future of Russia and the region" (Fedor 2017: 309). A similar focus on Russian state authorities' cooptation of social initiatives characterizes much of the recent Russian-language research on commemorative activities related to Victory Day; analyzing commemoration in terms of state-society relations, these works routinely introduce the Russian state or state authorities as a collective agent seeking to "declare itself as the official trustee of the Victory's legacy" (Gabovitch 2015: 109) and "appropriate the war" (Kurilla 2018), using it as a valuable resource for national identity-making.

At the crux of this approach is a commonplace argument that the history of World War II in Russia has been transformed into a "myth" that substitutes a complexity of war experiences with a much more straightforward picture. According to such an analysis, this myth highlights the suffering and heroism of Soviet people, while silencing the collaboration between the Soviet and Nazi authorities during the initial period of the war, the critical mistakes committed by the Soviet government throughout the war, and the Red Army's crimes against local communities in Eastern Europe, as well as the political suppression of non-Communist democratic movements during the final stage of the war and the postwar years (Tumarkin 1994; Weiner 2002). While this argument often (but not always) accurately describes discourses shaping historical knowledge in Russia, its explanatory power for understanding the place of World War II in private and public rituals, such as commemorative activities, is less promising, as it implies a conceptual binary frame of authentic knowledge that the Russian authorities allegedly seek to downplay and false knowledge ("myth") that they produce to boost patriotic expression and political loyalty.

From this perspective, commemorative performances are interpreted as forms of political manipulation meant to coopt their participants and audiences into submission. This interpretation was offered, for example, in a resonant 2017 publication on the state of

historical memory in Russia authored by the Free Historical Society (Vol'noe istoricheskoe obshchestvo 2017). This approach is problematic as it denies agency to the participants and audiences of commemorative rituals and downgrades them to mere pawns of the Russian political establishment. This position was also manifested in the extremely derogatory term *pobedobesie* that many educated critics of the public commemorative rituals of World War II use to discredit the alleged effort of the state authorities to instill a “false” memory of the war, as well as to deride the complicity of Russian citizens.⁶ The website Pobedobesie.Info, (a collaborative project of Grani.Ru, a popular website now blocked in Russia, and the Free Russia Foundation, a US-based NGO), claims that the Immortal Regiment is now organized by the Russian authorities who force people to take part in celebrations, often with random portraits (not necessarily of their relatives), by coercing them or by simply paying money for their participation (Abarinov 2018).

Another approach to understanding the commemoration of World War II focuses on the performative character and the affective potential in communities producing commemoration. The affective and performative aspects of commemoration, especially in regard to community building, has long been the subject of scholarship on the Holocaust and other genocides, as well as of scholarship on historical trauma (LaCapra 1996). In the context of post-Soviet Russia, Serguei Oushakine discusses the different ways in which the Great Patriotic War is remembered showing how historical reconstructions are used to demonstrate a link with the past, “to provoke a sense of authentic connection with the past” (Oushakine 2013: 270). Researchers studying war commemoration practices in Russia have discussed how they have recently started to include more and more theatrical and even carnival elements, such as historical reenactments, where people wear war-time uniforms, dress children and even babies in uniforms and decorate their strollers as military machinery. Changing practices go along with the change in meaning attributed to the holiday, from commemorative to performative (Brown 2015; Arkhipova, Kirziuk 2015). My approach in this chapter is mainly informed by the latter trend, emphasizing performance and affective elements of commemoration, as it allows us to better understand the meaning of

⁶ The word *pobedobesie* is difficult to translate into English as it is made by merging two words, *pobeda*, a Russian word for victory, and *mrakobesie*, which can be translated into English as bigotry.

commemoration for people and, in the case of my research, the importance for community mobilization.

I start this chapter by discussing how the commemoration of World War II has recently become a politicized and controversial topic, and how this controversy became particularly important for the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Canada. I then describe commemorative practices that exist in the Russian-speaking community in Toronto and analyze how they became important loci for drawing community boundaries, serving both as a division between “us” and “them,” and as a connection and communication tool at the same time. The major event I analyze is the Immortal Regiment, a procession to commemorate Soviet servicemen who fought in World War II, but I also examine several other significant events, including the construction of a war memorial by a Russian-speaking immigrant group in Ontario and a public celebration marking the day the nearly three-year siege of Leningrad was lifted (January 27, 1944).

Concerns over History and Community Mobilization

“Don’t let them rewrite our history!” is a common phrase often heard at various events organized by Russian-speaking immigrant organizations of Greater Toronto. Immigrants are likely to use this phrase when speaking about their personal and collective identity and memory. “Our history” refers to their shared Soviet historical experience and narratives, especially about the Soviet struggle against Nazi Germany during World War II, or the Great Patriotic War as most of them call it, stressing its particular importance for Soviet and post-Soviet societies. I heard this phrase from people of different ethnicities and nationalities who, nevertheless, emphasize that they and their families were originally from the Soviet Union. By rewriting history immigrants usually mean a significant difference between their knowledge of the Soviet experiences in World War II and a critical perspective that they encounter in Western political discourses and mass-media coverage of the Soviet Union’s role in World War II. The western perspective usually includes a much bigger emphasis on the negative aspects of the Soviet role in the war and post-war periods, and less attention to the role the Soviet Union played in the defeat of Nazi Germany and its allies. Many of my respondents are acutely aware that this critical and unnuanced perspective – itself a product

of the Cold War – was further reinforced by political and cultural elites from post-socialist countries, as their perspective on the role the Soviet Union played during and after World War II was very different from that of the official Soviet version of history which shaped the historical consciousness of the average Soviet person. This critical version of history became especially pronounced in Canada after Russia became involved in the military and political conflict in Ukraine in 2014. As one of my respondents, Elena, claimed: “Everything we were used to, our history, our culture, our past is made dirty, is forgotten and distorted.” My respondents sometimes identified other aspects of the Soviet historical experience that have also become targets of a presumed historical revisionism, but according to them World War II was the major historical event that was being “re-written”.

The perpetrators of this historical revisionism – “they” – are rarely explicated, which suggests that the immigrants are concerned not so much with its origins, but, first of all, with the negative effects that it can exert on their community. Overall, the idea of history as “rewritten” expresses a fear of losing a symbolic connection with the national community that transcends the present moment in time and extends into their past. The word for this connection that immigrants and scholars alike invoke is “memory” (in Russian “*pamiat*”). Various events I will discuss in this chapter are related in one way or another to Russian-speakers’ efforts to keep alive what they call “our memory,” to share it with their children and grandchildren, and to prevent it from being distorted in one way or another. The ultimate goal, however, is not only to remember the past, but also to be able to be proud of it, to have moral rights to celebrate their memory and their history. As I discuss in this chapter, most events organized by Russian-speaking immigrants of Toronto are not only intended for their own community, but rather are intentionally public and staged to be seen by a broader audience as the community’s celebration of its shared history. While nothing formally prevents the Russian-speaking community from celebrating their Soviet past (with few exceptions that I will discuss later in this chapter), a complex array of political and cultural issues causes their events to be contested and criticized, a situation which immigrants often interpret as a threat to their collective memory and identity.

As I discussed in Chapter 1 and will further address in Chapter 5, the recent consolidation and political mobilization of the Russian-speaking immigrant community was triggered by a sharp domestic and international reprisal of Russia’s annexation of Crimea in

2014, as well as in the public sphere by the heightened visibility of a Ukrainian Canadian perspective on the history of Russian Ukrainian relations. The increased visibility of the Ukrainian Canadian community and the continued military and humanitarian support (more than 785 million dollars) provided by Canada to the Ukrainian government, caused many Russian-speaking immigrants to fear that this would lead the Canadian public to embrace widespread support of dominant Ukrainian perspectives on Soviet history.⁷ In Canada, Ukrainian Canadian intellectuals have historically been at the forefront of those interpreting the Soviet period of Ukrainian history as an experience of occupation, violent oppression of national liberation movements, genocide, and an onslaught on Ukrainian culture and language (Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies 1996). This understanding of Ukrainian history as an experience of colonial exploitation and imperial oppression became influential in national Ukrainian historiography beginning in the late Soviet years/late perestroika (late 1980s), and especially after the Orange Revolution of 2004. As historical narratives produced in Ukraine became increasingly ambiguous on the topic of Russian-Ukrainian relationships, many Russian politicians, scholars, and other people invested in the politics of history interpreted it as an example of historical revisionism, to such an extent that some of them accused Ukrainian authorities and scholars of a “rehabilitation of Nazism” (Medinskii 2014).

In large part in reaction to these developments Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada, including many immigrants from the eastern parts of Ukraine, became increasingly involved in community events that accentuated the “preservation of memory” and they attempted to strengthen the visibility of the Russian-speaking diaspora in Canadian society. I return to this in chapter 5 where I analyze the political mobilization of the Russian-speaking community and their citizenship practices. I also further discuss their attempts to establish themselves as a diasporic group with their own distinct cultural and historical narrative, along with the role of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada in this process.

One of the first events that consolidated a politically engaged segment of the Russian-speaking community was the March 2014 political rally against Canada’s support of the

⁷ According to the Government of Canada website, Canada committed more than \$785 million in assistance to Ukraine, including in the form of: development, humanitarian and financial assistance; defense and security cooperation, including training of military personnel in Ukraine; and contributions to the reform of the Ukraine National Police force (Prime Minister of Canada website 2019).

Ukrainian government. At the rally, called "Harper, Stop Supporting the War in Ukraine!", its organizers claimed that the Ukrainian government did not deserve any support because of its presumed support of fascism. These allegations have a history in that Russian-speaking immigrants have often accused the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada of being pro-fascist. These claims are partially rooted in the history of Ukrainian immigration to Canada after World War II, when many Ukrainians were resettled to Canada as refugees when they refused to return to the Soviet Union after the war. An official Soviet narrative appearing in Soviet media and school textbooks portrayed Ukrainians as unwilling to return to the Soviet Union because of their support for fascism and their collaboration with the Nazis during the occupation; two generations of Soviet citizens were steeped in such a narrative. This is a key element in the historical backdrop to Russian-speaking immigrants' insistence on preserving and communicating their version of history, a dominant theme throughout most of their events organized in Toronto in recent years. For example, the organizers of the Immortal Regiment in 2019 wrote in their advertising materials, "It is important to preserve the real [*podlinnuu*] history of our motherland."

While the same discourse about attempts to rewrite history also exists in Russia, it is arguably even more powerful in the diaspora. For its Russian proponents, the perceived threat of historical revisionism is relatively external and often perceived as being kept under control by the Russian government, as it is portrayed as being driven by outside forces.⁸ For immigrants, however, the experience of historical revisionism is much more real and immediate, as they often encounter it in Canadian mass media, in the school curriculum, or at Canadian Ukrainian public events (see, e.g., Pedwell 2014). They interpret narratives that are critical of the Soviet role in WWII as attempts to prevent them and, even more importantly, their children, from remembering their past. "Do your children know who won World War II?" I was asked when explaining my research to one potential interviewee. She used this question to start her argument that the Canadian education system was faulty in a number of ways, including its historical biases and outright distortions. Such claims that schools in Canada and the US teach students that it was the Western Allies who won World War II,

⁸ In one of the most egregious examples, the current Russian Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinskii, in his Doctor of Sciences dissertation, extrapolates this logic to Early Modern foreign accounts of Russia (Medinskii 2011). On the politics of Vladimir Medinskii's dissertation, see Anikin et al (2016).

while the role of the Soviet Union in this victory is diminished or even silenced, are common in the Russian-speaking immigrant community.⁹ This fear of losing their right to remember, fueled by the current political tensions between Russia and Canada, compel immigrants to become actively involved in commemorations of important historical events, such as Victory Day celebrated on May 9th.

The Immortal Regiment

Dmitrii, a former Donetsk resident and one of my Ukrainian friends in Toronto, always seemed to me as someone who carefully maintained a distance from the local Russian-speaking immigrant community. He was in his early forties; building a career in the construction business consumed most of his time, and family took up the rest. I knew that he attended Russian Orthodox Church services on important religious holidays, but it seemed to be his only form of involvement with the larger Russian-speaking community in the area (apart from occasional shopping in Russian grocery stores). It was, therefore, a surprise for me when early in May 2017 he called to ask if I (or my husband) was planning to participate in the Immortal Regiment procession in Downtown Toronto, as he was eager to take part in it and was looking for company.

The Immortal Regiment is a public procession of people carrying portraits of their relatives who participated in World War II. Initially a grassroots phenomenon that emerged in 2012 in Tomsk, Russia, it soon became a nation-wide movement in Russia and some other post-Soviet states, as well as among the Russian diaspora. This initiative appeared as an attempt to oppose state practices of war commemoration. The three Tomsk journalists who came up with the idea of the Immortal Regiment – Sergei Lapenkov, Sergei Kolotovkin, and Igor Dmitriev – said they were “frustrated with the political, commercial, and militaristic overtones of the standard commemorative events and wanted to create an alternative to the usual military parades which, in their view, celebrated the state and its leaders rather than the

⁹ A recent example of how the USSR’s role in the WWII victory gets diminished in public discourse took place in January 2020, when the US Embassy in Denmark wrote in their Twitter feed that US troops liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau. The following day, after receiving considerable criticism, the Embassy admitted that it was liberated by Soviet troops (U.S. Embassy Denmark 2020). This episode was widely discussed in the Russian-speaking social media, including by immigrant groups in Canada, as another attempt to rewrite history.

common people who fought in the war” (Gabowitsch 2016: 11). The format turned out to be so appealing that over the next years the movement attracted more and more people and was eventually incorporated into the official program of the Victory Day celebrations. In 2015, a procession in Moscow drew half a million participants, including the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, who joined the Immortal Regiment with a portrait of his father, which caused some observers to conclude that the Immortal Regiment had turned into a state initiative. According to this view, those who join the procession are seen as manipulated by widespread state propaganda and provide, voluntarily or not, a symbolic legitimation to President Putin and his political agenda (Gabowitsch 2016: 11). Within this interpretative framework, participation in these state-endorsed practices and rituals is explained by a desire to communicate political loyalties, to make a statement, or to claim identity and belonging to a larger national unity (Arhipova et al. 2017). The story of Yevgeny’s sudden decision to take part in the Immortal Regiment procession in Toronto suggests that the motivations that pull people to join the Immortal Regiment, as well as other forms of war commemoration, are more complex than identity claims and demonstrations of political allegiance. While these motivations might be, indeed, important for some people who take part in the Immortal Regiment processions around the world, I suggest that we need to look more specifically at how the political and the personal are intertwined in this particular practice of war commemoration.

The first Immortal Regiment in Toronto took place in May 2015, and it was one of the first events that brought together a large segment of the Russian-speaking community in a public space. Marina, one of the organizers, describes how the first event was planned:

We heard about it in 2014, and we got excited. We only managed to organize it in 2015, though. Nobody knew anything about what we were doing. There were like five of us, all women, and we went to the Russian stores, printed some flyers, and were just telling people about it, about what the Immortal Regiment was, why we wanted to organize it, why we had to bring portraits. Nobody knew anything about it.

While Marina emphasized a lack of experience or precedents, the organizers of the Immortal Regiment were greatly assisted by the large diasporic infrastructure of the Greater Toronto Area, with its network of ethnic grocery stores, businesses, clubs, print and online

media, and schools that I described in chapter 1. These allowed them to quickly and effectively engage a large audience of Russian speakers. For instance, my friend Dmitrii, who conspicuously avoided most diasporic activities, picked up a flyer distributed by the organizers of the Immortal Regiment at one of the Russian grocery stores. Marina admitted that the biggest fear of the organizers was that only a few people would show up, but instead they had an impressively large procession of several hundred participants.

People came with portraits of their family members who were war veterans. These portraits were printed and designed in different ways. Some portraits were framed, and others were just attached to a white poster board. Many included names, dates of birth and death, and military decorations; others only had photos. Portraits were attached to various poles and sticks, or even a tennis racket, which allowed the participants to carry portraits above their heads. Some people did not have portraits of their family members, and they simply printed their names on posters. Many people dressed up for the occasion by sporting elements of traditional Russian clothing or Soviet military uniforms; there were a lot of flags, including Russian, Soviet, and Canadian ones. In this respect, the first Immortal Regiment did not look much different from those that would be organized in the following years. This event was, however, particularly important for the mobilization of the community. Since 2015, the event has been organized every year in early May, with several Immortal Regiments held on the same weekend by different groups.

I attended the Immortal Regiment that took place in the Russian neighborhood of Toronto two years later, on Sunday, May 7, 2017. In general, the visual impression of this procession was typical of any other Immortal Regiment with portraits of veterans, Soviet and Russian symbols, military uniforms, and St. George's ribbons.¹⁰ The most common military clothing worn by participants of the Immortal Regiment worldwide is a *pilotka*, a Red Army side cap. The Russian Congress of Canada, which organized the event, was selling side caps on that day, as well as during some other events in the previous months. People were also wearing hats and t-shirts with "USSR" and "Russia" printed on them and one man wore a red t-shirt with a portrait of Stalin and his quote: "Our cause is just; victory will be ours."

¹⁰ The ribbon was first designed in Russia in 2005 to become a symbol of patriotism, war sacrifice and supra-national unity, but soon became interpreted by many as a symbol of loyalty to the current government (Gabowitsch 2016: 13-14).



Figure 2.2 The Immortal Regiment in the Russian neighbourhood, May 7, 2017.

The procession began with Vasily Lebedev-Kumach and Alexander Alexandrov's song *The Sacred War*, an unofficial anthem of World War II, played through giant loudspeakers. People started moving along the streets; a large poster on a red background proclaimed in Russian "No one is forgotten. Nothing is forgotten" and was carried in front of the procession along with another red poster reading "Immortal Regiment Canada" in both English and Russian. This phrase, "No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten," has a long history as part of the May 9th commemoration. It was written by the Soviet poet Olga Berggolts in 1959 to be displayed at the memorial built to honour those who perished in World War II. These words have become incorporated into Victory Day celebrations and are widely recognized by people from post-Soviet countries. "We want our children and grandchildren to remember this, too. We will pass our memory to them. Hurray!" one of the organizers said in a loudspeaker while walking along in the procession. Her "Hurray!" was supported by most people in the procession. In addition to portraits, people also carried other kinds of posters. One of them was a large banner with a mixture of Russian and English stating: "I remember! I am proud" (in Russian: "Ya pomniu! Ya gorzhus"); "Remember the

Soviet soldiers who died in WWII”; “Liberating Europe from fascism and Nazi genocide!” and the numbers showing how many people died during the war in the USSR (26 million) and in other countries by comparison.¹¹



Figure 2.3 The Immortal Regiment in the Russian neighbourhood, May 7, 2017.

Unlike the Immortal Regiment in Downtown Toronto that I will describe later, this procession in the Russian neighborhood proceeded on sidewalks, as the streets were not

¹¹ The widely recognized figure of 26.6 million Soviet casualties (including the armed forces, home front, and occupied territories) was produced in the late 1980s by professional historians and demographers who conducted thorough archival research in the newly opened archives. Some of my respondents, like in this example, rounded it to 26 million; some others, including later in this chapter, to 27 million (Krivosheev 1997: 83-84).

closed for traffic, and police only assisted when they had to cross intersections.¹²

Representatives of the Russian Consulate were invited to attend, and they made a short official presentation before the procession started, and then joined the Immortal Regiment. At some point, a group of bikers (also members of the Russian-speaking community) joined the procession, riding their motorbikes alongside on the road. The end point of the procession was Earl Bales Park, where the Russian Congress of Canada had prepared a large celebration that started with a short parade by a group of war reenactors, who were clad in full World War II-era uniforms. The parade also included Soviet war veterans living in Toronto. The leader of the veteran organization gave a speech in Russian at the beginning of the parade that culminated in his rousing part lament, part proclamation: “Some people are still trying to diminish the meaning of this victory, and we remember what everyone did, what Canada did, what the US did, but we won’t let anyone diminish OUR victory! We entered Berlin! We raised the banner of Victory!” His speech was welcomed by a loud “hurray!” shouted out by both participants of the parade and everyone in the audience. Another part of the celebration was a ceremony of laying flowers at a war memorial. In the program this memorial was referred to as a “memorial to a fallen soldier,” while, in fact, the flowers were laid at a Holocaust memorial, officially known as The Spirit of Bravery square. Later in this chapter I return to a discussion of this site as part of my analysis of the initiative to build a World War II memorial in Toronto.

¹² The cooperation with the police is an ongoing issue for the organizers of these parades. In spring 2019 organizers of the Immortal Regiment posted on Facebook that they needed to raise extra money to pay for the police presence at the event and for their assistance in closing streets for traffic. The previous year they got this assistance for free, but in 2019, due to another large event in Toronto and the limited availability of police officers, they were asked to pay or to change the day of the event. The organizers chose to pay because they had already widely advertised the event and coordinated it with other events happening in the community that weekend. Even though the amount was just over one thousand dollars, it was a serious problem for the organizers, whose budget for the event relies almost entirely on donations.



Figure 2.4 Parade at Earl Bales park, May 7, 2017.

That day in 2017 the Immortal Regiment commemoration was followed by a celebration primarily consisting of a concert that included songs about World War II, speeches by community members and representatives of various immigrant organizations, and dance performances prepared by children's and adult's amateur groups. Songs and dance performances largely featured the classic Soviet-era repertoire. For example, one of the acts in the program was the aforementioned *The Sacred War* performed by a group of children wearing *pilotkas* and St. Georges' ribbons. The celebration in the park also included a large Soviet-themed field kitchen (*polevaia kuhnia*) where volunteers were selling food, including pelmeni and pirozhki. The man who was serving food said to no one in particular: "Just think about it: we are in Canada, gathered together like this, cooking pelmeni, in the centre of Toronto!" After the official part of the celebration was finished, people remained in the park for several hours in spite of the cold weather. The concert continued with less symbolically laden songs, more modern pop music, and with kids dancing in the tent and people chatting in small groups. Others stayed in the park eating and talking to their friends.

This commemoration in the Russian neighbourhood was one of the three Immortal Regiments organized in Toronto during that weekend of May 6-7, 2017. I was able to attend only two of them (two events were scheduled for the same time), and while there were some differences in the organization and rhetoric of the organizers, they had much more in common. There were some internal conflicts among immigrant organizations that led them to organize these three Immortal Regiment processions, and one of the main reasons for this multitude of processions was an inability of the organizers to come to an agreement about the location and leadership. One Immortal Regiment procession took place in downtown Toronto on Saturday, May 6, while the other two processions took place in different areas of the Russian neighborhood of Toronto on May 6 and May 7.¹³ (The following year, in 2018, leaders of the immigrant community cooperated in organizing two processions, one in the downtown and one in the Russian neighbourhood, as distinct segments of the same Immortal Regiment, using the same visual symbols and coordinating the timing of the events.)

The first time the Immortal Regiment took place in downtown Toronto (in May 2016), it was very much a political event, even though its organizers claimed that it was not. They not only aimed to honour the veterans of World War II, but also to deliver a political message to the Canadian public, which also explains their insistence on the downtown location. Their Facebook page for the event stated the following goals in English (in the original):

To celebrate and commemorate Victory Day. To remember heroes of World War Two. Demonstration of IMMORTAL REGIMENT (heroes of World War Two). To stop demonizing Russia. To stop sanctions against Russia.

After this very brief introduction in English, they further continued the description of the event in Russian. In this description, the organizers primarily focused on the current political situation rather than the World War II commemoration, even though Victory Day was the underlying idea for this celebration:

¹³ In Russia, these celebrations always happen on May 9, which is a statutory holiday marking the end of World War II. However, immigrant communities around the world, including in Canada, tend to organize celebrations on the previous weekend in the case that May 9 is a workday when most people would not be able to attend.

This is not a political demonstration. This is a festive demonstration of the Russian-speaking Canadians to support our motherland Russia. We will proclaim that Russian-speaking Canadians are against sanctions, that we are against demonizing Russia and against Russophobia.

The leader of the group Russian Canada and the main organizer of the event in Downtown Toronto repeatedly emphasized in his Facebook posts that the Immortal Regiment should take place downtown and not elsewhere in the Greater Toronto Area: “The Immortal Regiment should only happen in Downtown Toronto. This is our place [*tam nashe mesto*].” There were also multiple online and offline discussions about the location of the Immortal Regiment, and in general, the preference for the location was related to the meaning people attached to this event, and their primary motivation for participating in the procession. While the downtown location provided more visibility and implied the inclusion of a broader Canadian public, a preference for holding the event at a location in or near the Russian neighbourhood suggested, in the logic of its supporters, an orientation towards the community and the preservation of traditions and memory.

While these two aspects were not mutually exclusive, and many people took part in both events in 2017, I suggest that this difference in goals was important for the organizers of the events, and in general, those who see this event as primarily a political action were in favor of the downtown location:

It is not easy to gather people in the centre of Toronto. This is a political act in support of Russia when everyone is against Russia. One needs to be brave to go there where all Canadians will see them.

We will celebrate the Victory Day in downtown every year. I see it as our sacred mission. We need to share our feelings with the people of Toronto and Canada. Canadians should know what price we paid to be free from fascism. It is very important to be today at the right place.

Unlike this group, the organizers of the Immortal Regiment in the Russian neighbourhood in 2017 were very vocal in their view of the event as a commemoration of World War II which they do “*dlia sebia*” (for ourselves), because they want to remember their history and remember what their grandparents did and how they survived or died for this victory. While the Immortal Regiment in the Russian neighbourhood was also a public

event, I suggest that there were different levels of publicity and visibility that were deemed necessary by various people who participated in the same ritual. To highlight these differences, I now turn to reflect on the event that took place in Downtown Toronto the same weekend in 2017 that I attended the Immortal Regiment in the Russian neighbourhood.

The Immortal Regiment procession in Downtown Toronto took place on Saturday, May 6. Participants gathered at the downtown core, at the intersection of Yonge and Dundas Streets. I came to take part in the procession as a researcher, and while I spent some time observing the procession from a distance, remaining on the sidewalk, at several moments I was included in the procession as a participant. It was this experience of participant observation that I found very important for understanding this event. I went to the Immortal Regiment with my friend Dmitrii, and we were staying with the crowd while waiting for the event to start. People were gathered holding portraits of their parents and grandparents and wearing St. George's ribbons attached to their clothing, their children's strollers, and even to their umbrellas. There was a sea of flags, mostly Russian, but also Soviet and Canadian. While waiting, we started talking to three elderly women, who also came to take part in the Immortal Regiment procession. After briefly complaining that there was little information about the event, and that they found out about it last minute, by chance, they started talking about how important it was that such events were, after all, organized. "We need to do something, they are trying now to rewrite our history everywhere, trying to take away our celebration," one of them argued. They mentioned a poll, which presumably showed that everybody thought the Americans had won World War II, and they lamented, "They will soon be telling that the Russians dropped the bomb on Hiroshima." (These women did not know any details about the poll or where it was published, but I heard about the poll again later from different people who pointed to the same poll as an illustration of how their history and memory were targeted by hostile powers.) Apparently, similar sentiments compelled others to take part in the Immortal Regiment as well.



Figure 2.5 The Immortal Regiment in downtown Toronto, May 6, 2017.

The procession started at approximately 1 pm, and it was led by two women carrying a poster reading in Russian “The Immortal Regiment Toronto”, followed by several people holding Canadian and Russian flags and portraits. Other participants were carrying the same poster in English. Right behind them, a participant held a large red banner on which was written the slogan: “Thanks to the Red Army for the Victory over Fascism! 1941-1945.” Two other banners with large red letters on a white background read, “Stop Demonizing Russia” and “Stop Sanctions against Russia” (with the word “sanctions” highlighted in black). Other slogans that I noticed that day read “Make Canada a Zone for Peace” and “Oppose the Escalating War Preparations!”, but they were relatively small and not as visible as the others. These last two posters were held by people closer to the middle, and even the end, of the procession. Yet another poster was carried by members of the Communist Party of Canada and read: “Canada needs an anti-war government!” Overall, despite several explicitly political banners, this event I attended in 2017 was less politicized and more focused on the Immortal Regiment itself and the honouring of war veterans, as compared to the first event organized in 2016 by the same group in downtown. This does not mean that the organizers and participants moved away from their political agenda entirely, but they shifted the

emphasis of their discourse and the political aspect became less visible in their promotional materials and in the organization of the procession itself.

For the 2017 event the organizers also brought two long pieces of fabric, one in the colours of the Russian national flag (red, white, and blue), and the other in the colours of the St. George's ribbon (yellow and black). These enormous banners were about a meter wide and long enough to stretch for about a block. People were carrying them on both sides of the procession, with others walking in the centre, between the two banners. The lengths of fabric were not long enough to enclose all participants of the procession, but they covered a large segment of it. Others walked behind with flags and portraits. The demonstration proceeded along the streets, accompanied by police officers who stopped the traffic to allow people to walk. At some point I overheard a police officer explaining to a passerby that the Russians were celebrating Victory Day and that they wanted to remind everyone about the important role the Soviet Army played in the victory. Most likely, something along these lines was written in the application to the city to get permission to hold the event.

During the entire duration of the procession, as it was moving along the streets, music was playing through portable speakers. The playlist consisted of popular Soviet songs about the war. Music is an important part of the war commemoration in general, and most of the events commemorating Victory Day employ music, inevitably creating a strong emotional response among participants. As Serguei Oushakine writes, “songs about the Great Patriotic War have become a major cultural device through which the commonality of war and loss is established in Russian society” (Oushakine 2013: 289).



Figure 2.6 The Immortal Regiment in downtown Toronto, May 6, 2017.

I followed the procession as an outside observer for some time, but then I joined it and found myself walking in the very middle of a large crowd of people. I did not have a portrait to carry, but there were many other people without portraits, so this did not set me apart. Then somebody invited me to join a group of people carrying a large banner. I was not planning to do it, but at that moment it did not feel right to refuse, so I ended up holding the banner portraying the national colours of Russia. While I continued walking there, I was thinking about my own experience of being a part of this large group of people gathered together to celebrate the memory of their parents and grandparents. I also have great-grandparents who died in WWII and grandparents who lived through WWII as children and lost their fathers and siblings. My great-grandmother lost her husband, and then her daughter died when they were evacuated to the Kola Peninsula. She once told me matter-of-factly how her daughter got sick and ended up in the hospital, while my great-grandmother had to keep on working. Since the hospital was far away, she could not stay with her daughter or even visit her every day, and one day she arrived at the hospital only to learn that her daughter had died the previous day. I was thinking about her experience as we were passing the Sick Kids hospital in Downtown Toronto where I had taken my own child for a critical medical

treatment just a few weeks before. This was a very strange experience that I could not articulate at that time, but that I wrote about it in my fieldnotes after I came home. I continued to think what it meant to me personally to be a part of that event, and to what extent my experience could be extrapolated to the experience of other people who I walked next to.

There are two main approaches to how war memory and commemoration are studied (Ashplant et al. 2000). One of these approaches, developed first in the works by Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, is political (Hobsbawm 1983, Anderson 1983), where war commemoration is analyzed primarily as a part of nation-building projects controlled by the state, “as a practice bound up with rituals of national identification, and a key element in the symbolic repertoire available to the nation-state for binding its citizens into a collective national identity” (Ashplant et al. 2000: 7). The other approach focuses instead on the psychological meaning of commemoration as a human response to the experiences of war, death and suffering (Winter and Sivan 1999). Jay Winter (1995), in particular, emphasizes the need to address how war commemoration translates individual grief into public mourning for the dead. Ashplant et al. (2000) criticize these two approaches for constructing themselves as mutually exclusive, with the first one focusing on how war memories are shaped by the state, and the other addressing individuals and civil society and how they remember. In contrast, Ashplant et al. argue that these processes are interrelated and constitutive of each other and that “[t]he politics of war memory and commemoration always has to engage with mourning and with attempts to make good the psychological and physical damage of war; and wherever people undertake the tasks of mourning and reparation, a politics is always at work” (2000: 9). For example, David Lloyd showed in his work on the commemoration of World War I in Britain how the official narrative of the celebration of victory was displaced by popular mourning of the dead, which then became part of official commemoration practices (Lloyd 1998). In his more recent book, Jay Winter also emphasizes the interrelatedness of state politics and individual agency in the work of remembrance. He writes that groups of people involved in practices of collective remembrance “may work in concert with the state, but they are never wholly subsumed by it” (Winter 2006: 276). He continues his analysis by claiming that “remembrance is a facet of family life and of civil society, that space which reaches from the family to the state” (276). Victory Day

celebrations in the Russian-speaking community reflect these complicated relations between individual memory, family history, and social agency, as well as state initiated and supported practices. In the case of the Russian-speaking immigrant community, there is not one, but two states whose narratives and practices of memory and war commemoration differ in some very important respects. However, the role of individual memories and the psychological effects of war are extremely important in the celebrations I discuss in this chapter.

From their early childhood, people in Russia are exposed to the cultural discourse of the Great Patriotic War. While there are various media that transmit knowledge about the war, such as books, movies, school curricula, and monuments, there is one medium that makes this knowledge very personal, namely, family history. In addition, the overwhelming majority of Soviet and Russian citizens at some point of their lives learned that the war affected almost every family in the Soviet Union, and that it was a tragic, but also a heroic, period for the entire Soviet nation. Despite all the political implications of Victory Day and the state involvement in its celebration, for many of them this holiday is first and foremost about family. As someone who was born in the Soviet Union and grew up in Russia, my knowledge of the Great Patriotic War is, first of all, from stories of my family: the story of my great-grandfathers whom I never saw because they perished in the battlefield; the story of my grandmother, whose village was occupied by the German Army and whose family escaped just hours before their village was set on fire either by the Wehrmacht or by Soviet partisans and had to hide in the forest for several days to avoid retaliation; and the story of my great-grandmother who lost her husband and her daughter. The oral tradition of passing family history, especially about WWII, from generation to generation is very common in Russia; for example, in a recent survey of 120 Russian teenagers and youth between 14 and 24 years old, 116 mentioned oral testimony of their relatives as an important source of knowledge about World War II (Makarova 2015: 113-114). The political dimension of the commemoration of Victory Day becomes a superstructure built over these personal memories, and it is key for our understanding of political and ideological aspects of war commemoration to consider them as rooted in family histories.

Another example of the importance of family in commemorative practices is reflected in what one of the participants shared about his experience:

It is hard to put into words what you feel when you wear the uniform of a Soviet soldier. I remember my grandfather well. I remember his friends... Wearing this uniform, I cannot say I fully understand what these heroes were feeling, but I feel that I am closer to them now... It is important to feel this connection though time, and not to let it break (Yar Media 2017).

In a 2016 video recording from the Immortal Regiment procession in Toronto, one of the participants, a man in his 50s, explained his motivation to participate: “We are here to draw attention to our history, to let the world know that we care about our history. It’s not just about facts, it’s a personal matter to everyone here” (Art Vision Production 2016). This is a common sentiment, as many immigrants perceive the Immortal Regiment as a “personal matter,” and when I was talking to people who were involved in the organization of the Immortal Regiment in Toronto, one of the most important motivations they expressed was a very personal feeling of being hurt and offended by what they perceived to be the unjust treatment of Russia by the international community. One of the main aspects of this perceived injustice was a large-scale re-evaluation of the role that the Soviet Union played in World War II, something I discussed earlier in this chapter. A paucity of knowledge about World War II among the Canadian public leaves them largely unaware of the death toll, the scale of wartime occupation, and the degree of devastation in the USSR. By contrast, knowledge of these tragic facts of WWII permeates Russian culture and has long been part of general historical literacy. Some of my informants, consequently, felt that what they saw as the heroism of the Soviet Army was put into question in a Canadian context and this led my informants to feel that their fathers and grandfathers were being stripped of their rightful heroic status. It was this personal feeling of being offended on the part of their fathers and grandfathers that initially compelled many people to take the portraits of their loved ones and march along the streets of Toronto. This feeling of indignation as the driving force for Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto to begin mobilizing in recent years was especially evident in my interview with Olga, a Russian-speaking woman who was actively engaged in a Russian-speaking community organization. While I did not ask her about World War II commemorations at the time of the interview, one of the first things she told me about Russian-speaking political mobilization was that

[Another reason was] the situation in Ukraine. Everyone saw what was happening when our history, our culture, our past were forgotten, distorted, and brutalized. People got scared. People don't want those who killed their grandfathers to become heroes on an equal standing with those who freed the world from fascism.

This quote refers to the history of Ukrainian nationalist resistance to Soviet authorities that broke out following the liberation of Ukraine from occupying Nazi forces in 1944; this then lasted for half a decade. Perceiving Soviet bureaucrats, teachers, and police officers as another occupying force, Ukrainian nationalists launched an insurgency campaign against Soviet officials and the military, almost all of them World War II veterans, as well as against many local people who collaborated with the new regime. In 1945-46, insurgents in Western Ukraine killed almost 10,000 Soviet officials, servicemen, and civilians (Statiev 2010: 105-138). While this history was marginalized and silenced during the Soviet era, the re-emergence of an independent Ukrainian state in December 1991 led to an affirmation of Ukrainian insurgents' historical experience and to the inclusion of Ukrainian insurgents in official Ukrainian accounts as "independence fighters" (Narvselius 2012). For Olga, the respondent quoted above, this re-evaluation of the national historical narrative in Ukraine represents a symbolic attack on the Soviet and, by extrapolation, Russian historical legacy.

Another Russian-speaking woman, Anna, one of the organizers of the Immortal Regiment in Toronto, reiterated this sentiment. Explaining to me why and how they came up with the idea to organize the procession, she said:

Well, when all this started happening with Ukraine, we became disturbed, agitated (*vseh zavelo, razvolnovalis'*), and we had of course already heard that they were organizing the Immortal Regiment in Russia.

In the cultural logic of these people, their parents and grandparents, who had lived through World War II, were undeniably heroes. When the current political processes started threatening their heroic status, it was not loyalty to the Russian political system that forced them to organize the Immortal Regiment, but rather a strong urge to protect their family history and to protect the memory of their loved ones, a sentiment linked to their desire to be proud of their past. I argue that while the Immortal Regiment was very personal in its core, it had to be public to reach its goal. People who walked the streets of Toronto with portraits of

their loved ones needed others to witness and affirm the heroism of their loved ones in order to remind the world of what their relatives had accomplished. Here, the portraits of their relatives, printed and framed, become a material and visual object that facilitates connections with the past and allows a demonstration of it, but to do so, collective action and an audience are required.

The Immortal Regiment was definitely a very powerful way for the Russian-speaking immigrant community to insist that their historical experience should be recognized and to claim the streets of Toronto as their own space. This march allowed people to bring together their Canadian experience with their post-Soviet background as they exercised their presence as political actors and exercised their political power to contest dominant narratives of history. A common critique of the Immortal Regiment processions in Toronto expressed by groups of Russian-speaking immigrants who have not participated is that those who take part are pro-Putin activists or even Kremlin puppets; a common rhetorical question that circulates in online debates between these two groups is why, if someone is so proud of the Soviet historical experience and self-identifies as a patriot of Russia, they refrain from going back to Russia. These critiques, however, miss a crucial point that the celebration of Victory Day in Greater Toronto is not only about Russian identity, but also about the assertion of the right to claim their ethnic and cultural heritage in a multicultural Canadian society. Taken in this context, these celebrations represent a claim for full inclusion in Canadian citizenship. I will focus more on these citizenship claims in Chapter 5; here I would like to emphasize the multifaceted nature of the Immortal Regiment in Canada, as well as the fact that we cannot reduce it to a performance of loyalty to the Russian government. It is also important to note here that the organizers of the Immortal Regiment refer to themselves and other participants as Russian Canadians. This sentiment was manifested in an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that was posted on Facebook by one of the organizers of the Immortal Regiment (the letter is reproduced in the original spelling as follows):

Dear Friends,

We are gathered here today to celebrate Victory Day, which marks the end of World War II. Today, we remember and give tribute to all those who lost their lives in the great war, and bow our heads in honor and respect of our veterans all over the world. Today, we are reminded of the blood and tears that were shed for our lives, for peace. And so, we carry portraits of our loved

ones, those who fought in the war or were its unfortunate victims. Today, together, we remember them.

Russia and the Soviet Union paid the highest price for victory. 27 million people, soldiers and civilians, died across the vast battlefields of Europe. Millions were sent to and died in concentration camps across the continent. We are the children of those who have survived the horrors of war. We have come from near and far. We have become Canadians. Today, together, we remember our heritage.

We wish to send our message across Canada and to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau: Canada and Russia stood shoulder to shoulder against Nazi Germany; for the sake of peace, for the sake of freedom. And now, we once again stand together, we continue to honor Victory Day. Today, together, we remember and we say: "Never Again!"

Happy Victory Day!

The letter expresses a feeling of belonging to the global Russian-speaking community and to Canada at the same time. It asserts a genealogical succession and indebtedness of immigrants to the Soviet people whose heroism and suffering stopped the advance of Nazism, and simultaneously the letter asserts Russian Canadians' present-day place in Canadian society. The symbolic importance of the Immortal Regiment for the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Toronto is that it helped manifest a number of elements, such as: their ethnic, cultural, and historical heritage; connections with other members of the community; and performances of national pride.

The presence of a political message in the organization of the Immortal Regiment does not contradict the personal nature of the event but is rather an extension of it. Serguei Oushakine suggests in his analysis of war commemoration practices in Russia that they can be interpreted as a search for "collective emotions" and understood as performative rituals (Oushakine 2013: 274). Following Victor Turner's definition of a ritual, Oushakine emphasizes how these historical re-enactments work similarly to other types of ritual, aiming at inscribing order, but this work is done not so much through the narrative of the ritual, but rather through "the emotional encoding" where the organizing force is not the political establishment, but rather affect itself (Ibid: 274). This analytical framework can be equally productively applied to the understanding of the Immortal Regiment, which can be interpreted in Victor Turner's terms as a liminal area, where space and time collapse, and the unstructured form of society emerges (Turner 1977). Turner emphasizes the ability of a ritual to communicate the most deeply ingrained values shared by the group, and he also argues

that ritual has an important pragmatic function. He writes, “[a]s a ‘model for’ ritual can anticipate, even generate change; as a ‘model of,’ it may inscribe order in the minds, hearts, and wills of participants” (Turner 1982: 82). This ability of ritual to generate change and inscribe order makes it important to consider when speaking about the Immortal Regiment. The ongoing re-interpretation of history and the proliferation of anti-Russian discourse among Western politicians and mass media is interpreted by the participants of this ritual as a violation of the existing order, as a disappearance of the world as they know it. In this aspect, the Immortal Regiment pursues an aim of bringing the world back into order, or fixing it. Political demands are closely related to this underlying idea of the Immortal Regiment, as an effort to recreate a world its participants know and a world in the form they think it should be.

Emotional response is a very important aspect of the Immortal Regiment as a performative ritual and a collective action. The main aftermath of this event for its organizers and participants is the emotions they experience and try to capture and express in later conversations, the feeling of belonging that they experience when walking together with other people and holding the portraits of their loved ones. When people discussed the first Immortal Regiment held in 2015 on Facebook a few days after it took place, most of the posts were about emotions. “I’ve been living with the feeling of happiness since yesterday,” claimed one of the participants, while another recollected: “We were standing there and crying, and those were the tears of joy.” Marina, one of the organizers of the Immortal Regiment, told me: “The first event was the most touching, it was driven by emotions, we were all so happy that we could just walk like this in the city.” Such strong emotions form a turning point where personal and political merge together, creating affective solidarities. As Oushakine argues, war commemorations in Russia produce strong emotional states and affective solidarity, which is also true in the case of the Russian-speaking diaspora in Toronto. People who come to the Immortal Regiment to re-affirm their individual histories and to honour their parents and grandparents become part of a performative ritual that provokes intense emotions. Through these they experience solidarity with others as they share in celebrating a common personal history, and as they reflect on their past and a larger national entity. To quote Marina once again:

We realized then that there are other people here, the same as we are. When I came to Canada, I thought I am alone here with my love for my country, but in fact there are a lot of such people here, they were just hiding somewhere, there was no solidarity... There is a different atmosphere now, you feel that you are a part of this history, and it is so great when all people who are like you are together.

Another quote from a Facebook post following the first Immortal Regiment shows similarly strong affects produced by participation in the commemorative event: “Every time we feel the joy of victory and grief of loss in the unforgettable atmosphere that prevails during the procession.”

On another occasion, while preparing for the Immortal Regiment in 2016, the organizers of the event posted on their Facebook page:

The 2015 parade left an unbeatable impression and created an overwhelming atmosphere of joy and sadness, pride and sorrow, but, first and foremost, we felt the spirit of solidarity. We would like you to share this unforgettable experience with us.

Scholars have previously described how affects organize society in various ways. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* Sara Ahmed suggests that the social power of affect is irreducible to politics and ideology, but rather emanates from the circulation of affective texts, images, and other media forms between members of society in a kind of “affective economy” (Ahmed 2004: 7-9, 51). William Reddy, in turn, suggests that different “emotional regimes” can be identified as underlying certain forms of political mobilization, or, put differently, that “communities construe emotions as an important domain of effort” (Reddy 2001: 55). As the quote above suggests, emotions are the key components of the community mobilization in the Russian-speaking community in Toronto, while personal histories become reworked in the process of performance and affective remembering and lead to a collective solidarity. In this way, it is important to emphasize that the Immortal Regiment is not just a reflection of political loyalties and solidarities, but instead is a form of a collective action that produces and intensifies them, allowing people to transform the personal into the political and the private into the collective. Most of its participants came there out of an urge to protect their family history and a feeling of belonging to the Russian world. What they found at the Immortal Regiment procession was that there were many other immigrants from

the ex-USSR who shared pride in their Soviet heritage. The first Immortal Regiment in the Greater Toronto Area became a moment when the personal met the public, and a feeling of community was born.

A War Memorial

“We will tell our children about the war, and they will tell their children,” said Lena, who came to the Immortal Regiment with her adult daughter and grandson. Marina, another participant of the Immortal Regiment, whom I met for an interview after the 2017 commemoration, said that they attended the Immortal Regiment every year; when her son was several months old, she made a military uniform for him to wear at the parade and attached the St. George’s ribbon to his chest. She explained that it was very important for her husband to take their child to such events. Marina seemed to be less enthusiastic about the Immortal Regiment than her husband, but she supported him in his decision to introduce their son to the Victory Day celebrations. Marina quoted her husband’s statement that: “When he [their son] is older, he will see these photos and ask me what it was about, and I would tell him, explain everything.” Marina continued: “It’s very important for him to remember, to be sure that our son also knows his roots.” Marina herself only came to Canada several years ago, but her husband came to Canada as a young boy, together with his parents and older brother. His brother returned to Russia later, but her husband became well integrated into Canadian society, received a university degree, and found a good job. As Marina said, “The way he thinks, his brain is Canadian now.” Marina’s husband never went back to Russia, but he was still entirely invested in bringing his child up in Russian traditions, speaking Russian, and knowing Russian history.

Likewise, in a video posted on YouTube by one of the participants after the 2016 Victory Day celebration, one of the organizers discussed the importance of such celebrations for educating younger generations: “They will grow knowing that we won this awful bloody war. Their grandfathers and grandmothers won this war, and the great Soviet people won the war” (Yar Media 2017). These celebrations are seen by their participants as necessary to remember the history, and it is important to remember it together, as a community, not only individually, and to pass it on to the next generation.

In addition to commemorations, another important element of such collective remembrance is war monuments, which serve as “a means of unifying a community’s collective memory” (McMichael 2013: 3). These “promote a narrative of what we want, or what someone wants us, to remember why we fought these wars” (Allison 2017: 39), and act as a real place “where the imagined community actually materializes” (Savage 2011: 4). The importance of war monuments and memorials for collective remembrance has been discussed in a plethora of research focused largely on both the official politics of memory and on how monuments shape public memories of the past (Inglis and Brazier 2008, Ehala 2009, Savage 2011, Bruyneel 2014, Mallett 2017). Here I turn to the experience of Russian-speaking community members’ efforts to build a monument.

For several years, Soviet veterans and Russian-speaking immigrant organizations attempted to build a monument in Toronto to commemorate Soviet soldiers and civilians who died fighting Nazi Germany. They applied to the city of Toronto to receive permission to build this monument but, according to one of the immigrant community activists, in spring 2017 their request was denied. A person who was involved in this process told me that the reason given for the refusal was that the city did not see this monument as necessary in Toronto. There are numerous monuments in Canada intended to honor and commemorate those who died and suffered abroad and many of these monuments cause heated debates about their true meaning and purpose, as well as raising ethical dilemmas, while some continue to be commissioned (Dolgoy and Elżanowski 2018: 435). It is not surprising that this refusal to grant permission for a monument caused a lot of disturbance in the Russian-speaking community, especially when around the same time a monument to the victims of communism was under construction in Ottawa, and a year later a memorial for victims of the Holodomor (sponsored and built by the Ukrainian diaspora) was built in the center of Toronto.

In response to these developments Russian-speaking immigrant activists decided to build a memorial on private land where they were not required to obtain permission from the city. Sergei Sergeev, an active member of the Russian-speaking immigrant community, offered his land for this purpose. He decided to use his private estate, which he calls his “Slavic Lodge” (“Slavianskii Khutor”), to promote the cultural revival and preservation of Slavic cultures; it is located in Ontario, about an hour and a half by car north of Downtown

Toronto. Sergeev's decision caused a lot of disagreement within the community, as some people accused Sergeev of pursuing his personal business goals when building the memorial on his territory. The remote location of the property was another cause for criticism. However, the local World War II veterans' organization, as well as the Russian Congress of Canada, supported this initiative and the monument was built and officially unveiled in September 2017.

People volunteered their time to travel to the *Slavianskii Khutor* and clear a site on the territory in preparation for the installation of a large rock that would bear a memorial plate pronouncing: "Eternal Glory to the Heroes of the Great Patriotic War Who Saved the World from Fascism" (*Vechnaia slava geroiam otechestvennoi voiny, spasshim mir ot fashisma*). While not many people attended the opening ceremony, it was nevertheless a very formal and festive event. A group of war reenactors performed at the ceremony and fired a three-volley salute to honor the opening of the monument. Guests included Soviet veterans who live in Toronto, representatives of the Russian consulate, and members of the Russian Congress of Canada who participated in constructing the monument. The following year, when they celebrated the one-year anniversary of the monument's inauguration, Sergei Sergeev posted a video where he invited everyone to come and help to expand the memorial. Their plan was to create an *Alleia Slavy* (Alley of Glory) with portraits of Soviet war veterans who lived in Ontario. In his speech, Sergeev used this experience of building the monument as an example of real community spirit:

What is *ob'edinenie* (community)? I just hear everywhere *ob'edineinie* and *pamiat'* (memory). [...] Here some people who really want to keep the memory alive came together and worked to build this monument. This is real *ob'edinenie*, I think.

The importance of the monument for the community is usually explained in reference to a need to remember the past and the need to transmit these memories to future generations. One of the activists of the immigrant community wrote on Facebook: "The memorial to the heroic deeds of Soviet soldiers is a key to and a foundation of our memory. It is the only way to raise the younger generation with an understanding of the extent of heroism demonstrated by the Soviet people in their struggle with fascism." However, we should also consider the

symbolic meaning of monuments, which serves, in a way, as a legitimation of their memory. A monument provides not only a physical center for any commemorative events, where flowers are ceremonially laid, speeches are given, and photos are taken, but also a symbolic legitimation of these actions.

The commemoration of World War II in the Russian-speaking community of Toronto is not limited to the celebration of Victory Day, even though this is its central element. Other events that are related to the Russian-speaking community's World War II commemoration include: the celebration of the end of the siege of Leningrad, January 27 (1944); the commemoration of the first day of the Great Patriotic War, June 22 (1941); and the anniversary of the end of the Battle of Stalingrad February 2 (1943). Although these events are much smaller than the main events (Victory Day and the Immortal Regiment), they help to extend the effect of the main commemorative events throughout the year. Social media also plays an essential role in extending the effects of the main events that happen annually. For instance, there are special groups created on Facebook to coordinate the organization of the Immortal Regiments, and throughout the year organizers regularly post war stories, photos of war veterans, and war time photos, as well as posting photos and videos from previous Immortal Regiments on these groups' pages and on their own personal pages.

Conclusion

In May 2018, the *Toronto Sun* published an article by Marcus Kolga, called "Putin's Bareknuckled Propaganda Comes to the Canadian War Museum" (2018). Kolga described a recent celebration of Victory Day organized by Russian-speaking immigrants in Ottawa at the Canadian War Museum. This article exemplifies a common understanding of the World War II commemoration organized by the Russian-speaking immigrant community as a propaganda tool of Russian authorities. As such, Kolga denies that the participants of such celebrations have any independent agency and thus he ignores Russian Canadians' efforts to critically engage with a politics of commemoration in Canada. The author mentions an incident that took place at the Canadian War Museum during a commemorative event when a Canadian-Ukrainian activist tried to interfere in the celebration and was removed from the museum grounds. Kolga writes, "[i]n crypto-Soviet fashion, the Russian embassies and

consulates organize parades and ceremonies that deify the Red Army combatants, the KGB and Stalin himself... The festival of Soviet nostalgia might usually be dismissed as naked Kremlin propaganda, contained to a group of neo-Stalinist buffoons.” He continues to develop his idea that this incident is a warning sign of the Kremlin’s interference in Canadian democracy and a threat to Canada as a nation. He emphasized that the Ukrainian activist who was removed from the museum was a Canadian citizen; at the same time, he silenced the fact that the Russian participants of the event were also Canadian citizens. The author, Marcus Kolga, is a Senior Fellow and “a leading Canadian expert on Russian and Central and Eastern European issues” at the Ottawa-based Macdonald-Laurier Institute, which represents itself as “rigorously independent and non-partisan” (Macdonald-Laurier Institute n.d.). While some of the claims Kolga makes in the article are valid, his unwillingness to see all participants of these events as his fellow citizens who organize and take part in these events without being masterminded by the Kremlin limits our ability to understand these practices and their meaning. Kolga claims that these celebrations represent “a direct threat to our cohesion as a nation and our society.” I argue that such a blatant misunderstanding or misrepresentation of these celebrations represents an equal threat to our society, as it only further escalates this conflict rather than suggesting ways to solve it.

Contrary to the foreign policy of the Canadian government, which refused to accept the annexation of Crimea, many members of the Russian-speaking community share the opinion that it was a legitimate act, and thus side with the Russian government (and with the majority of members of Russian society) in this question. Exposed to discourses of a global Russian diaspora, they are, without doubt, exposed to propaganda or fake news by the Russian government. Yet, the particular community my dissertation has focused on is comprised of Canadian citizens. They believe that in their demands to have their historical narrative recognized they exercise a democratic right to their own political opinion, informed – as for other diasporic groups – by their own historical experience and diasporic connections. It might be tempting to simply attribute their political agency and activism to the Kremlin influence, but my research suggests a more complicated picture. In analyzing diasporic political allegiances and opinions, we need to pay attention to immigrant communities’ historical experiences which inform their political activism in a much more profound way than can be explained by a mechanistic model of state propaganda.

In this chapter I have discussed how the commemoration of World War II and the celebration of Victory Day became an important symbolic vehicle for Russian-speaking immigrants to claim their right to remember their parents and grandparents, to stand against what they perceive as intentional “tarnishing” of their memory, and to build a local community. In response to perceived threats to their personal and national history, a large part of the Russian-speaking immigrant community of Greater Toronto came together as an affective community of historical remembrance and performance. Borrowing cultural forms that originally appeared in Russia, such as the political rhetoric of the Great Victory, performative rituals, and even monumental forms of expression, immigrant organizations and ad-hoc groups worked to increase the visibility and recognition of Russian-speaking immigrants as full members of Canadian society whose understanding and performance of citizenship includes appreciation of their historical, cultural, and language background. In order to assert recognition of this hybrid form of citizenship, these organizations and groups seek to build a positive image of Russian national history; their efforts are especially driven by a desire to counteract the frequently hostile and disrespectful portrayals of their community that circulate in public discourse and erode Russian Canadian claims to equal citizenship in Canada.

Chapter 3. At the Frontier of the Family: Children's Bodies and Moral Concerns in the Russian-speaking Community

I met Tatiana at a school event in Downtown Toronto in the beginning of my field research in December 2016. Tatiana was around 50 years old; a parent and a grandparent, she was very active in Russian-speaking community educational activities and was one of the first informants recommended to me by the people I met in one of the immigrant organizations I worked with. Our conversation that day focused mainly on the different ways in which she sought to complement the standard Canadian school curriculum with subjects, topics, and skills that many Russian-speaking immigrants associated with Soviet and post-Soviet education. This was a passion that she initially developed with her own children, and later pursued as the owner of a private school. Tatiana also mentioned to me that for the following year she was involved in organizing the Festival of the Russian Orthodox Family, a major event that sought to consolidate the immigrant community around “share[d] family values” and “strong traditions in upbringing and education.”

A strong theme that linked ideas of family and education permeated my entire fieldwork in the Russian-speaking community of Greater Toronto. If I asked someone about school education, we often ended up talking about family and morality; when we talked about liberal politics and how it affects their families, our conversations tended to shift towards the content and quality of school education in Canada. The connection between family and education is not new; as Louis Althusser argues, for example, the “family-education couple” represents an important ideological apparatus in capitalist societies (Althusser 1971), and the role of public education and how it is used by the state to advance its agenda has been extensively studied (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Willis 1977; David 1980; Gibson 1988; Kirschenbaum 2013). What I found particularly interesting in my work in Toronto was that, for some reason, the topic of morality served as a connecting link between the spheres of family and the state-controlled system of education. For example, in one of my conversations with Nina, a middle-aged Russian-speaking woman from Ukraine who was also an active member of an immigrant organization, she complained that it was very hard for her to support high moral standards among her children while living in Canada. There is a widespread, although not universal, opinion in the Russian-speaking community that the

Canadian state is interested in promoting thoughtless consumerism, and therefore intentionally produces illiteracy, encourages lower moral standards, and indulges the “lowest biological instincts” in its citizens, as more than one of my informants called the “sexualization” of modern popular culture. As a Russian-speaking mother claims in her video blog in 2017: “Western education systems are not based on any moral and ethical principles. The West does not need humans (*Cheloveki zapadu ne nuzhny*). Lower intellectual level and deficient morality make it easier to manipulate the crowd and maximize consumption.” Nina, like many other people I talked to, contrasted what she saw as high Russian standards in education and culture with what she saw as much lower Canadian ones. In the following chapter I examine this cultural logic that equates a low level of education to what are seen as low moral standards.

Here my discussion focuses more broadly around questions of moral concerns raised by the Russian-speaking immigrant community of Toronto and how and why these concerns become instrumental in the political mobilization of this group.¹⁴ The liberal politics of the Canadian government, in general, and their implementation in the Ontario school curriculum, in particular, are understood by some immigrants as a policy intentionally targeting them and their “sense of morality.”

In February 2015, the Ontario Liberal government introduced a new sexual education (sex-ed) curriculum, according to which certain aspects of health and sexuality were taught at an earlier age than before, and several entirely new areas were introduced. For example, Grade 1 students were taught to identify body parts, including genitalia, using scientific terminology, and Grade 3 students were introduced to the concept of gender and sexual orientation as a part of teaching the importance of showing respect for differences. The introduction of the 2015 sex-ed curriculum under the Liberal government caused an uproar in many communities throughout Ontario where people voiced their criticism of the curriculum through heated public fora and social media.

¹⁴ As I discuss in the introduction, Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto come from very diverse backgrounds, and this chapter focuses only on a specific group of this community. There are a lot of other Russian-speaking immigrants who do not share these concerns and are comfortable with and supportive of the liberal gender politics and the sexual education program.

Political scientists have noted how on the federal level in Canada immigrants tend to support the Liberal party (White 2017; Blais 2005). However, scholars have also repeatedly noticed that immigrant populations, and especially recent immigrants, tend to be among the most active critics of the new education program in Ontario (The Canadian Press 2015; CBC News 2015). Many new immigrants ultimately supported a conservative social, political, and cultural agenda during the 2018 provincial elections in Ontario. This tendency is routinely explained by immigrants' earlier upbringing and education in conservative societies and adherence to religious traditions. However, immigrants' dissatisfaction with sex education programs and liberal politics of gender identity also has been problematized by social scientists as immigrants' struggle to influence a broader public sphere from the position of their ethnic subjectivity. In one instance in 2014 when the Vancouver School Board proposed changes to its policies on sexual orientation and gender identity, they faced fierce opposition from a group of local parents, most of whom were from Chinese communities (Leung 2007: 483). Discussing the motivation behind these protests, Helen Hok-Sze Leung points to the specific ethnic subjectivity formed among Chinese immigrants in Vancouver, which, she argues "conceives itself to be at odds with dominant mainstream values" (488). Focusing on the role of evangelical churches in this process, Leung and other researchers also emphasize how experiences of migration and of racial discrimination lead people to engage in the public sphere, employing a specific discourse of "moral values" (Han 2011; Tse 2013; Leung 2017). In doing so, they "invoke an ethnic solidarity against a perceived dominant discourse that is hostile to their sense of family values and parental rights" (Leung 2017: 488). As I argue in this chapter, and also throughout this dissertation, Russian-speaking immigrants often tend to develop similar attitudes towards mainstream values and adopt discourses on "moral values" as a reflection of their attempt to enter the public sphere.

Most members of the Russian-speaking diaspora have gone through the Soviet or post-Soviet system of schooling, many identify as agnostic or even atheist in questions of religion, and the majority belongs to an educated urban class. Nevertheless, the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Greater Toronto has been very vocal in its opposition to the 2015 sex-ed curriculum reforms, arguing that this reform contradicts their family values and that the future and well-being of their children are at stake. One of the popular slogans during these protests was "Science, not Sex; Math, not Masturbation," and this slogan clearly

shows what parents see as the major task of school, namely to teach children academic subjects, and not to interfere with morality and values, a domain seen as exclusively that of their parents. There is a common concern shared by this community that the government interferes with what many immigrants perceive to be the normal and desired reproduction of their families. Moreover, many of my informants were particularly concerned that the state does this not only by allegedly encouraging and popularizing same-sex relationships and encroaching on the rights of heterosexual families, but also by making the transfer of cultural capital more complicated in immigrant families. Talking about the Ontario sex education program, Nina referred to it as a “propaganda of sexual degeneracy,” and claimed that this program illustrated how the modern state, in general, and the Canadian government, in particular, interferes with family matters: “The state starts to infiltrate the family’s domain; it starts, I am sorry to say that, to spread its tentacles across those domains that have always belonged to the family. And this is the factor that pushes our people to unite.”

This quote sounds like an accusation of the Canadian state for violating the boundaries of its citizens’ privacy. More importantly, it also reveals Nina’s recognition, even though not necessarily acceptance, of the fact that children are complex social subjects, and their bodies are the site of negotiation between the values of the dominant culture and the values that immigrant families associate with their home culture. My respondents see the Canadian liberal state as penetrating the private sphere of their homes via their children’s bodies, and thereby threatening the ability of immigrants to reproduce themselves and their values in the future. In this way, bodies become the site where immigrants experience the exercise of state power and where they negotiate their own position in the system of power relations (Foucault 1985; Butler 1997). These new liberal tendencies to support diverse gender expression and sexual orientation are interpreted by my interviewees as a state-imposed immorality, which should be resisted in order to ensure that their children are raised according to what they see as a sound system of morality. As I show in this chapter, the state’s involvement in the formation of their children is interpreted by many immigrants as a desire to “destroy” conventional gender roles and traditional families; in response to this understanding, Russian-speaking immigrants adhere to maintaining and imposing a familiar gender binary among their children, and gender, seen as inseparable from bodies and reproduction, becomes a central theme in immigrant activism and education.

Russian-speaking diasporic political mobilization, motivated by the need to protect children from state-imposed immorality, is informed by two different aspects of immigrant experience. First, this moral panic is a reaction to immigrants' participation in a Canadian system of power relations and a negotiation of their new position in it. Second, this moral panic is informed by fears of losing their children to a foreign culture. These two aspects are distinct in some ways, but they are also closely interconnected, as immigrants' attempts to raise their children according to their preferred values are a part of a negotiation of power and a form of political participation. In their cultural logic, the spread of immorality can be resisted through cultured consumption, preferably of what they call "our culture," a mixture of Russian and Soviet cultural forms. These concerns also determine the preoccupation of many immigrants with education, which I especially focus on in Chapter 4. It is important to emphasize here that for many Russian-speaking immigrants being a "cultured" and educated person goes hand in hand with being a morally worthy person. Russian immigrants widely expect "Our culture", with its prescribed moral code of everyday behavior, fixed gender roles, and "traditional family values", to result in a secure and worthy future for their children and grandchildren. "Our culture" is also expected to resist the state's attempts to appropriate their children. To summarize, the conservative political mobilization in the Russian-speaking community, especially in regard to gender identities of children, can be interpreted as a reaction to the fear of losing their children to a foreign social, political and cultural milieu. Moreover, this conservative mobilization is an essential response to what is seen as the ever-increasing state involvement in the private domain of the family.

The dichotomy between public and private, which is often invoked in the discussion about the family and the state, is a form of cultural knowledge rather than a neutral set of truths (Lamphere 2009). We can suggest that Russian-speaking immigrants, who grew up in Russia and other post-socialist countries, have a different understanding of what is private and what is public and how these two spheres are interconnected. Many places in the West have a much longer history of sexuality being open to public discussion, and even the grounds for political mobilization, rather than something that is exclusively private (Ginsburg 1998). In order to better understand Russian-speaking immigrants' unease with the Ontario sex education program and with inclusive gender politics more generally, I suggest we look

back at how knowledge about sexuality and sexual relations was formed and communicated in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia.

Sexual education in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia has been very limited, and its form and content varied greatly over the course of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Fin-de-siècle Russia saw the first public efforts to spread sexual literacy, driven by a fascination with psychoanalysis among many intellectuals, although such efforts around sexual literacy never secured government support. This situation changed radically with the Bolshevik revolution and early Soviet reforms that resulted in secularized marriage, simplified divorce, and legalized abortion. Sexual education and literacy became important topics in public debates during the 1920s. However, Stalinism brought about an almost complete stop in these debates about sexuality (Kon 1995). The post-Stalinist understanding of sexual literacy remained rooted in the idea of “moral education” (*vospitanie*) and “sexual moral education” (*polovoe vospitanie*). The aim of moral education was to promote order and hygiene, which were seen as necessary preconditions of health and moral purity (Rivkin-Fish 1999: 803). Texts published during the Khrushchev era (also known as the Thaw, a period between the death of Stalin in 1953 and the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968) reignited a public discussion of sexuality, but in a very limited way, only focusing on biological aspects of reproduction without mentioning the sex act itself (803). Sexuality was only mentioned when discussing the need to restrain it, since if not restrained it would result in the proliferation of anti-social behavior (Field 2007). There were, of course, other unofficial ways of transmitting knowledge about various aspects of sexuality, including peer communication, folklore, and art, but they all belonged to marginalized forms of communication (Rotkirch 2000; Snarskaia 2009). The demographic crisis, recognized in the 1970s, led to another change in the discourses of sexuality and moral education (Lapidus 1978; Rivkin-Fish 1999). Low fertility rates in the Soviet Union were viewed as a result of the previous decades’ promotion of gender equality and women’s participation in the work force. In order to overcome this crisis, the importance of family life and the necessity of maintaining traditional gender roles dictated by nature figured dominantly in public discourse and in government policy. In 1984 the course “The Ethics and Psychology of Family Life” was added to the ninth and tenth grade curriculum in Soviet high schools. Michelle Rivkin-Fish (1999) analyses the content of this course and she argues that “women and men were

now instructed that being a cultured, moral person required them to realize the dictates of their gendered ‘nature’” (804). This last statement is particularly important for my discussion in this chapter, as well as for the overall argument of my dissertation, as it demonstrates how a persistent connection between a supposedly “natural” gender binary, morality, and class (in the form of “culturedness,” which I discuss in the next chapter) is traced back to Soviet-era ideology and education.

Beginning in the early 1990s, Russian society saw an abrupt change in public discourses about sexuality as a result of what is often called a “sexual revolution” (Kon 1995). Glasnost’ resulted in a large volume of mass media sources openly discussing sex in its various forms. In spite of the open discussions of sexual matters in the mass media, attempts to introduce sexual education in school faced a lot of criticism. Various groups and organizations tried to develop programs of sexual education, but none of them received lasting support (Snarskaia 2009). One of the most active critics of the program was the Russian Orthodox Church, which regained its widespread social and political influence in the 1990s. Likewise, various conservative groups in Russian society actively criticized the sex ed program and viewed sexual education as a threat to the future of the nation. The 2000s marked an even stronger conservative turn in Russian politics, including a demonization of feminism and queer rights in which opponents referred to these social movements as promoting “gender propaganda” and argued that this was driven by Western conspiracies to destroy Russia’s sovereignty. As Marianna Muravyeva shows in her research, the criticism of feminism and queer rights (their critics often call themselves an “anti-gender movement”) became particularly vocal beginning in 2012, the year of the Russian presidential elections and the Pussy Riot case (Muravyeva 2018: 13).¹⁵ Around that time, feminism and queer activism became seen as anti-Russian and anti-patriotic, potentially leading to a demise of the nation, and wielding official forms of gender became a source of power for Putin’s government (Sperling 2015). Many conservative political activists argued that the blurring of

¹⁵ Pussy Riot is a Russian feminist punk rock group. In February 2012, they walked into the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow and attempted to perform one of their songs there. The members of the group were found guilty on charges of “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred” and sentenced to two years in prison (see Bernstein 2013; Gapova 2015).

boundaries between traditional binary genders resulted in a loss of morality, a demise of the family, and a decrease in birth rates (Luehrmann 2019).

I suggest that immigrants' Soviet and post-Soviet cultural background, informed by discourses on proper forms of gender and sexuality in the Soviet Union, at least partly explains their perception that the relationship between public and private spaces is out of balance in Canada and why discussions of sexuality in the public sphere have become a point of tension for this community. The dichotomy between domestic or private life and public or political life has long been discussed by social scientists, including anthropologists (Rosaldo et al. 1974). More recently various researchers have challenged a distinct separation of "public" and "private" spheres and have shown how a supposedly public sphere can permeate a supposedly private one, and how what is "domestic" often influences "public" life (Lamphere 2009). Likewise, in reflecting on postsocialist states, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman showed how reproduction, which had been long considered to be a part of the private sphere of family, also belongs to the public sphere of politics. Childbirth and childrearing are affected by power relations, and together they constitute the "politics of reproduction" (Gal and Kligman 2000: 17). Despite these important critiques of distinct public and private spheres, the public/private dichotomy continues to be a powerful discourse that informs everyday lives across diverse societies. In a smaller way, immigrants from post-Soviet countries, who internalized this dichotomy from their Soviet or post-Soviet experiences, actively use it to make sense of their lives in Canada.

Family is one of the key concepts that is most often imagined to belong to the private sphere. It is also one of the central concepts in any society, and as such it is intertwined with social structures reproducing and perpetuating social, cultural, and economic inequality. Friedrich Engels suggested that the very origin of the modern monogamous family lies in the ownership of private property, and Pierre Bourdieu wrote of the family as a key institution of maintaining social distinctions in capitalist society (Bourdieu 1984; Engels 2010). The meaning of family has changed dramatically over time. This change was, in particular, linked with the evolution of the modern state, which shifted the distribution of power and responsibility for social welfare from the realm of family and community to the state; this, in turn, changed the nature of relationships within the family. In particular, scholars have suggested that the idea of families as stable in the past is a myth that came to life in the

nineteenth century; Janet Carsten has called this myth “an imaginary social landscape of stability and continuity” (Carsten 2004: 17; see also Foucault 1980: 100, 109-110). However, due to the central place that family occupies in human lives, it has long been perceived as one of a few stable things people have in their lives: a common idealized perception of the family and home as a safe, sheltered territory in an ever changing environment, or “a haven in a heartless world” (Lasch 1977; Collins 1998; Donovan et al. 2003). These ideas of the family as a stable and secure institution that provides continuity and confidence in the future have been persistent across cultural and social landscapes, and it is not surprising that people are often willing to ignore historical evidence of multiple and often disorganized family forms that dominated in the past (Cooper 2017, Ridgely 2016). “The crisis of the family” has long been a subject of anxiety and political concern (Donovan et al. 2003: 9). Popularized in the 1970s across industrialized societies due to falling birth rates, the discourse of family crisis has remained in the public sphere ever since (Allison 1991). American historian and conservative social commentator Christopher Lasch famously discussed anxieties about the future of the family and its decreasing ability to provide comfort and to serve its function as an important social institution (Lasch 1977). The anxieties that Lasch discussed in the 1970s continue to resonate today, including in the Russian-speaking immigrant community of Greater Toronto.

At the same time that discourses on “family crisis” continue to animate national debates across Europe and the Americas and beyond, the last decades of the twentieth century in the same countries have marked a growing movement to recognize alternative, non-heterosexual forms of families and intimacies. Since the 1970s feminist anthropologists have emphasized the need to approach family and kinship from a different angle (Rubin 1975; Strathern 1988). New patterns of intimacy that go beyond the heterosexual nuclear family have challenged traditional ideas of marriage and reproduction. These developments, however, have been paired with hostile responses and have often been perceived as a threat to so-called “traditional family values,” invoked by many as a cornerstone of Western societies (Weston 1991; Collins 1998; Donovan 2003: 2, 4). The nostalgia for intact, self-reliant families permeates both left- and right-wing circles and is closely related to discourses on the relations between an individual, the family, and the state (Cooper 2017; Luehrmann 2019). In the next section I build on these arguments as I discuss the Festival of the Orthodox

Family and the understanding of family in the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Toronto.

Festival of the Orthodox Christian Family

The conversation with Tatiana that I started this chapter with took place in December 2016 when my fieldwork in the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Greater Toronto was still at a relatively early stage. By June 2017, when I came to attend the festival, I had a much better understanding of the processes shaping this community and the lines along which certain divisions were forming. Yet I was still very surprised to observe how Orthodox Christian celebrations came together with a glorification of the Soviet period known for its harsh repression of the church, how discussions of early child development were happening alongside the exhibition of WWII weapons, and how women wearing traditional pre-revolutionary Russian dresses were posing to be photographed with those weapons in their hands. However, all these things happening at the festival in 2017 have an internal logic when we start looking into the reasons that bring people together to organize and attend such events.

The festival took place in a park approximately 50 km southwest of downtown Toronto, with a group prayer led by a priest from the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia starting off the festivities at 10 am. Irina, who was one of the organizers and also acted as the host of the festival, made sure that everybody attended the prayer, or at least was aware that the prayer started. Most people approached the ritual proceedings and remained quiet during the prayer, as well as trying to keep their children quiet. Many of those taking part crossed themselves every time it was required during the prayer; at the same time, many others just stayed there without visibly participating in the ritual, or even wandered away to explore the larger site of the festival. The park, belonging to the Romanian community, has a spacious building to accommodate large groups of people in case of bad weather. The park also extends to a large adjacent territory with a river running through it where there are a number of amenities, including an outdoor stage and picnic tables, as well as an Orthodox Christian chapel.



Figure 3.1 Festival of the Orthodox Christian Family, June 2017.

The festival program included several performances by amateur dance troupes and singers from the immigrant community. The outdoor stage where the performances took place was decorated with the English slogan “The only value in life is family. Once the family dies, the world will die also.” Most performances were stylized as ethnic Slavic dances, with dancers wearing ethnic costumes; the repertoire of the singers who performed was also largely comprised of Russian folk songs. The festival was attended by a representative of the Russian Consulate General in Toronto who gave a formal address to the audience with very general words about the importance of family in modern society; a much more emotional and involved welcome speech was given by the host of the festival, Irina, who started by speaking about the dangers of Ontario liberal politics, and in particular, about the new Ontario legislative initiatives, including Bill 89 (the “Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act”, 2017), which she called “an anti-Christian law.” Bill 89 introduced a number of changes in various aspects of how Ontario’s child, youth and family services

should work. However, one particular aspect of this bill attracted the most attention from right wing groups in Canada, and from some Russian-speaking immigrant parents. Their major concern centered on the invocation of “sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression” in the list of factors (along with race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, family diversity, and disability) that were to be taken into account to assess the well-being of a child. When introduced, this law caused resentment among various groups who interpreted it as the government granting social services the power to remove children from their homes if parents opposed a “gender ideology” and/or did not accept their children’s gender identity. In her welcoming comments Irina claimed that the bill was only one of many measures that the current Liberal government of Ontario had introduced to make children lose connections with their roots, their families and their parents. Underlying this statement was a fear, shared by many immigrant parents, of becoming estranged from children, as well as a desire to affirm rights for full participation in Canadian society.

The organization of the event, as well as the promotional materials, conveyed two major messages. First, they emphasized the importance of family both to the Russian-speaking community and, more generally, to the “modern” and “civilized” (in their terms) society. Second, they tried to demonstrate that there was an ongoing struggle against the family that was being initiated by the state. When my respondents referred to the concept of the family, they emphasized its traditional character and its rootedness in the Christian, in general, or Russian Orthodox, in particular, traditions. While the concept of the “traditional family” was routinely used in casual conversation, it was rarely explicated in detail. From the broader context we can infer that the people who used this term most were often referring to a heterosexual family where the parents are primarily responsible for the moral and cultural upbringing of children and children obey the dictates of parents. The ensembles taking part in the program at the festival also reflected Russian-speaking immigrants’ widespread equation of Orthodox Christianity and pre-revolutionary Russian culture with the idea of “traditions” and “traditional families”. As Sonja Luehrmann shows in her research among Russian Orthodox family values activists, Russian immigrants’ family ideal is widely located in the Russian past prior to the 1917 October Revolution (Luehrmann 2019: 772). The Soviet period plays an uncertain role, when traditional gender roles were destabilized with women actively entering the workforce. However, even though their ideal image of a family often

referred to a “traditional” family, especially in the context of Orthodox Christian rhetoric and rituals, I suggest that these allusions to ethnic traditions disguise the real source of their understanding of family, which is actually rooted in Soviet practices, and more specifically, in a Stalin-era and post-Stalinist pronatalism (Goldman 1993; Randall 2011). It has been previously noted that the dominant type of family in Russia today can hardly be described as traditional; instead, what is portrayed as a “traditional” family by various Russian Orthodox conservative activists is in fact a Soviet family form, which retained some features of the pre-revolutionary family, but was also extensively transformed during the Soviet period. For example, discussing the Concept of the Russian State Family Policy, a document drawn up in 2013 by the Russian parliament, Marianna Muravyeva emphasizes that what is represented in this document as a traditional family is “an ethnographic fantasy rooted in the Bolshevik/Soviet criticism of pre-revolutionary traditional (rural) society” (Muravyeva 2014: 631). This perception of the traditional family is no different from how traditional family discourses have been deployed elsewhere in the world, where it is obvious that the perceived traditionality of this type of family is a myth that serves larger political ends (Nicholson 2016; Carsten 2004).

This idea of the “traditional family” thrives in a context with a binary gender system defining gender relations, which is the case among the overwhelming majority of Russian-speaking immigrants in Greater Toronto, who share a strong belief that gender is biologically determined. During my fieldwork, I often heard statements about gender as entirely defined by nature and gender roles as determined by biological difference. Worded as truth-statements, they nevertheless played an equally important performative function in mobilizing the community and bringing together individuals, sometimes leading to a sense of connection between them. This gender discourse can be traced back to dominant family politics and ideology that defined public culture in the Soviet Union. These official discourses on the family informed how citizens linked gender roles that were defined by biological difference to being a cultured and moral person. Any social and cultural movements that support alternative understandings of gender are seen to undermine “traditional” families. It is not surprising, therefore, that, for a large part of the Russian-speaking community in Greater Toronto, their understanding of family clashes with the recent efforts of activists in Canada who aim to promote a more inclusive understanding of

what a family can be. In particular, many immigrants viewed efforts to expand sexual literacy through school education and mass-media, and especially through the introduction of new legislation, as representing “gay propaganda” and even intentional, malevolent, and conspiratorial policy aimed at their families and the Russian-speaking immigrant community in general.

The idea of a traditional family is appealing to my respondents partly because they see such a family as being predominantly independent from the state. In adhering to the idea of a “traditional family” as an autonomous unit, they aim to minimize the unwanted interference of the state in what they see as a private matter of a child-parent relationship. They interpret the involvement of the state in family life as a new negative development aimed at destroying the heterosexual ideal of an independent and self-sufficient family unit. Paradoxically, the immigrants’ resistance to the state’s involvement in the private domain of family only happens as a result of their immigrant experience and interaction with the Canadian state. In their pre-immigration experience the state presence was part of the established order of things (including public education and health care), and most Russian-speaking immigrants took it for granted. This situation was itself a historical product of several decades of the Soviet welfare state. For Russian-speaking parents, a move from one type of welfare state to another accentuated their sense of state presence as state interference; as immigrants who felt vulnerable in new ways, they encountered the logics of the Canadian state, including in the upbringing and education of their children, and experienced this as threatening. In many ways, they found themselves in a situation described by Laura Nader for a broader context of the industrialization period, when “[p]arents, who earlier had both power and responsibility for their children, found their legal responsibility increasing at a time when their power over the intimate home environment was declining” (Nader 2018: 46). For many Russian-speaking immigrants, the understanding of the government's involvement in raising children has been informed by their Soviet experience, when the state took a large share of responsibility for children through various forms of state support provided to families. Yet, at the same time state interference in families, especially in the form of child protection services, was very limited. In Canada, immigrants experience a situation in which the state provides much less support to families, apart from free public education, which many of them consider as inadequate. At the same time, the government control over parents

and their relations with their children is believed to be much more widespread, which leads to frustration over the role of the state in family life.

The idea that a family should be independent from the state, at least in terms of the moral education of its children, and that parents should be the ultimate authority determining the future of their children, is not unique for this specific group of immigrant parents. Contemporary parental movements in Russia and Eastern Europe reflect similar sentiments about how the responsibility for children's welfare should be distributed between the state and the family. These movements have mobilized against what they perceive as the interference of the state in family life (Muravyeva 2018, Fábíán 2017). In fact, as Marianna Muravyeva argues in her analysis of these movements, the rhetoric of state disinvestment from the family not only has significant public support in Russia but is also tacitly encouraged by state authorities seeking to reduce public spending. She writes that “the anti-gender movement’s whole project is to make the family autonomous and sovereign – i.e. self-sufficient – which can be seen as an ideological response to the acute need to cut social spending” (Muravyeva 2018: 13). According to this logic, the economic crises that Russia has periodically experienced since 1991 explain to a large extent why the state actively promotes the idea of a strong, self-sufficient family, using the ideology of “traditional values” and broadcasting it through state-owned mass media. Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada are still widely immersed in the Russian social and political context due to their regular visits back home, frequent communication with their extended families, or exposure to Russian mass media and social media. Not surprisingly, Russian-speaking immigrants tend to reproduce certain ideas in their own lives, even if in an altered form. I will discuss some aspects of this situation in Chapter 5, but now I want to emphasize that, when discussing the politics of gender among Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada, we need to further consider the politics of gender in Russia as well.

These conservative discourses on gender and family have been conspicuous in Russian pronatalist policy, which culminated in 2015 in a law that criminalizes the promotion of homosexual propaganda among minors. The law, signed on June 30, 2013, amended the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offences and made “the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations” among minors an offence (Federal’nyi zakon 2013). De-jure, this law does not limit sexual rights of adult citizens, but in practice it bans any display

of homosexual identity in public. It also indicates clear priorities in the area of childhood and youth politics, and, by invoking children and youth, the idea of their “well-being” as presented in the law trumps other critical debates about freedom of conscience or personal freedoms. The text of the law provides details on what it considers propaganda in this particular situation, specifying any information aimed at forming non-traditional sexual predispositions among minors, stimulating their interest in non-traditional sexual relations, and equalizing traditional and non-traditional sexual relations. When this law was under discussion, Sergei Zhelezniak, Vice Chairman of the State Duma, claimed that Russia is a country of “traditional values” and more than 90% of the population supported the prohibition of the propaganda of homosexuality among minors:

Our law is not aimed to target non-traditional sexual relations as such; it’s aimed to protect children and teenagers from being forced to experience the propaganda of such relationships. We are trying to protect children who are too young to be objective and critical towards information imposed upon them, which might cause harm to their minds and imbed distorted ideas about relations between people (Zhelezniak 2013).

Sergei Naryshkin, a high-ranking Russian official, when presenting at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2013, emphasized that this law did not discriminate against sexual minorities but was designed to protect children from what the Russian state authorities call the propaganda of “non-traditional” (*netraditsionnykh*) relationships (Naryshkin 2013). A similar discourse characterizes conservative political mobilization in the Russian-speaking diaspora that I encountered in my research. For example, sexual literacy campaigns are widely portrayed in the Russian-speaking community as “gay propaganda”, a position informed partly by official Russian discourse and the Russian government criminalization of LGBTQ so-called propaganda among minors.¹⁶

Irina’s criticism of Ontario’s Bill 89 (the “Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act”) that she voiced at the Festival of the Russian Orthodox Family in June 2017 exploited all these tropes. Her major concern was that in the official language of child protection services the law legitimizes the concepts of gender identity and gender expression in

¹⁶ See a corpus of official government publications on this topic in the official newspaper of the Russian Government (Rossiiskaia gazeta 2017).

children. She was not alone in voicing her concerns: these developments terrified many people whom I met in Toronto during my fieldwork. It was surprising to me that what seemed to be a positive development towards a more inclusive and tolerant society was, instead, interpreted by many of my interlocutors as a threat, to such a degree that they turned to social media and political activism to mobilize their community against these new developments in Ontario politics.

Body

The body plays a central role in the concerns Russian-speaking immigrants have about the alleged government conspiracies against traditional families. The idea of the family being invaded by the state is, for example, a key theme for a video blog produced by a Russian-speaking mother of three young children living in Toronto. I came across her blog during my fieldwork, and while it was anonymous, it was relatively easy to find the author, since she was actively promoting her blog in Russian-speaking Facebook groups. Even though she was very willing to meet with me and discuss her blog when I contacted her, to protect her identity I will refer to her using the pseudonym “Vera”.

There are currently three videos published in the blog that Vera makes with her husband and a couple of friends. These videos are dedicated to the discussion of various Ontario laws, how they negatively affect traditional families, and what parents can do to protect their families from the negative influence of these undesirable social and political developments. This blog is produced in the genre of a conspiracy revelation; in her videos, the author claims that the Liberal government of Ontario works in the interests of a “gay lobby” by promoting illiteracy via the public education system and by introducing new legislation aimed presumably at the destruction of traditional gender norms and identities. The ultimate goal of this conspiracy, she argues, is a “new slave” society where the state has fully appropriated the care of children:

Slaves do not have rights for their own children, they cannot continue their family line. The essence of slavery is to deprive slaves of the future... Canadian society employs instruments of modern enslavement affecting the people, including our fellow countrymen, who came to Canada from the former USSR. Basic strategies for the human and social reproduction are

destroyed under the influence of an aggressive media propaganda, inhumane laws, enforced tolerance.

The underlying message in Vera's videos is that there is an informational war going on against the families who want to educate their children in so-called traditional morals and values. She sees her task as educating other parents about this situation by showing them the dangers their children face as a result of liberal politics that are changing the fabric of social life, including school education. As a practical example of the workings of this conspiracy, she tells her audience about Ontario's Bill 28 (the "All Families are Equal Act," 2016). According to the official press-release, this act "recognizes the legal status of all parents, whether they are LGBTQ2+ or straight, and whether their children were conceived with or without assistance." However, Vera sees the main purpose of this new law as an attack on traditional families whose rights are infringed upon, who become de-facto slaves of the liberal order, and whose children might be taken away by the state if their parents oppose their inculcation into a new multi-gender and trans-gender culture.

In her second blog entry, Vera focuses on Bill C-16 (An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code), which adds to the Canadian Human Rights Act the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of gender expression and gender identity. In Vera's interpretation, this law limits the rights of people who want to bring up their children according to traditional values. She focuses on what she calls "practical consequences" of this law and tells a story about a "gender fluid" teenager who can go to any bathroom, or take a shower with teenage girls at school, and they cannot complain, because it will be interpreted as discrimination against that person who supposedly thinks he is a boy one day, and then a girl the next. It is important to emphasize Vera's peculiar choice of words when she tells this story. She says: "the parents can only imagine, and be terrified of, what is going to start happening at schools now." There are two key words she uses that explain much about this sentiment – "imagine" and "terrified". With rare exceptions, all of the situations that she describes in her blogs and that people discuss in the context of sexual education or the freedom of gender identification are products of their imagination; symptomatically, they often start with the phrase "imagine, what if..." Yet this conspiratorial form of social and political imagination is a product of very real fears among Russian-speaking immigrants. Conspiracies are known to express (and, in turn, further fuel) fears and concerns common for

a certain social group (Borenstein 2019; Popper 2006). As extreme as this blog is, it does highlight a common sentiment among a certain segment of Russian-speaking parents that liberal policies on education, especially the sex-ed curriculum, interfere with the proper upbringing of children. In other words, a statement about a “gay lobby” in the Ontario government that threatens to take children away from “non-accommodating” (as Vera puts it) parents should be treated as a symptom of broader immigrant concerns about the future of their children. Physical removal of children from their families is an ultimate form of losing children to a foreign culture. As such, while the instances when the state takes kids away from parents are rare, the idea embodies very real fears of the symbolic alienation of children from their families, which happens (and not just in immigrant families) when the next generation does not share values of their parents and grandparents.

The physical body of a child is a crucial component in the stories of the potential harm brought about by liberal politics in the sphere of gender expression and identification. The widespread Russian-speaking immigrant fear of state policies on gender inclusivity is expressed via narratives of physical harm that children could potentially suffer as a result of these policies. In her video blog Vera very alarmingly, but without any evidence, claims that there have already been cases of rape in school bathrooms and, in her interpretation, this was brought about by the new “gender ideology.” In another case, when in fall 2018, a scandal developed at an all-boys Roman Catholic school in Toronto, where several boys were accused of sexually assaulting another male student, a Russian-speaking parent posted this news in an immigrant Facebook group. The parent included a long commentary explaining how this case demonstrated that sex education turned Canadian schools into dangerous places. This is just one of many examples of parents claiming that children are not physically safe at schools any longer due to the dominant gender inclusive and sexuality positive discourses that have become increasingly common in public institutions like schools. Russian-speaking immigrants’ sense of outrage is not only being shared via social media in Canada, but also transnationally among Russian speaking communities, as in the case of a 2015 article, by a Russian-speaking journalist living in Canada that appeared in a major Russian newspaper, *Komsomolskaia Pravda*. In the article the journalist wrote about mass protests against the new sex education curriculum introduced in Ontario in 2015, and she quoted a Russian-speaking mother from Toronto who explains why she was opposed to the

new sex education curriculum. She said, “Let’s imagine my child will remain pure, unaffected. How will he live together with the others? They will experiment with each other. School won’t be safe any longer...” (Azaeva 2015). I heard similar claims from various people in the community about why they believed sex education was corrupting and unacceptable for their children.

Russian-speaking immigrants also invoke their fear that pedophilia could be fostered by liberal gender and sexual identity politics promoting sex education. The logic behind this fear is that sex education is designed to make children sexually active at a younger age, and this could make it easier for pedophiles to get involved in sexual relations with minors. In an even more conspiratorial manner, some people interpret the sex education program as a preliminary stage of legalizing pedophilia which would ultimately be presented as a form of sexual identity. “Why do they need to teach six-year-old kids the concept of sexual consent? Are they able to give it?” a mother asks and continues to discuss that she sees it as the first step to normalizing pedophilia, by imposing the idea that six-year-old children are able to give sexual consent.

While a fear of the potential sexual abuse of their children was the most widespread explanation of why many Russian-speaking immigrants protested the introduction of a new sex-ed curriculum in 2015, many of them also referred to other threats allegedly posed by the changing gender politics in Canada, and Ontario, in particular. Many mentioned a medical alteration of children’s bodies – carried out against the will of the parents, if necessary – as the most threatening perspective of what they call a new “gender ideology” enforced by the liberal Ontario government. Recent legislative initiatives in the province and the country, indeed, provide easier access to medical treatment for children who identify as a gender that does not match their biological sex (Maser 2019). References to the state’s right to grant children access to transgender hormone therapy are widely invoked as an example of how the state is taking control over children’s bodies and is privileging children’s rights over those of parents and families. The following quote from a Facebook post by a Russian-speaking parent who asks fellow mothers to sign the petition against Ontario’s Bill 89 (the “Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act”, 2017) reflects many typical aspects of Russian-speaking discourses on the medical dimensions of gender transition:

If BILL 89 become a law, an unprecedented SOCIAL EXPERIMENT [capitalized in the text. – A.R.] will be launched with our families [as test subjects]. If your child stands out of the rules set by the state, he might be taken away from your family because you as parents failed to educate your child in line with the politics of the LIBERAL PARTY [capitalized in the text. – A.R.]. I am not trying to scare you, but just listen carefully... Children will be taken away from you to foster families; they will be offered or even pushed into having medical treatment. Personally, all this scares me. I am afraid that, ultimately, this is a disguised form of social engineering with immigrants from the countries which have significant ideological controversies with the current government.

This quote links together visions of the state, immigration experiences, and the fear of losing one's social and political status, especially in the context of political conflict between Russia and the West after 2014, which I turn to discussing in Chapter 5 when I examine questions of citizenship. These fears are ultimately expressed in the image of children taken away from parents, and physically altered and absorbed by the hostile state. An important aspect of all these stories is that the fears they reveal have a very material basis, as they are focused on children's bodies. Those immigrants who voice these fears are afraid that their child's body could be violated (removed from the family, prescribed transgender hormone therapy, raped in a school's bathroom), and this threat is facilitated by the new legislation, which limits parents' ability to protect their own children.

Children's bodies repeatedly embody the contested ground of the relationship between families and the state. In September 2018, the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) in Toronto, the main medical facility for children in Ontario, published a paper on medical assistance in dying in a setting of a pediatric hospital (DeMichelis et al. 2019). The article was picked up by several media outlets and was widely shared in social media, including Russian-speaking groups in Canada. One of the issues in the article that caused the most heated debate was parental consent. The article suggested that in certain situations a capable minor might decide not to involve their family in their decision to choose a medically assisted death. The article discussed the issues of patient confidentiality and how medical teams should proceed if a patient does not want to inform their family or if the family is against the patient's decision to end their life. In social media I found, however, that the article was interpreted as if the SickKids hospital wanted to have the right to euthanize children without parental consent and/or knowledge, and the post was followed by a flurry of

comments about parents losing any rights over their children. The modality of the comments ranged from fairly neutral to panic-stricken, including fantastic scenarios of how any medical mistake could now be presented as a medically assisted death. Other scenarios dealt with how doctors could use this opportunity to harvest organs for transplants. Overall, the discussion revolved around the idea of the new legislation turning children into the state's "property" and denying parents their parental right to take care of and protect their own children.

A similar logic is shared by the anti-vaccine movement, which has been increasingly widespread in North America in recent decades (Sobo 2015). Russian-speaking immigrants in North America have been shown to have a higher than average rate of vaccine refusal (Leeds and Muscoplat 2017, 1128–9); for instance, scholars have linked an increase in measles cases in the State of Washington in the United States with insufficient vaccination rates in the local Russian-speaking community (Washington State Department of Health 2012; Wolf et al 2016). One of the possible explanations for this vaccine hesitancy is an opposition to the state's exercise of power over the community's children. This rhetoric of the state's appropriation of children's bodies is partly a reflection of parents' realization of children being not only their projects, but also being influenced by the biopolitics of the state. They channel these fears of their inability to control their children into a figure of the state "spreading its tentacles across family domains," as one of my interviewees described it.

The question of parental rights and control over the bodies of children is critical when it concerns any medical and public health interventions. Michel Foucault has famously analyzed medicine as a site for the exercise of power (Foucault 1980). In addition to being a site where power relations are produced and exercised, medical knowledge is also a form of culturally specific knowledge (Good 1994). The combination of these two characteristics of biomedical knowledge makes it a particularly important site for my current discussion of the immigrant community and their political mobilization. Different cultural norms that shape medical decision-making, communication between patients and health care providers, and different understandings of health and illness make immigrants particularly sensitive to the dynamics of power relations in public health and biomedicine in general. This is also an area where many immigrants get involved in the negotiation of power in their new society and where they are struggling to participate on their own terms. In the course of my field research

among the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Greater Toronto I observed how vaccine hesitancy was often expressed by people who had college degrees, were well acquainted with medical discourse, and were otherwise successful professionals. In many ways, they perfectly embodied the idea of people enacting scientific citizenship. Having appropriated the rhetorical and communicative forms of medical knowledge, some of the Russian-speaking immigrants started using this discourse to express their anxieties about the modern state's encroachment on their children's bodies, their families, and their very future.

This fear of the state acquiring physical control over children's bodies is neither new, nor is it limited to the Russian-speaking immigrant community. In this aspect, Russian-speaking immigrants are very well integrated into existing conservative discourse both in Russia and in Canada. The following quote from a right-wing Montreal-based media source *The Post Millennial* also summarizes this argument:

...SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) politics are now actually helping to move our society closer towards becoming a totalitarian state, in which the hearts, minds, and even the bodies of children are being taken from parents and handed over to the technocratic agents of the government (Smith 2019).

I argue that the reason these fears have so easily taken hold in the Russian-speaking immigrant community is rooted in the insecurities they have about reproducing themselves culturally and socially in their new society. Being Canadian permanent residents or citizens, they have expected to be fully accepted in Canadian society; however, often they do not feel secure in their new country as their cultural capital, as well as their values, are not universally appreciated. I will focus on these problems more broadly in the following chapters on education and citizenship, but before turning to that, I first consider immigrants' understandings of morality and how these become key concerns in the community.

Morality

Many of the people I met in Toronto are parents and grandparents. One of the most popular reasons provided by Russian-speaking immigrants for their decision to leave their home country is a concern for their children's future. Coming to Canada with certain expectations

for their children's future, immigrants were then confronted by real-life experiences that often failed these expectations. Prior to their immigration many of my respondents shared an image of Canada as an exemplary democracy, which would be an ideal place for bringing up their children and providing them with the best possible future. Their life in Canada proved that some of their expectations were not realizable. In this section I discuss how the centrality of gender in their concerns about immigration and adaptation in a new social and political environment is translated into broader attempts to define their community through the ideas and discourses of morality. This is accomplished through strengthening diasporic networks and adhering to a sense of cultural traditions. Russian immigrants tend to imagine Russian culture as firmly grounded in core, moral values, and they juxtapose this to Canadian (and, more broadly, "Western") culture that is seen as having lost its moral foundation. According to Vera, whose video blog I discussed earlier, the Russian, or Slavic (she uses these terms interchangeably) culture offers an alternative future for Russian-speaking parents' children, and she prompts her audience to draw on the potential of Russian/Slavic culture to build their families as autonomous units capable of resisting the liberal state's intrusion. For Vera, maintaining one's ethnic identity becomes a tool of conservative political mobilization and an allegedly effective countermeasure for resisting the corrupting influence of the liberal state on the bodies and minds of Russian-speaking children.

Morality was one of the key themes at the Festival of the Orthodox Christian Family and this was evident in its programming which featured not only entertainment, but also educational events. One of those events was a lecture by a speaker who was introduced to the audience as a family psychologist, even though no credentials were provided at the time of the festival, nor could I find anything specific on his website. According to the speaker's website, he is a follower of what could be broadly described as "Eastern religions and mysticism", but at the time of the festival he presented himself as an Orthodox Christian. There is, however, no contradiction perceived here by his audience, because he represents the idea of traditional knowledge and high moral standards (embodied in a religious expertise) as opposed to the perceived immorality and consumerism defining the majority of industrialized countries.

The invited speaker's presentation revolved around morality and immorality (*nравственность* and *безнравственность*) and their role in forming minds and bodies. He

continually pointed at various aspects of Western cultures to demonstrate how they lack morality, moving from women's equal rights as being contrary to the natural order of things and damaging, to the negative influence of new technologies and Hollywood movies. Using the language that is genealogically rooted in the Slavophile dichotomy of the innate morality of traditional Slavic rural communities and the corrupting influences of the materialistic cultures of Western Europe, he claimed that "everything spiritual is being eliminated... This society wants us all to be consumers. Children are taught to be consumers, egoists, to think only about themselves." The speech criticized Western societies for being consumerist and egoistic, and for working against traditional families and healthy human relationships. According to the speaker, current developments in "First World" nations, including Canada, would inevitably lead to a disappearance of the family and thereby expand immorality.

Moral concerns are an important aspect of all discussions around the politics of gender and "gender ideology" in this community. Parents are concerned that liberal politics cater to the "lowest biological instincts" instead of educating citizens in high moral principles. Education and high culture are seen by Russian-speaking immigrants as an antidote to the spread of immorality, and moral concerns become a link between family and education. As I mentioned earlier, the people I came to know in Toronto are concerned with the quality of public education in Canada. This was in terms of lower academic standards, but also in terms of "wrong" moral principles and values children are exposed to through the public education system and, in particular, through the sex education program.

My respondents often mentioned the controversial 2015 sex education program as the reason why parents consider private schools or homeschooling for their children. Tanya, a Russian-speaking mother of a four-year-old boy, who was expecting her second child when we met, said that her husband did not want their son to attend a public school precisely because of the sex education program. When I asked her what exactly made them so concerned about this program, she hesitated a little bit and then said, "I don't know, all these ideas they impose on kids... I do not think they need to know all this stuff when they are so young." Lena, another Russian-speaking mom, was more specific in her fears: "I am just worried that kids at school are exposed to all these ideas at such a young age. What can they understand? And what if he gets an idea in his head that he is a girl, not a boy? What if he says that at school? We will then be forced to get him a medical treatment to change his

gender, and if we refuse, they will just take him away.” As these quotes show, fear of sex education is based on a very superficial and often inaccurate knowledge of what the program actually contains, and of the idea of gender overall. However, these fears are widespread in the community, and they do not need to be very specific and accurate in detail to be shared and internalized.

Russian-speaking immigrants’ concerns about morality and different norms around gender and family in Canada come to a head in their outrage about sex education. Sex education in Canadian schools has caused considerable resentment among many Russian-speaking parents who view sex ed as promoting not only all those undesirable developments I discussed earlier in this chapter, but also, more generally, immorality as such. Parents believe that sex education corrupts their children’s morality by encouraging them to get sexually active at a younger age, or to be open to various forms of non-traditional sexual relations. From this perspective, sex education not only endangers children’s bodies, as I discussed before, but also their minds. Nina, whom I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, complained that it was very difficult to maintain proper moral values in children when they were growing up in Canada. In one of the video blogs, Vera also suggests that her audience should think about what kind of future Western civilization offers to its children. In her analysis of the 2015 sex-ed curriculum Vera concludes that the western education system imposes animal instincts as the only social norm. “The Western educational system is not based on the principle of morality and ethics,” she claims and she continues to argue that there is a planned attempt to decrease the intellectual level of the population and lower their morality in order to make it easier for those in power to manipulate people. As a measure for resisting this dehumanizing politics she suggests looking at alternative futures offered by “our culture”:

We need to cultivate the culture of consciousness in our children, and then the future will be directed towards light, truth, justice, and humanity. This is the image of the future for our children offered by the Russian civilization.

Vera ends her videos by urging her audience to unite to help each other protect their children. She claims that their community is the thing that can help them to stand against this “Western” gender ideology and immorality that ruins the idea of a traditional family. Similar

sentiments are shared by the organizers of the Festival of the Orthodox Christian Family, which disseminated the following to promote their event:

The main aim of the festival is to strengthen the Orthodox Christian family, educate a generation worth [sic] of their ancestors and their history. The main idea behind the festival is the priority of family and relationship, Divine Providence and believe [sic] in people, as the Orthodox Christianity is a vaccine, spiritual immunity against everything evil (Canadapress.ru 2018).

The idea of an ethnic community as an antidote to immorality and other dangers of Western civilization is often repeated by activists of immigrant organizations. While the fear of immorality is not the only reason that brings people together, it is an important aspect of the community mobilization. This imagined need to protect their children is a strong motivating force for some people to turn to the immigrant community and fight for their right to live according to their moral principles. This motivation is a leitmotif of a letter authored by one of the organizers of the Festival of the Orthodox Christian Family:

Immigrant life is a constant stress for the whole family, when we all to deal with a cultural shock when life pulls us out of our familiar environment, our native language, our established circle of friends and relatives. Then we somehow learn to live and bring up our children and grandchildren. We live through this first shock, learning how to start our lives in a new country, start getting education ourselves, we, as parents, do not often realize how we give our children away to a foreign society, when their souls and minds are shaped. Most often, this development doesn't go along our Orthodox Christian worldview, our values. We often realize this dissonance only when our children become teenagers, and we write it off as their rebellious age, and only realize it finally when they get married to the people who are absolute strangers to us, and then they become parents themselves and bring up their children according to the local standards, and ask Google, not their own parents, for advice. There is a saying that we will only know how well we brought up our children when our grandchildren grow up, but if our grandchildren will appropriate a culture and values incompatible with our traditions, it will be too late to change anything. The respect for older people, a care of them, a transmission of the cultural code and centuries-old wisdom – these are the invisible bonds that brings us together as a family, as a kin, as a people, and even when we live dispersed, outside of the borders of the Russian state, we nevertheless feel ourselves parts and parcels of a large and meaningful culture, history, and power of the Russian World, which was vividly demonstrated by the First and Second Festivals [of the Russian Orthodox Family].

This quote illustrates a real fear of alienation that is at the basis of all struggle against “gender ideology,” sex education, new legislation initiatives, and gender inclusive politics. According to this logic, Russian-speaking parents can avoid alienation from their children only if they stick to their cultural and ethnic background and keep their children immersed in the Russian cultural context. As one woman told me, “My biggest fear is that I won’t be able to read my favorite books to my grandchildren.” This fear of losing connection with their children and grandchildren is not specific to Russian-speaking immigrants, but their immigrant experience makes these tendencies more pronounced and visible. This quote also suggests that, because a sense of being grounded in the Russian culture is closely linked to literature, the effort to pass this cultural knowledge to their children requires, on behalf of immigrant parents, regular language practice and being grounded in a specific community, such as that found in a broad network of extracurricular services (not limited to math and other applied subjects).

In focusing their concerns about the future on the bodies of their children, Russian-speaking immigrants also interpret the liberal politics of the Canadian state in terms of moral degradation. Many of my informants turned to political activism through community mobilization as the only means to protect their and their children’s identities and futures. Irina emphasized this in her welcoming address at the festival when she said: “It is important for us to understand how we can protect our children and grandchildren, how to stop this disaster that is happening in Ontario, in Canada and everywhere in the world that wants to be called civilized.” This statement allows us to take a broader look at the ultimate goals of this movement. It seeks to mobilize the Russian-speaking community out of the perceived need to protect their children. However, its activists also realize that the children are inseparably connected with Canadian society, and this forces them to frame their activism in almost messianic terms, as they also campaign for, ultimately, saving the world, which is in danger of losing its right to be called “civilized.” They care for children and their well-being, but the ultimate object of care is the national body, which these immigrants want to define as conservative. This sentiment was reiterated in the keynote speech when the speaker claimed that a propaganda of immorality and anti-Christian propaganda were leading to the disappearance of the Canadian nation. He suggested that Canada would not have been here to

celebrate its 150th anniversary if the current values had received such widespread support a generation earlier. As he explained:

[The] Russian-speaking community is the only place where we can still understand it and talk about it, and we can see nowadays how there is a struggle going on against all values and Russia. Orthodox Christianity is the last fortress that hinders the spread of immorality and *beskul'turnost'* [lack of culture] and physical and psychic degeneration. We need to protect ourselves.

This rhetorical transition from a “moral community” to a “political community” represents a dramatic change in how activists of the Russian-speaking diaspora position themselves and their community in Canadian society. Until recently, the dominant logic of the Russian-speaking immigrant community was that immigrants did not have a right to advocate for any change; they had to adapt to the existing situation or return to their home country. What I observed in Toronto in 2017 was a shift in this paradigm, suggesting that Russian-speaking immigrants have now begun to exercise their rights to influence the political and cultural agenda of the nation-state where they live. In other words, they are adopting a new understanding of political consciousness as a form of citizenship practice, a topic I turn to in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

While in this chapter I have discussed the fears and concerns shared by the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Greater Toronto, I want to emphasize here that these fears are not culturally unique. They represent a common situation of the global mobile era when socially privileged groups, who feel threatened by social change, tend to develop similar reactions. Canada and the United States have experienced a similar conservative mobilization among social groups that interpret certain social, political, and cultural changes as threatening (Diamond 1995, Gross et al. 2011). A significant share of the Russian-speaking immigrant community responded to these fears by invoking discourses, and taking concrete actions, that seek to protect their children's bodies from the perceived corrupting influence of the modern liberal state. On various occasions, I heard people explaining how Canadian authorities were "attacking" and "undermining" traditional families, traditional gender norms and family values. Their list of concerns and fears included gender neutral policies, sex education at schools, LGBTQ 'propaganda', and a decreased popularity of the traditional family. My informants fear that the normalization of an alternative model of family and non-heterosexual relationships will destroy the family as they know it, and this means they will lose a future they are longing for, a future filled with children and grandchildren living in traditional families and immersed in strong elements of a Russian cultural context.

Immigrants' discourses on caring for one's children are interwoven with concerns about liberal politics that are allegedly affecting children in the privacy of immigrants' homes. The fears of the state "abducting" children – mentally, through "wrong" education, or even physically, through child protective services – becomes an important tool for community mobilization. The alienation of children from their immigrant parents and their emotional and cultural distancing is a well-researched phenomenon (Baolian Qin 2006; Foner 2009). However, what is interesting for my analysis is not alienation itself and its causes, but rather how the fear of alienation from their own children is translated into concerns about gender and body. In particular, it is striking how this becomes one of the major driving forces behind political mobilization among immigrants. This fear of losing children leads parents to turn to diasporic networks, which then become a sort of antidote to a perceived vicious reality of a state-imposed gender inclusive and illiterate society.

In the next chapter, I focus on educational efforts and social class aspirations shared by Russian-speaking immigrants. They associate social class with agency and the ability to decide their own future in a situation when the state is attempting to take control over increasing spheres of life. In a similar way, their struggle against liberal gender politics is largely a result of their fears of losing their agency. As immigrants, these people encounter a new system of relations between the state and individuals, and a different understanding of how rights and responsibilities are distributed. Insecurities they experience in claiming their place in the social hierarchy of their new society result in their attempts to claim control over their future, to limit what they perceive as an interference by the state into the private lives of their families. These experiences translate into both their struggles against prevailing liberal gender politics in Canada and, as I discuss in the next chapter, increased efforts to invest in education and a work ethic that they associate with social mobility.

Chapter 4. The Labours of Literacy: Class and Education among Russian-Speaking Immigrants

On February 4, 2018, a Toronto-based radio station called The New Classical Channel FM 96.3 aired a classical music piece by Dmitri Shostakovich. After the piece was finished, the host Mike Duncan entertained his audience with three alleged facts about Russia: a third of all Russians believe that the Sun revolves around the earth; wealthy Russians hire fake ambulances to beat Moscow's traffic; and Russian teachers were paid in vodka during the time of economic disparity and inflation. One of his listeners happened to be a Russian-speaking Torontonians who was very disturbed by Mr. Duncan's choice of facts about Russia. She posted a recording of the broadcast in one of the Russian-speaking immigrant community groups on Facebook to attract the attention of her fellow immigrants to this episode. The broadcast provoked a heated online discussion, in which most participants interpreted Mike Duncan's comments as anti-Russian propaganda and as an attempt to degrade Russian people, society, and culture. Some of them posted their comments on the webpage of the radio station and emailed its management demanding that Mike Duncan should apologize to the Russian community of Canada for his slander. They actively followed this situation for several days while waiting for Mike Duncan to apologize, which he did several days later.

This story is an interesting example of how Russian-speaking immigrants mobilized around a perceived threat to Russian national dignity. Their discussion of Mike Duncan's program revealed a commonly shared concern, namely, a desire to defend a positive image of their country of origin. In addition, the incident foregrounded their pride in being Russian Canadians, and this sense of pride was especially affronted due to these derogatory comments being made in a more general context of worsening relations between Russia and Canada. In the following quote from an online discussion of the incident, a Russian-speaking person lists famous Russian writers, scientists, and composers to prove their point that Russians have something to be proud of:

A disgusting, blatant lie! We have something to be proud of! This [sic] Russians had Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, etc. This [sic] was the Russian

Mendeleev, Lomonosov, Korolev, Landau, Tsiolkovsky, etc. This [sic] was the Russians had Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, etc. You cannot list all of them for all our great centuries-old history.

This list of famous Russians is meant to substantiate its author's claim that Russians should be respected both as a group and as individual members of this group. Similar attitudes are reflected in the World War II victory celebrations, which I discussed in the previous chapter. However, this acute reaction to Mike Duncan's broadcast reveals another aspect of Russian immigrants' concern about Russian national dignity, which is related to class anxieties shared by this group. This episode demonstrates how self-esteem and the perceived social status of this group of people are closely related to their image of themselves as educated and cultured persons. For many Russian-speaking immigrants, their access to education and immersion in the European cultural canon prior to immigration play an important role in self-identifying themselves as a group that can claim a higher position in the social hierarchy within Canadian society. However, many of their discourses and practices reveal class insecurities, related to their experiences in Canada when their social status is not always perceived in the same way as they imagine it within their community. "You Americans wanted us to be the way you describe us, but we have never been and never will be [like that]. It's silly to hide behind a joke. Your sarcasm borders on an insult," claimed one of the participants in the discussion following Mike Duncan's program.

In the above-mentioned program, Mike Duncan mentioned three supposed facts about Russia. However, in the rather heated discussion that followed the broadcast it was only the first one, an allegedly widespread belief that the sun revolves around the earth, that provoked the most indignation. The second point, that teachers were paid in vodka, was mentioned in online discussions only a few times, while the last point, about rich Russians hiring ambulances for private transportation, was hardly ever mentioned at all. In other words, the overwhelming majority of the participants taking part in this discussion felt insulted by what they perceived as an attempt to disparage the quality of Russian education (while they were much less concerned about alleged corruption and economic disparity). What follows are just a few of the many comments posted by Russian-speaking immigrants on the FM 96.3 radio station's Facebook page:

It is totally irresponsible and disgusting to portray the whole nation as a country of illiterate degenerates and alcoholics. What a shame!

Also, take into consideration the level of education of that part of Russian community which belongs to Classical audience! I am not talking about how well educated Russian people are in general. There are compulsory 10 years of school in Russia with little exception. And it's very academical. Wherever they have gotten those polls' results, it's completely disrespectful to announce them in between two RUSSIAN masterpieces!

I have to add that Russian education is the BEST in the world and has been taken as an example by some countries who are looking for high-level specialists.

These quotes both point to a high level of education in Russia, and also demonstrate that education is an important aspect of class identity for Russian-speaking Canadians. Most of these immigrants came to Canada with limited economic capital (with few exceptions), yet with relatively high cultural capital, mainly in the form of university degrees. I borrow the term “cultural capital” from Pierre Bourdieu who identified it as one of the two major factors – together with economic capital – that define social structures. As he writes, “Social space is constructed in such a way that agents or groups are distributed in it according to their position in statistical distributions based on the two principles of differentiation... economic capital and cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1998, 6). For Bourdieu, the concept of cultural capital refers to one’s accumulation of symbolic goods (primarily academic knowledge, as well as artistic and musical skills) that might not necessarily translate into economic well-being, yet nevertheless advance one’s position in social hierarchies. This concept helps to explain those social distinctions that are not determined by an unequal distribution of economic wealth in society; in this sense, it is particularly useful in understanding how class worked in socialist societies (Bourdieu 1998, 15-18). For immigrants, prior to immigration, this cultural capital had made them part of an educated class in Soviet and post-Soviet societies, and this class position had corresponded to high social status. In most cases Russian-speaking immigrants’ high level of education and professional skills were what enabled them to qualify for immigration to Canada.

Even though in their discussion of the radio broadcast immigrants referred to it as an attempt to degrade Russian people, that is they experienced the broadcast as insulting their sense of national identity, I suggest another aspect of their reaction. The broadcast also

reveals Russian-speaking immigrants' concerns about social class and privilege and their striving to ascertain a sense of belonging to a higher social status than is normally ascribed to them in their adopted country. One of the angry comments responding to the claim that a third of Russians believe in the geocentric model explicated these concerns:

Our children and grandchildren will live here! Will they be second-class citizens? It's obvious that these things are done deliberately and high-handedly! They want us to live with it and keep our heads down. Even better if we become ashamed that we are people who get paid in vodka. "*Po Sen'ke i shapka*" [referencing a Russian proverb that means that everyone gets what they deserve]. That's what is happening!

This man's outrage at Russian-speaking immigrants being classified as "second-rate citizens" who would, as another participant of the discussion put it, "shamefully yield" to their low status points to an anxiety about class formation as related to education and respectability. This suggests that educational efforts in many immigrant families are driven by their concern about losing the social privilege that they believe they possess or have the right to possess. Tatiana, a Russian-speaking woman I met in Toronto, discussed how she was choosing the right school for her daughter, when she said:

I will probably say an awful thing now, but I want my daughter to start and finish school with people of the same social status; people I want her to live with in the future. This desire is probably a reaction to my own experience in Canada. When we moved here, we lived in an apartment building in the Russian immigrant neighbourhood, and we ended up living with people whom I would probably never meet in Russia, would never talk to. There were three or four alcoholics in our building who would get drunk and scream obscene words and beat their wives. I went to a private school in Russia, I never heard people saying obscene words when I was living there. All this was very hard to get used to. That's probably what I want to protect my daughter from.

Tatiana is a very well educated woman who has obviously thought a lot about her decisions regarding her daughter's education. Her own experience of losing social status, even for a relatively short period of time, made her focus on how she and her family could regain their status, namely via education and hard work. Class aspirations of many Russian-speaking immigrants push them to work hard on their children's education, as they believe that their children deserve more than being "average consumers". Based on their cultural and social experience, they aim to instill values in their children which they see as necessary in

raising them as worthy individuals and in reproducing the desired future for their families (“I want my daughter to go to Harvard,” Tatiana claimed at one point). The immersion of children in Russian language education and culture becomes a diasporic reaction to the loss of social status during immigration, a tool to regain a higher position in the class hierarchy – if not for oneself, then at least for one’s children – and a way to differentiate oneself from lower classes and other immigrant groups. Through these practices, class and privilege become displaced onto aspirations to become “cultured” and educated.

In this chapter, I discuss how education becomes an important factor that brings the Russian-speaking immigrant community together and defines the boundaries of the community. As I claimed earlier, this community experienced a dramatic increase in their diasporic activity and political mobilization since 2014. However, the mobilization did not emerge out of nowhere. Prior to 2014, there was a well-developed Russian-speaking diasporic network in Toronto, which included numerous educational institutions, such as language schools, after school activities, sports and arts schools and clubs, organized by former Soviet teachers and coaches who followed the Soviet techniques and methods of teaching and training. There are also several Russian bookstores in Toronto, and all of them have extensive sections with children’s books and various textbooks and workbooks for all ages. In addition to sending their children to Russian schools and after-school activities, many parents spend significant time working with their children at home, supplementing the school program with extra work in reading and mathematics. My analysis focuses, in particular, on how Russian-speaking immigrants’ emphasis on education and their striving to be educated is integrated into their understanding of social distinction and their aspiration to attain a higher social status in Toronto. As an important aspect of immigrant class subjectivities, education becomes a defining element for determining social and cultural boundaries of their group and an arena of great effort and anxiety for a lot of families.

In Chapter 1, I discussed how most Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada belong to an urban, educated class, and many Russian-speaking immigrants share class subjectivities rooted in their Soviet and post-Soviet experiences. I will apply this relatively specific understanding of social privilege and distinction among post-Soviet immigrants to analyse their educational practices and their discourses about education and culture in Canada. Having attained a relatively privileged social position in the Soviet Union or its successor

states, Russian-speaking immigrants invest heavily in what they perceive as necessary for being successful in any society, i.e. education. As a magazine published by a Russian-speaking immigrant organization claimed in 2007: “For any parent who came to Canada with children their education is one of their main priorities. Children should not lose a single year in their education” (Terentieva 2007: 45). I earlier quoted a slogan used in campaigns against sex education: “Math, not Masturbation! Science, not Sex!” While this slogan has several layers of meaning, it also perfectly illustrates what parents consider to be important aspects of education and what they think their children should focus on at school.

In their concern for their children’s education, Russian-speaking immigrants are not particularly different from most middle class and aspiring middle class parents of any immigrant or non-immigrant background. However, there are certain differences, which make this group quite distinctive. First, their efforts are often focused on a specific type of education, which includes not only a heavy focus on such academic subjects as mathematics and science, but also a high value placed on becoming well versed in forms of high culture, such as reading classics from a Western literary cannon, appreciating Western classical music, making regular visits to theatre and ballet performances, and acquiring a deep knowledge of history, geography, and other subjects seen as related to general erudition. In other words, many immigrant families are engaged in a didactic effort that includes two distinctive aspects. One is a more general effort on mastering the official school curriculum as a necessary precondition for their children to pursue a successful college career, which can be interpreted as part and parcel of the global trend for intensive parenting (Hays 1988; Shirani et al. 2012; Faircloth 2014). At the same time, many families encourage their children to enroll in extra-curricular education activities that have a more specific focus on a set of cultural competences that, back in the Soviet era, were associated with the notion of a cultured person (*kul’turnyi chelovek*) and that are still widely recognized, valued, and reproduced in the Russian-speaking immigrant community of Greater Toronto. This understanding of a cultured person can be traced back to the Soviet concepts of *kul’turnost’* (being cultured), *intelligentnost’* (belonging to the intelligentsia, which is often referred to as a Soviet middle class) and *obrazovannost’* (being educated) (Dunham 1990; Kelly and Volkov 1998; Kelly 1999; Volkov 2000; Rivkin-Fish 2009). These were all related to patterns of social distinction in a Soviet era and are still strongly present in discourses on the

value of education in Russia, even though since 1991 these concepts have lost their state-sponsored status that they enjoyed during the Soviet era.

Social Distinction in Socialist and Post-Socialist Societies

Social distinction was structured differently in the former Soviet Union as compared to capitalist societies, including Canada. Even after the collapse of socialism post-socialist societies did not immediately jettison older forms of distinction and embrace capitalist social structures and signs of distinction such as large houses in prestigious neighbourhoods, expensive cars, and vacations. Patterns of economic development, political culture, and living conditions were different, but also, quite importantly, cultural memory of how social distinction worked proved to be strong and long-lasting (Rivkin-Fish 2009). As I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, during socialism the most important basis for social distinction was cultural capital, which included education, appreciation of high culture, and erudition, as well as certain moral qualities.

Social stratification during socialism was structured differently from such social hierarchies under capitalism, as was class hierarchy itself; this was perceived as something problematic and morally reprehensible. Discussing class anxieties in late socialist Vietnam, which has similarly undergone rapid social transformations and class reconfigurations with the waning of socialism in recent decades, Ann Marie Leshkovich argues that class differences there are often rationalized in moral terms. She shows how market traders and entrepreneurs in Vietnam struggled to define their class location in a socialist society where moneymaking was not considered respectable. Through their adherence to traditional cultural values and Buddhism they continue to strive to represent class differences and inequality as natural and moral and even as “an index of righteousness” (Leshkovich 2006: 297).

This moral aspect of social stratification is very important in a post-socialist context, but, as Carolyn Hsu claims, is often overlooked in the current research on post-socialist stratification systems. As Hsu argues,

In more stable societies, the moral arguments behind stratification institutions are not areas of contestation; instead they are taken for granted and unquestioned. Furthermore, the very content of the ideology of Western industrial capitalism masks its moral nature. This moral logic argues that

human beings are independent, rational individuals who compete with one another to maximize economic gains; it is a moral vision which claims that morality is not particularly important. However, in the socialist system of stratification, the moral logic was extremely visible (through state propaganda), explicitly moralistic, and often highly contested. ... We should not be surprised that people in post-socialist societies would be more consciously concerned about the moral aspects of stratification—and much more skilled at negotiating and contesting that moral content—than their counterparts in the United States or other Western societies (Hsu 2007: 9).

This concern about the moral logic of social stratification is very visible in the Russian-speaking immigrant community as well. As I showed in the previous chapter on gender and sex education, morality was an important aspect of educational anxieties for Russian-speaking parents. Many of them believe that low educational standards result in a loss of moral standards and they perceive proper education to be a necessary precondition of moral righteousness. This connection between morality and education is closely related in this cultural logic to the connection between morality and class hierarchy.

Historically, the Soviet and post-Soviet educated class, which is where most of my respondents come from, rationalized its privileged social position through their level of *kul'turnost'* (culturedness), which was perceived as attainable by anyone and only dependent on one's personal qualities, such as an ability to work hard and adherence to moral standards. This approach allowed people to rationalize class differences in natural and moral terms, constructing them around the idea of *kul'turnost'* and resolving the ideological problem of social stratification in a socialist society. Similarly, Russian-speaking immigrants, whose class status in Canada is often unclear, position themselves in the new socioeconomic context by claiming their subjective class location through a narrative of moral righteousness.

The concept of *kul'turnost'* has amassed an impressive body of scholarly literature as one of the dominant principles in the organization of daily life, consumption, childrearing, and education in the Soviet Union (Dunham 1990; Kelly and Volkov 1998; Kelly 1990; 2001; Gronow 2003). The first Soviet People's Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky (1918–1929), as well as Lenin and Trotsky, were fervent advocates of deploying socialist cultural literacy (as well as actual literacy) to eradicate the remaining elements of capitalism and foster new, socialist forms of labour, consumption, and everyday life in Soviet Russia (Lenin 1964; Lunacharsky 1929; Trotsky 1975). Later, Soviet

authorities, along with the intelligentsia, made great efforts to teach people of the USSR that to be modern and socialist meant to consume and perform cultural literacy, such as knowledge of Russian and world history, classics in literature, and western, and especially Russian classical music (Fitzpatrick 1992; Buchli 2003).

The Soviet cultural revolution, as it was called by its proponents, targeted the entire national community of Soviet people, but from the very beginning it carried with it elements of new class distinctions. Vera Dunham (1990) notes that *kul'turnost'* became a formative category for what she calls the "Soviet middle class" and what I call the Soviet and post-Soviet educated class. Dunham argues that late Stalinism saw a replacement of repressive methods of social management with motivation through material consumption, a shift that Dunham calls a Stalinist "Big Deal" to emphasize its profound impact on Soviet society. The concept of *kul'turnost'*, which she defines as "a fetish notion of how to be individually civilized", was a regulatory tool that encouraged material self-interest among the Soviet educated class in return for its loyalty and productivity (Dunham 1990: 4–5, 16–23).

Catriona Kelly in her *Refining Russia* provides the most comprehensive analysis of Russian and Soviet advice literature published so far (Kelly 2001). As Kelly shows in her analysis, Soviet advice literature of the post-Stalinist era reflected and reproduced cultured behaviour as a marker of social status (327-338). Just as some aspects of *kul'turnost'* emphasized body culture, including hygiene, and sanctioned taste for material possessions, others emerged with a focus on cultural knowledge and education. In a different work, Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov have argued that both took shape in the 1930s: the former in the middle of the decade, and the latter by its end (Kelly and Volkov 1998: 302-303). Drawing on a logic of social distinction, the idea of being individually "cultured" or possessing "culturedness" as a set of knowledge and skills, became associated with the Soviet educated class. This, in turn, produced persistent forms of social critique about material self-interest and even individual well-being. This critique became most evident in what Timo Vihavainen calls the "struggle against philistinism as the moral mission of the Russian intelligentsia," a social crusade associated with a conspicuous consumption of literate culture and advanced knowledge as well as abstinence from material wealth (Vihavainen 2006, see also Kelly 2001: 327-329).

The understanding of culturedness in terms of education and knowledge was further advanced in the post-World War II era in connection with the Soviet mass scientific literacy campaign (Froggart 2005). Despite the nation-wide scope of this campaign, its values were most deeply embraced by the Soviet intelligentsia for whom the consumption, communication, and performance of advanced knowledge became a crucial element of class identity (Vasilieva 2012; Kukulin 2017; Lipovetskii 2010). In a manner similar to many industrialized societies, this class feeling was manifested in formal, school education. Russian immigrants in Canada often discuss education in the Soviet Union as an egalitarian good, of equal quality and equally accessible to everyone, and provided by the state, which was interested in making the best education possible available to its citizens. Although I do not aim to write an in-depth history of education in the Soviet Union, assessing the veracity of these claims, I do want to ponder this issue briefly, as it is related to an important topic of social distinction for the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Canada. Schools in the Soviet Union, as well as in post-Soviet Russia were not all the same. There were high schools like the one where the famous sociologist Boris Firsov studied (Firsov 2006); as he describes, it is remarkable that four of his classmates got doctoral degrees later in life. However, there were other schools in the Soviet Union, where hardly four students from each class even went on for higher education. When elite schools were established in many Soviet urban centers in the 1950s and 1960s, placing one's children in them became an important parenting strategy for Soviet educated parents; elite schooling secured reproduction of their privileged social position as the urban professional class. David Raleigh's book *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk about Their Lives* (2006) discusses one such school, School No. 42 in Saratov, which produced an almost 100-percent rate of college admission for its graduates. His interviewees, graduates of this school, discussed the substantial financial and time investment that their parents made to have them enrolled in this school (Raleigh 2006: 20, 28, 61-64). Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto did not necessarily attend any elite schools in the Soviet Union, but most of them came to Canada via the professional immigration program, which means they had to prove they possessed a certain level of education, professional experience, high competency in English, and also some financial means to afford the move. This suggests that members of this group were

more likely to belong to a rather privileged group of citizens in Soviet and post-Soviet societies.

By the time the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, *kul'turnost'* as a way of “how to be individually civilized” (Dunham 1990: 22) remained a recognized notion, but in terms of its social importance it was giving way to the word *obrazovannost'*, as it went from being somewhat more frequently invoked in 1960 to being nearly 10 times more frequently encountered as a term in the year 2000 (Google Books corpus 2019). Russian-speaking immigrants in Toronto, most of whom had previously belonged to the Soviet or post-Soviet urban educated class, value the sets of skills associated with both *kul'turnost'* and *obrazovannost'*, as well as the social category of the Soviet intelligentsia. Based on a partly mythologized figure of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, the image of a Soviet *intelligent* (a member of the intelligentsia) was, and often remains, a strong role model for people in the former Soviet Union who aspire to belong to a higher social class.

Even if they do not necessarily use these terms, Russian-speaking immigrants to Canada are widely invested in developing these skills in their children, value them in other adults, and use them as markers of a perceived higher status for their own cultural group, which disguises their anxiety about losing their cultural and social privilege in the new society. However, it is important to note here that for most of these people, the very idea that they as immigrants possess any privilege would be laughable. They envision their social status as a result of their hard work, which is seen as a precondition of success, and a failure to be successful is often interpreted as a result of laziness and lack of effort. This particular social situation – a desire to reproduce one's social privilege understood to have resulted from hard work and moral qualities – has produced a particular anxiety around education in Russian-speaking immigrant families. This anxiety is additionally reinforced by a high status of the “Western gaze” in Soviet and post-Soviet cultures. The Western gaze was an important part of Soviet subjectification practices, since numerous cultural representations and political directives strongly encouraged Soviet people to perform proper Sovietness for the Western public. This was mainly a political and cultural response to persistent negative stereotypes about Russia that have been present in European cultures since at least the eighteenth century (Wolff 1994). In post-Soviet Russia, the Western gaze remains important for the educated class of Russian society and immigrants who often experience these stereotypes directly

(Golubev 2018, 2019). This cultural logic remains valid for at least some of my interlocutors; their indignation at the misrepresentation of Russian culture in Canadian mass media is at least partially driven by a painful affective reaction to what they perceive as a political prejudice preventing Russia – and a Russian diaspora – from being fully appreciated on the international stage. It is unsurprising that political performance has become an important tactic among the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Toronto.

Russian Schools, Hard Work, and Discipline

Tatiana’s five-year-old daughter plays piano twice a week, attends dance studio once a week, and has one art class a week, in addition to her regular (private) school and a three-hour weekly class at a Russian school. Tatiana explains how she chose activities for her daughter:

All activities she attends are Russian-speaking. It was my choice, because I firmly believe that Russian education is much better. Our teachers are strict, but they achieve better results. There is no Canadian teacher here who would tell my daughter: “Sit down, don’t move and play the piano,” («Сядь и не вставай из-за фортепиано») but our teacher will.

Tatiana’s opinion is not unique; rather, it is commonly shared in the Russian-speaking community in Toronto. Parents enroll their children in Russian schools because they are not satisfied with Canadian programs. As another Russian-speaking mother claimed, all after-school activities and sport programs in Canada care only about children enjoying them, having fun. A lot of Russian-speaking parents, however, do not want their children to have fun, they want them to learn, to master skills, and develop discipline.

This focus on discipline when it comes to learning is an important aspect of immigrant culture, as I observed on multiple occasions. One day during my fieldwork in Toronto, I went to a Russian preschool to attend a class they were holding for three-year-old children. It was an hour-long class, aimed at both Russian language and general development, as the teacher explained to me. She spent time playing musical instruments with the children, singing songs, and doing some easy crafts toward the end of the class. When playing the musical instruments, the teacher repeatedly emphasized that musical instruments were making different sounds: “This one is loud, listen to it, it is loud,” or “This one is quiet, it makes quiet sounds.” Children were sitting in a circle in the middle of the

room, while parents were also staying in the room, away from the children, but closely watching them and being ready to interfere if children started to lose attention. At some point, a little girl decided to lie down on the carpet. Her mom immediately came to her and urged her to sit up, telling that she was supposed to listen to her teacher. One boy was particularly inattentive during the class, and he kept slowly pushing himself out of the circle, exploring toys in the corner, looking for his grandmother and trying to talk to her. He was not particularly loud but seemed to be more interested in everything else rather than what the teacher was doing. After the class, I heard the teacher talk to the grandmother; it turned out that it was the first day that the boy attended the preschool. When I talked to the teacher later, she explained:

He will learn [to behave] if he continues to come here. It is very important to have discipline. That's what we do here, we teach them how to behave at school so that they know that they have to sit still and listen to the teacher, to do their work. They won't learn anything if they do not have discipline.

Children were expected to maintain attention throughout the class and follow instructions, and these expectations were shared by both parents and the teacher. The teacher whose class I attended was a Russian-speaking woman in her fifties who used to work as a music teacher back in Russia. In her work with children at this Russian school she was following the standards and expectation that she learned as a teacher in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia. While she admitted that she had to adjust her teaching methods after moving to Canada, she did not want to adopt Canadian approaches, which, according to her, were only about entertainment and making kids happy. She wanted her students to work hard; more importantly, she was sure that their parents wanted the same.

This focus on hard work as a necessary precondition for child development leading to a cultured person is evident in immigrants' attitudes about children's sports. One of the most popular sports among Russian-speaking immigrant families is rhythmic gymnastics, an activity in Canada invariably coached by former Soviet or Eastern European gymnasts. At one point I enrolled my daughter, who was at the time a very active and strong four-year-old, in one of these gymnastics classes. When I took her to the first class, I stayed in the gym to support her, but the next time I left her in the gym and went for a walk. When I came back, she was still in class. I looked through a window in the door and realized that something was

going on. My daughter was sitting on the floor, and her coach and the owner of the club were sitting next to her talking. Her coach explained to me that they were doing splits and my daughter overstretched her legs to such an extent that she hurt herself, and she could not stop and get up on her own. The coach saw tears in her eyes, helped her to sit down, and made sure she did not further injure herself. Then she told me that she was very impressed by my daughter's attitude: "I thought she would not go back to practice after being hurt, but she did, and she continued to work hard. This is such an important quality for a good gymnast. That's what we aim for our kids to learn here." In reference to a four-year old girl, the Russian-speaking coach emphasized hard work and ability to overcome difficulties and pain as the most important aspects for successful participation in sports.

While this attitude is in no way limited to the Russian-speaking immigrant community, as we can observe from the global trend towards youth sport specialization and professionalization (Gould 2010; Myer 2015), such an attitude reflects how Russian-speaking parents expect and praise children's hard work and self-discipline above all else. "Russian schools are not for you if you are only looking for fun," I heard from a Russian-speaking mother in Toronto. The idea that you get nothing if you do not work hard for it (in Russian, one could talk of *upornyi trud*) is very common among Russian-speaking parents. In contrast, they are ambivalent about the idea that learning can and should be fun, an attitude amply reflected in an article published in a magazine by one of the Russian immigrant organizations in Toronto. As the author reminisces:

I remember a meeting at one of the schools in the Russian-speaking neighborhood in Toronto before the beginning of a new school year. The principal was explaining with the help of an interpreter, to us, new immigrant mothers and fathers from Russia, what the priorities of Canadian schools are:

- 1) Have fun...
- 2) Grow up.
- 3) Learn.

In this precise order. Parents were shocked. Children smiled happily" (Terentieva 2007: 46).

As parents, most of my respondents were glad when their children expressed interest in the activities they were enrolled in; at the same time, they were concerned that if children were not used to working hard they would fail sooner or later once they faced "real" obstacles. It is illustrative that the article I quoted above was published in the section called

“Through hardship to the stars...” (from the Latin *per aspera ad astra*). “How can we expect them to work hard in high school if they only know how to have fun,” Ekaterina, a Russian-Jewish immigrant woman asked me at one point during my fieldwork, as she was visibly upset that her nine-year-old daughter was not expected to make any effort at school. The child was supposed to memorize the multiplication table that year, but, as her mother complained, teachers did not put any pressure on the students. “If they know it, it’s good, if they do not, it’s good too. As long as they are happy, everything is good,” the mother claimed, and it was clear that what was good for the Canadian teachers of her daughter was definitely not good enough for the parents. To compensate for this lack of effort at school, she was trying to enforce additional learning at home, making rules for her daughter to spend a certain amount of time every day working on the multiplication table, as well as introducing some other learning requirements for her. Tatiana, whom I quoted in the beginning of this section, complained about the first preschool her daughter attended: “She started coming home and telling me that she would not do something [an educational activity that her mother encouraged her to do], because she already tried and could not do it. ‘It’s ok,’ she would tell me. I was furious.” “It’s ok” is a phrase that immigrants claim to hear very often in daycares and schools in Canada when caregivers and teachers see children fail a certain task or activity and want to express their support and care. Yet for Tatiana, this phrase – especially when reproduced by her daughter – meant something different: a refusal to overcome difficulties and an indulgence in laziness. This was the main reason that she started looking for another preschool for her daughter, and eventually sent her to a Russian-speaking one.¹⁷

These expectations of learning as labour, starting at a relatively early age, are one of the reasons why many Russian-speaking parents are often dissatisfied with Canadian schools. They do not appreciate the idea of learning through play, or a concept that learning should be

¹⁷ There is an extensive choice of “Russian” daycares in Toronto. Some of them are fully Russian-speaking with Russian being the only language used with children. Others are bilingual, striving to teach children English, but to maintain and develop their Russian competencies as well. Some larger daycares might have a Russian-speaking group, while other groups are English-speaking. Some parents emphasize that it is not only the language that makes them choose “Russian” daycares, but other aspects of education and daily routines that they think are better in daycares run by Russian-speaking educators. These aspects that parents refer to include a focus on structured learning activities, home-made food, including soups and hot meals, better discipline, and better hygiene routines, etc.

fun. There is a popular attitude that adults go to work, and this is their “labour,” while children go to school, and this is their “labour”. Children are expected to work hard, to labour, and for many parents it is only the results of hard work that have real value (“все надо заслужить тяжелым трудом»). While this attitude is not shared by everyone, and some parents would never send their children to a Russian school precisely because they do not want to expose them to this attitude, most claim that this is the only way to teach children how to work. Discipline and an appreciation for hard work are the two things that people I met in Toronto value in these Russian-speaking programs. Parents also praise Russian educational programs for their quality of education, as, unlike other local educational programs aimed at children of a similar age, Russian schools provide what they perceive to be more academically rigorous curricula.

One might ask, where does this emphasis on rigor and the labour of learning come from? The connection between education and labour was very important in Soviet culture. Beginning with Lenin and his well-known quote “learn, learn, and learn” – a quote which was displayed on school walls all over the USSR and which inspired multiple jokes -- the idea of hard work as a basic aspect of human existence was deeply rooted in both official discourses and everyday practices, including literature and other forms of art. The idea of hard work refers not only to physical labour. A very famous poem by the Soviet poet Nikolai Zabolotskii, “Do Not Let Your Soul Be Lazy” («Не позволяй душе лениться») (Zabolotskii 1958), urges people not to let their souls become idle. “Your souls must work all day and night,” claims the poet. In this cultural logic, a lack of hard work leads not only to inferior education and skills, but also to moral degradation; taken together this results in a loss of a higher position in the system of social hierarchy.

Social Agency as Class Privilege

An important aspect of class privilege is agency, and while this is not the concept my interlocutors use, it is the theoretical concept that I believe allows us to encompass a crucial aspect of social stratification as experienced by people I met in Toronto. There are multiple approaches to the understanding of agency in the social sciences, but a basic definition refers to agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001: 112). For my

interlocutors, agency meant their ability to make decisions, to resist the influence of the state, which they interpreted as immoral, and to have power to take control over their own life and the lives of their children. “They don’t give people an opportunity to shape their own future. Live, consume, what else do you need?” – complained Maria, a Russian-speaking immigrant woman, a mother of two grown-up children, who came to Canada in 1992. She suggested that those in power offer ready-made scenarios of the future and impose these upon people, instead of letting them choose their future and participate in shaping it. “They create such situations when you, you personally, do not make any decisions,” – she continued to explain why it was important for her to work hard on her children’s education. “My education allowed me to somehow re-orient my children, to pull them out of this soulless existence,” she claimed and continued to discuss how education and ability to think critically were necessary to take control of one’s own life and to resist the state’s interference. This understanding of agency as class privilege can be observed in lot of practices and discourses, even though they are not necessarily as explicit as in Maria’s arguments. Agency is framed as a significant motivation for their educational efforts, as only those who are educated and have strong moral values are believed to be able to resist being controlled by the state and corporations that have allegedly penetrated the government.

Many Russian-speaking immigrant parents interpret the difference in educational approaches and methodologies between Canada and the Soviet Union as evidence that Canadian schools (and the Canadian state which they represent) are not interested in providing their children with the best education available. Moreover, many start believing that school curricula have been designed – intentionally or unintentionally – to “dupe” children so that new generations of Canadian citizens can be easily controlled and manipulated, disciplined and oriented as consumers, devoid of agency, something that is convenient and beneficial for both the state and corporations. “The state doesn’t need educated people,” was a phrase that I often heard in conversation and also encountered in online discussions about education. Likewise, during my interview with her, Maria reminisced how she learned so many different things while she was at school in the Soviet Union where all activities were free at pioneer palaces (sort of government sponsored community centres), and children could learn all they wanted there (Donahoe and Habeck 2011). She was telling me about bringing up her children in Canada and reflected: “I only

then realized how the state took care of everything in the Soviet Union. Here, the state turns everyone into imbeciles. We cannot give our kids here that erudition (*krugozor*) we ourselves got back there. Here, everything is about money.” From her point of view, the Soviet state and the government was not motivated by money and financial profits, but by progress towards a better future for everyone. It is an idealized image of the Soviet state, and it might seem illogical that people see it in this light when there is a widespread understanding of the Soviet Union as a totalitarian state, which limited rights and freedoms of its citizens. However, many of my interlocutors strongly believe in this idealized image of the USSR, and they claim that people there had more opportunities to fully develop their potential and had more social agency, compared to contemporary capitalist societies, where access to a good education and to social privilege is regulated by money.

These allegedly evil intentions of the state (and corporations) represent a widespread belief that circulates among Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada. These ideas have a significant impact on parents’ decisions regarding their children’s education, including their engagement in the time-consuming effort of supplementing the Canadian school curriculum with elements of the Russian (or even Soviet-era) school curriculum. Vera’s family, who I came to know in 2017, exemplifies this trend. When I met Vera, she was living in a small town in the Greater Toronto area, where she lived with her husband and two children. One of her children was of preschool age and one started kindergarten that year but was homeschooled. Our conversation that day mainly focused on the threats traditional families were facing in Ontario where the Liberal party was in power. Vera was sure that the recent bills passed by the provincial government were aimed at the destruction of traditional families, and in order to pursue their preferred lifestyle and raise their children according to traditional values, parents had to be extra careful and protective. New laws were the most recent and ultimate threat (“They can just come to your home and take your children now,” complained Vera), but there were other threats she was trying to protect her children from as well. While we were talking, she let her children watch TV, but it was not a kids’ channel or a Disney movie. They were watching a carefully selected Soviet era animated cartoon, and, as Vera told me later, they only watched Soviet cartoons and films. Her choice of entertainment for her children, as well as her selection of educational resources, reflects one obvious trend in her perception of the state. While she did not trust the Canadian state in

providing her children with a good education, she had much higher regard for educational materials produced by the Soviet state.

Vera's trust in Soviet educational materials also extended to a very particular choice of textbooks she used to teach her children to read and write. The textbook, called *Stalin's ABC Book*, was first published in 1952, and in 2017, a man based in Russia, Dmitrii Frontov, decided to reprint it. He suggested that the ABC book published in 1952 was the best one available for children today, and the best cursive writing workbook was the one published in 1948. Moreover, the best pen to use when writing in this workbook was a dip pen. Frontov, set up a fundraising page on the website boomstarter.ru to finance this project and thereby provide other parents with an opportunity to access this set of learning materials for their children. He emphasized that this was not a commercial project, and he only charged the amount needed to cover expenses associated with reprinting the books. He named his project 'Stalin's ABC book' [*Stalinskii bukvar'*] and justified his choice of these books by his belief that the education system in the Soviet Union was much better than the current system. As he wrote, in the 1950s, the USSR led by Stalin, "was at the peak of its powers in all areas, including education" (Frontov 2017). In total, over 420,000 Russian rubles (approximately 9,000 Canadian dollars) were raised, and almost a thousand textbooks were ordered. By 2019 this project developed into a large-scale reprinting business, with its own website and online store where dozens of Soviet-era elementary school textbooks are available for purchase. Copies of these textbooks are also sold by major online booksellers, and there is an app in the Apple store where one can download these books.

Vera's was one of several Russian-speaking families who ordered their copies of Stalin's ABC books as a part of the initial fundraising campaign. She did not order the books out of nostalgia, to have this rare book at her house as a symbolic object or a curiosity; instead, she actually used these books in teaching her children. People like Dmitrii Frontov who support this project in Russia share a similar sentiment towards the role of the state. Contemporary states are perceived to be uninterested in providing children with the best education, and it has now become parents' responsibility to make sure that their children get a good education, which could allow them to maintain and reproduce their social distinction and remain able to take control of their own lives and futures.

Cultured Consumption and the Consumption of Culture

The idea of the Soviet system of education being superior to a Canadian system is related not only to the differences immigrants observe in the role and functions of the state. There is also a belief that Russian culture occupies a superior position in an imaginary hierarchy of cultures. Such sentiments of cultural superiority become accentuated in situations when Russian-speaking immigrants reflect on what makes their own group distinct and different from others. The following statement, posted in one of the Facebook groups, is particularly illustrative of this feeling. While it expresses strong criticism of Canadian society and culture (or, more precisely, Russian-speaking immigrants' perception of Canadian society lacking culture), a similar sentiment, only usually expressed in a more polite and cautious manner, is fairly common in daily interactions in the Russian-speaking immigrant community.

Do you have friends among Canadians? If you do, what do you talk to them about other than the weather? What cultural institutions (*kul'turnye zavedenia*) do you visit with them?... As someone said, it is hard here for the first generation, and the second generation turns into dull-witted Canadians, and their life is wonderful. People who have no interests in things other than the weather and a new piece of clothing are happy in Canada. They have inexpensive clothing, and they are happy here.

While the emphasis in this quote is on culture, I argue that the underlying argument is still about social stratification, which is based not on economic capital or income in this case, but on cultural capital as a dominant element of the system of stratification. As for the person commenting on dull-witted Canadians, for many of my interlocutors, the consumption of high culture vs. the consumption of material goods becomes an imaginary line that divides people into two separate groups. I argue that immigrants perceive this dividing line as a basis for social distinction rather than an acknowledgement of various interests. This approach clearly reflects the rhetoric of Soviet social distinction, when Soviet intelligentsia based their class identity not on material success, but rather on their culturedness and high level of education. Carolyn Hsu notes a parallel situation in her research on China. She comments that scholars do not usually provide any justification for, "why economic capital should be considered a dominant form of capital in post-socialist societies except for the unspoken belief that since money is so central in industrialized capitalist nations, this must be

the “normal” state of things when the state is not meddling unnaturally in society” (Hsu 2007: 6). She argues that in other societies different forms of capital might be dominant, and this is the case for Russian-speaking immigrants who emphasize a dominant role of cultural capital in their system of social stratification.

Michele Rivkin-Fish’s work sheds light on this question of social stratification among Russian-speaking immigrants as well. In her article on the production and reproduction of class subjectivities in post-socialist Russia she discusses the role of social memory of the past in this process (Rivkin-Fish 2009). She uses the concept of “class” in several ways, but the central theme of her analysis is “how people deployed class as a signifier of distinction that apportioned recognition and prestige to others” (Rivkin-Fish 2009: 81). In particular, her analysis focuses on what she calls “the imagined community of intelligentsia,” which she further describes as “a sacred quality, merging and condensing the symbolism of *kul’turmost’* (culturedness), high education, and the attendant respect and authority that derive from honesty and moral righteousness” (Rivkin-Fish 2009: 81). In her discussion of class subjectivities, Rivkin-Fish shows how people who shared these forms of capital and whom she calls “the aspiring middle class” claimed themselves a social position as worthy recipients of newly available economic capital and comfort in a post-Soviet period. She further argues, also referring to research by Jennifer Patino, that the idea that cultured, morally worthy individuals deserved material prosperity and comfort, and were “proper beneficiaries of higher standards of living” slowly became prevalent in the society that was previously struggling with the fact that Soviet-era cultural capital did not readily provide access to material forms of prestige (Patino 2005: 490, cited in Rivkin-Fish 2009: 82).

I need to emphasize here that financial prosperity is an important goal for most people in the Russian-speaking immigrant community. A lot of parents I met during my research were very critical about consumerism as a defining feature of a capitalist society, but at the same time they wanted both themselves and their children to be able to make good money and enjoy material success. The same people who complain that public education is raising consumers who are only interested in their own pleasures openly claim that there is nothing wrong with paying \$500 for a pair of new shoes. They enjoy going on vacations, buying expensive cars, spending money in beauty salons (and the beauty industry is among the most popular businesses in the Russian-speaking community), and wearing elite brands of

clothing. Their adherence to morality and high culture is not an alternative to material capital but is an equally important component of being a dignified person. Considering class subjectivities discussed above, the combination of education, culturedness, and moral righteousness makes many Russian-speaking immigrants believe that they and their children are worthy of enjoying comfort offered by capitalist society. The way to reconcile these seemingly exclusive attitudes is the legitimization of consumption through educational attainment and adherence to moral standards. This combination makes financial prosperity a legitimate reward, a classic Stalinist definition of culturedness (Dunham 1990: 41–52). As Rivkin-Fish claims, “[e]rudition and good manners became central elements in Soviet ideals of respectable personhood. In a context in which income differentials and material affluence were less pronounced than in Western settings, performing *kul’turnost’* and associating with the Russian intelligentsia became key symbolic practices of defining oneself as a “cultured” – read: dignified – person” (Rivkin-Fish 2009: 83). After the Soviet Union collapsed, other markers of social distinction became available, but Soviet symbolic practices continued to remain an important aspect of class subjectivities. In this situation, identifying with intelligentsia “was an especially important practice for establishing social respectability” for those who did not have material wealth (89). In post-Soviet Russia, associating themselves with the intelligentsia allowed people to access symbolic capital and retain the sense of respectability in a situation where they did not always have access to material capital. These two aspects of social stratification in post-socialist societies – moral logic and lower status of economic capital – are important to consider when discussing educational efforts in the families of Russian-speaking immigrants as they provide us with a better understanding of their logic of social distinction.

Many immigrants attach importance to cultural pursuits, which usually means attending theatre and visiting museums and Western classical music concerts, as well being able to engage in conversation on topics more abstract than the weather and the latest fashion trends. This attitude can be illustrated by Dmitri and Anna, a Russian-speaking couple from Eastern Ukraine that I met in Toronto. Prior to immigration, Dmitri had practiced law in Ukraine, but in Toronto he became self-employed in the construction industry; his wife had been a medical doctor in Ukraine and when I met them she was unemployed due to poor English language skills. Yet, understandably, their leisure activities reflected their class

aspirations, rather than their current social position. They had been to all the major museums in Toronto, regularly renewed their annual passes for the Art Gallery of Ontario, and on several occasions travelled to Ottawa in order to attend specific exhibitions in museums there. Their first family trip to the United States was to New York City, and the main purpose of their trip was to visit major museums and art galleries. Even though their seven-year old son was mainly interested in military technology and visibly bored by art (they came from the Donetsk region, and he had been exposed to the stories of military violence through communication with family members who stayed there), he accompanied them on all these trips, both in and outside of Greater Toronto, as this form of leisure also had a didactic component to teach him to appreciate high culture.

Many Russian-speaking immigrants share a sincere belief that Canadian society as a whole has little interest in so-called “high culture” and, as a consequence, there are fewer options for accessing this in Canada. On several occasions I heard complaints that ballet and opera in Canada could not be compared to those in Russia and Europe, museum collections were “primitive”, theater performances were mainly modernist and indulge audiences with the lowest expectations. Such complaints can be heard from people who moved to Canada not only from Moscow, St. Petersburg, or Kiev, but also from relatively small towns in the former Soviet Union. What worries them even more than this perceived low level of culture in Canada – at least rhetorically – is the fact that most Canadians allegedly do not consider this a problem and are happy to live their lives without being routinely engaged in the practices of consuming high culture.

The fact that immigrants reproduce their own class-based understanding of cultural consumption can be illustrated by a dialog that I observed as a guest in a Russian-speaking family with two teenage daughters. At some point, one of us mentioned *Madama Butterfly*, and one of the daughters asked what that was. Her mother’s reaction was very emotional: “Why, you don’t know what *Madama Butterfly* is!?” “Isn’t it some kind of chocolate,” was the response. The girl was not entirely wrong, as there was a chocolate candy produced in the Soviet Union with such a name, but that was definitely not the answer her mother was expecting. A smart, well-educated woman herself, she never struck me as someone who attached so much importance to music and opera. However, she was obviously very disturbed by this situation and looked embarrassed by her daughter’s response. This reaction

revealed her class aspirations, which she also expressed in a different situation, when she mentioned that her daughters would be second-generation intelligentsia. She and her husband were both the first in their families to graduate from university back in the early 1980s and represented a typical example of Soviet social mobility. In this context, her daughter's obvious ignorance in the area of high culture and a lack of erudition threatened the mother's social aspirations for her family to be seen as part of the educated class, or, in the context of Canadian social hierarchies, a part of the middle class.

The quotidian reproduction of the practices of cultured consumption and the consumption of culture associated with *intelligentnost'* in the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Canada is rooted in another aspect of late Soviet and post-Soviet culture: the cultural dichotomy of *intelligentnost'* and *meshchanstvo*. Catriona Kelly claims that Russian and later Soviet intelligentsia represented characteristics of bourgeoisie, when in their attempts to disseminate *kul'turnost'* they expressed "classic middle-class anxieties about the threat of disease and disorder from the lower-class population" (Kelly 2001: xxvii). Kelly discusses how the term *meshchanstvo* acquired negative connotations among the Russian intelligentsia, for whom "the term encapsulated a combination of mindless consumption of cultural goods and insensitivity to culture in the true sense" (Kelly 2001: 157). In Soviet discourse, entitlement to social privilege due to high cultural capital and certain moral qualities was, perhaps, most famously expressed by a famous Soviet scholar Dmitry Likhachev, an expert on Old Church Slavonic literature. In 1985, he published a book called *Letters on Goodness and Beauty (Pis'ma o dobrom i prekrasnom, Moscow, 1985)*, which was reprinted numerous times, and could be frequently found in Soviet and post-Soviet homes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this collection of essays addressed to young readers, Likhachev discusses a variety of topics, and one of his letters is called "A Person Should Be Intelligent" (*Chelovek dolzhen byt' intelligenten*). In this essay, he suggests that it is the social responsibility of Soviet youth to self-educate themselves in the qualities associated with the intelligentsia. He defines what real intelligentsia is, writing:

Deprive a genuinely *intelligent* person of all his knowledge, education, deprive him of his memory. Let's imagine he forgot everything, he doesn't know literary classics, doesn't remember the greatest works of art, forgot the most important historical facts. But if he is still able to remain sensitive to intellectual values, to preserve love to the acquisition of new knowledge, is

interested in history, has an aesthetical instinct, if he is still able to differentiate a real work of art from a vulgar object produced to indulge someone's poor taste,... if he is able to demonstrate respect toward the culture of the past, has skills of a well-mannered person, moral responsibility, richness and precision of his language – both spoken and written, – he will be a member of the intelligentsia (*intelligentnyi chelovek*).

In this cultural logic, *meshchanstvo* is associated with unscrupulous, “uncultured” consumption (Likhachev’s reference to vulgar objects). In the Soviet cultural context this link was explicated, for example, in a public debate about a common practice of buying books as objects of interior decoration, which Soviet intelligentsia characterized as a morally shallow practice and a sign of vanity (Simonova 1985). Since many Russian-speaking immigrants I encountered were university educated prior to immigrating, they have absorbed cultural tastes and practices that characterize Soviet and post-Soviet intelligentsia. The term intelligentsia itself might not be widely circulate among Russian-speaking immigrants (I probably only heard it once or twice during my fieldwork), but this idea is revealed through parallel concepts in their discourse and is still very important for the community. In the Canadian context this leads many immigrants to conflate their class subjectivity with national identity, and this in turn leads them to believe in the superior position of Russian culture and education. The role of *meshchanstvo*, against which they establish their identity, is attributed to Canadian society, as evident from numerous complaints about the unscrupulous and “uncultured” consumption that is allegedly promoted as a cultural norm in Canada. This feeling of cultural superiority among immigrants translates into a very high esteem for skills associated with Russian literacy.

Learning and Performing Literacy

The link between class aspirations and education is particularly visible in practices related to learning, maintaining, and performing normative Russian literacy. Reading is an area of significant importance for Russian-speaking parents both in Russia and abroad. The importance attached to the process of reading and the conspicuous drift from the objective need for literacy to the moral value attached to reading in Russian culture makes the children's book culture very distinctive. Although reading as a skill itself is important for Russian-speaking parents, even more important is reading as a medium of instilling proper cultural and moral values.

Being immigrants, most of these people had to face serious economic difficulties and a loss of social status when they moved to Canada. Many of them had to change their occupation and work in less qualified positions compared to what they were doing in their country of origin. One immigrant family, Tatiana and Dmitri, who I met in Toronto, moved there from one of the former Soviet republics in the early 1990s. They were educated as engineers but had to take on manual labour in Canada. Their children attended public schools that did not have a very good reputation in the immigrant community, but Tatiana and Dmitri did not have resources to move to a neighbourhood with better public schools, or to pay for private school. The children – who were already teenagers when the family moved to Canada – experienced numerous problems at school, including issues with discipline, to the degree that they were expelled from school at some point. Yet despite their parents working in low paid jobs requiring few qualifications and only having access to quite average public education, both children eventually attended university, and one of them earned a PhD degree. While there was no single factor that explains this choice of career, the parents' focus on education and valuing being cultured surely played an important role. When Tatiana and Dmitri moved to Canada, the most expensive item that they brought with them was their entire private library, so that their children could keep on reading in Russian. I heard myriad stories of people moving their libraries while abandoning furniture and other expensive belongings. It is not easy to do it, and has never been, but immigrants from the ex-USSR have often prioritized their books when moving across the Atlantic. In the case of Tatiana and Dmitri, bringing a home library ensured that even though the children grew up in a

lower-class environment, they were, nevertheless, immersed in book culture and practices typically associated with the Russian educated class, which eventually helped them join the ranks of the educated class in Toronto.

Reading held a unique place in Soviet and late Soviet culture. Evgeny Dobrenko, a scholar of Soviet literature, argues: “The Soviet reader, spectator, or listener is not simply a recipient (or in the Western sense a ‘consumer of books’) ... he is the *object* of reshaping, ‘molding’... The functions of Soviet literature (as indeed of all Soviet culture) are focused on this ‘reforging of human material’” (Dobrenko 1997: 2). Dobrenko also discusses the importance of books and reading in the Soviet school system that had primarily a nurturing [*vospitatel’nyi*] rather than content-oriented [*obrazovatel’nyi*] approach to education. Moreover, literature had taken a central role in the sphere of education, when “school and literature did not simply intersect in the Soviet era, but definitely merged into each other” (147-148). Catriona Kelly also emphasizes the role of school in teaching children about reading, claiming that “[e]normous efforts were expended by state institutions on circulating children’s literature, and on making sure that this was read in the appropriate way” (Kelly 2005: 717-718). She demonstrates how schools and libraries controlled and guided children’s reading through different means.

While schools in Canada are very invested in children’s reading, they are mainly focused on reading as a skill, and much less attention is paid to the content and quality of reading materials. In contrast, Russian-speaking parents I encountered in Toronto did not consider reading chapter books based on popular TV-shows as proper reading. Parents generally devote significant time to choosing books for their children, and it is important to them that their children not only read, but that they read the “right” books, namely, the titles from the European, Russian, and American canons of children’s and juvenile literature as it was defined in the Soviet Union (such as Mark Twain, Jules Verne, Samuil Marshak, etc.). This differentiation between “good” and “bad” books is associated with the high symbolic power attached to a book and can be definitely traced to the Soviet legacy of the high status of books and their perceived power to shape personhood (Dobrenko 1997).

Here again we can observe various situations where different attitudes towards books and reading in Canada and in Russia lead immigrant parents to affirm their belief in the advantages of Russian culture. Marina, one of the parents I met in Toronto, complained about

public schools: “I remember how terrified I was when I realized what children were reading at school. It was such mediocrity! I found then lists of books which were recommended in the Soviet Union for various grade levels and made my daughter read all of those.” Another Russian-speaking mother shared her surprise (and contempt) with other Russian-speaking mothers online after she took her daughter to their local library to pick out books for her summer reading and found that there was only one book from her list there. A librarian told her that they did not keep any older books in the library, as they were only rarely requested. For this mother, and some others she discussed it with, this was an outrageous situation. They interpreted this as a sign that children were encouraged to read only low quality, entertaining books, while knowledge of classics, which they considered crucial for any educated person, was being forgotten.

Likewise, a Russian-speaking mother and blogger who lives in Canada mentioned in one of her posts that her son’s school arranged a festival of book characters to encourage reading habits among students. She tried to persuade her son to take a Russian book to school: “It took me a long time yesterday to persuade him: ‘This is such a cool book! It does not matter that it is in Russian, just show them what is inside, none of them has seen anything like that.’” In this particular case – and, perhaps, more generally – she uses books not only to demonstrate her family’s cultural identity at school, but also for inculcating such an identity in her son. Moreover, this example is also about the quality of Russian books and their superiority, as her claim that “[t]hey have not seen anything like that” implied that her son’s classmates routinely consume lower-quality literature.

Considering the importance attached to reading, and the special attention paid by parents to the quality of the books their children read, it is not surprising that parents are interested in their children being able not only to speak, but also to read in Russian. As one woman lamented, “One of my biggest fears is that I won’t be able to read my favourite books to my grandchildren.” These concerns can be partly explained by general fear of alienation from their children and grandchildren being raised in a different culture, but there is also a fear that children won’t be exposed to a “reforging” power of “good” books. On a different occasion, the same woman also complained to me: “I heard recently that schoolteachers were instructed not to assign books that are published more than ten years ago. They are raising barbarians!”

Literacy is, without doubt, one of the most important skills of an educated and cultured person according to Soviet and post-Soviet cultural logic. Dmitrii Likhachev cites the richness and precision of language as one of the essential characteristics of the intelligentsia. Likewise, a relatively new event, *Total'nyi diktant*, which was first organized in Russia in 2004 and is now organized annually both in Russia and abroad, including in Canada, further substantiates how literacy becomes an important cultural and social category. *Total'nyi diktant*, a total dictation, is a popular event when people gather together on a specific day to write a dictation, a kind of spelling test similar to what every Russian-speaking person who grew up in the Soviet Union or Russia, did at school regularly. A *diktant*, or a spelling test, has been one of the most quotidian school experiences for generations of Soviet and post-Soviet schoolchildren. Usually a teacher reads a text, and students must demonstrate their knowledge of spelling and punctuation by writing it down as correctly as possible. The total dictation repeats this practice in detail, only students are adults who come to write this test of their own free will and to later see their grades online. Texts are written by popular writers for this event specifically and are read by various celebrities. Those who read the dictation are called “dictators” (“diktator” in Russian) and it is interesting to note the word play which exploits various meanings of words “total” and “dictator.” While the latter is used here occasionally to define someone who reads a text for others to transcribe it, together with the title of the event, which exploits the double meaning of the word “total” (“total'nyi”), these words inevitably make one think about totalitarianism and dictatorship. I have not found any explanation from the organizers of the event about what motivated them to invoke these associations, but it is quite certain that this was not a coincidence.

The Total Dictation was designed in 2004 by a student club at the Novosibirsk State University. For the next few years, it remained a small local event, but started to gain popularity after 2010, and spread not only beyond Novosibirsk, but also beyond Russia to Russian-speaking diasporas. Total Dictation is often invoked along with the Immortal Regiment as examples of grassroots initiatives originating in Siberia and becoming popular events nationwide. Similar to how the Immortal Regiment was first imagined, the Total Dictation is led by volunteers, and also like the Immortal Regiment, it later spread into the global Russian-speaking diaspora. Both of these events are also sometimes seen by critics as

popular initiatives that were later hijacked by the state authorities. As a popular Russian poet, Dmitri Bykov, claims, the Total Dictation was designed by people who wanted to resist the mass-dumbing of the population, and only subsequently did the authorities step in to try to alter it to match their own needs. For example, Bykov claims that there were attempts to change the name from “total” to “united” to echo the name of the pro-Putin party United Russia (Bykov 2016). The organizers managed to retain the original name, but they have faced considerable critique of the texts they use for the dictation, and even their authorship.

In recent years the Total Dictation has also been organized in Toronto, and in 2019 there were two locations where it took place, the Russian House, and one of the Russian schools in Toronto. This event was not even close in popularity to the Immortal Regiment in terms of the number of participants, but it still attracted roughly fifty Russian-speaking immigrants. In the context of the discussion of the mobilization of the Russian-speaking community, this event suggests that the Russian language is seen as a unifying aspect for this community; the language unites not only people who identify as ethnically Russian, but also people of other ethnicities. There is nothing particularly surprising in this situation, as the Russian language has long been seen as essential for national identity and defining boundaries between groups. However, what is interesting in this particular demonstration of language identity is the focus on language competence and grammatical correctness. People who come together to write the dictation not only want to demonstrate that they speak the same language, but that they are literate.

The same people organize the Immortal Regiment and the Total Dictation in Toronto, but I argue that this event, unlike the Immortal Regiment, is primarily related to class aspirations of people who participate in it, rather than their national identity. There are definitely some political dimensions in the organization of the Total Dictation; however, those are even more tangled and less explicit than those of the Immortal Regiment. The Total Dictation in Russia has the support of the state authorities (at least, their approval), on one hand, but it also actively engages so-called “liberals” who act as “dictators” and generally support the initiative. In turn, this liberal support does not antagonize people who would otherwise pejoratively refer to liberals as national traitors. These political debates somehow happen to be forgotten in this particular situation, when, as I suggest, class identity of the participants is being performed. By writing this dictation, people reconfirm their belonging to

the educated class, and demonstrate their adherence to the values associated with the social position to which they aspire to belong.

Conclusion

In my previous research among Russian-speaking immigrants in northern Norway, I found that Russian mothers in mixed families widely refused to speak Russian to their children, even when their Norwegian skills were limited. The reason for this linguistic behavior was a very complicated history of cross-border contacts, which led to the stigmatization of Russian women as poor, desperate, and even sometimes as prostitutes (Stenvoll 2002). In the context of stigmatization, immigrants did their best to assimilate in Norwegian society and to let their children grow up as Norwegians to avoid the social stigma they experienced after moving to Norway. Unlike Russian Norwegians, Russian Canadians do not usually follow this pattern. There are some families who choose not to speak Russian to their children, and who try to assimilate with white English-speaking Canadians as fast as possible, but the majority of Russian-speaking immigrants speak Russian to their children, and a lot of them also want their children to be able to read and write in Russian. This is reflected in a large number of Russian daycares, Russian schools, and Russian bookstores available in Toronto. Russian daycares are attractive to parents due to their familiar approaches to caring for young children. Moreover, parents are drawn to the language environment, where young children are not exposed to English at a young age, and to the way cultural norms and values that parents associate with “good” education are adhered to. These language attitudes are related to their class subjectivities, which are shaped by their late Soviet and post-Soviet social and cultural practices and expressed in discourses of anxiety around levels of education and degrees of being “cultured”. In Russian-speaking immigrant communities in Canada, erudition and moral righteousness act as pillars for self-esteem and class subjectivity and as the necessary preconditions for belonging to a socially respectable group, irrelevant of its financial success. Conversely, this class subjectivity also means that financial success alone is not enough to become a dignified person.

The potential loss of cultural capital among Russian-speaking immigrants is perceived as a threat to their self-respect and potential self-respect of their children. “It is

time to make everyone respect us!”), claimed one of the Russian-speaking immigrants when she discussed what she saw as misinformation about Russia that was aired by The New Classical Radio station. For these people, being educated is sufficient grounds for being respected. Like the perceived re-writing of Russian history that I discussed in Chapter 2, this radio program is seen as one example of ongoing anti-Russian propaganda, which is aimed at diminishing Russia and Russian-speaking people: “You Americans wanted us to be the way you describe us, but we have never been and never will be.” This episode also demonstrates how easily the idea of anti-Russian propaganda moves from being a question of international politics to a matter of personal dignity, self-esteem and social distinction. This alleged state-led anti-Russian campaign is related to the panic about the loss of culture and loss of roots.

This moral panic is exaggerated by a widespread sense that the Canadian state is involved in an anti-Russian campaign, but also in controlling citizens’ minds and bodies, an endeavour supported by public education that continues to generate non-thinking citizens. I find this idea of the dubious role of the state very important for understanding the cultural logic of immigrant parents who focus extensively on education. As I discussed above, during socialism, *kul’turnost’* served as a basis for social distinction, and the intelligentsia, which is sometimes interpreted as a Soviet middle class, was perceived to possess the set of skills and moral qualities that made them naturally “superior” to other members of the population. These skills and qualities were seen to result from hard work and personal qualities, and were interpreted as natural and well-deserved, a position that decreased the moral problem of class distinction. However, capitalist society offers a different model, where what people believe to be the result of individual effort and hard work depends to a large extent on economic resources available to families. Here, their model of social stratification based on cultural capital collides with the Western model, where economic capital has been central in the system of social stratification. Nevertheless, cultural logics remain powerful enough to survive the change of socio-economic systems in post-socialist societies and in the case of immigrants, even a move to another country. While my interlocutors see these differences and experience the effects of economic capital as a dominant factor in class hierarchy in Canada, my interlocutors continue to maintain and reproduce the familiar model of social distinction where education and moral values serve as a basis for social stratification and also set the boundaries of their social group.

Chapter 5. To Be Russian in Canada: Understanding and Performing Citizenship among Russian Canadians

Throughout the previous chapters, I referred to my informants predominantly as Russian-speaking immigrants. It is hard to dispute that their “immigrantness” is an important part of their identity, but this is also a situation in which I must be sensitive to my own conceptual language. Accentuating their place of origin in the Soviet Union and its successor states helps to explain how this group is different from other ethnic, social, and cultural groups living in Canada, but it also obscures the fact that for many of my respondents their legal status, social networks, and self-identification as Canadian citizens is at least as important.

In this chapter, I discuss Russian Canadians’ forms of political participation in the public sphere, including the various ways in which they engage in political activism, which I interpret very broadly as any form of interaction with the state and its representatives with intentions to initiate a certain change in its politics. I focus on their practices of citizenship in Canada, as well as formal and informal forms of participation through which they claim their political presence in their new society. The majority of their political activism I discuss in this chapter calls for a fairer treatment of Russia in Canadian politics and in the world; however, I argue that these forms of civic engagement simultaneously constitute a process through which Russian-speaking immigrants are learning to belong in Canadian society and establish their political presence. Their political activism should be understood as an attempt to become Canadian citizens, rather than just a claim of their loyalty to Russia. These types of belonging across two or more countries are part of a larger phenomenon of transnationalism. Changes in geographical mobility and communication technology allow immigrant groups today to remain increasingly attached to their homelands, and transnationalism has become an important concept in the citizenship and belonging debate in regard to immigrant population. Brettell and Danahay claim that “[b]ecoming a naturalized citizen does not necessarily obviate participation in the sending society, and immigrants often develop a dual sense of belonging” (Brettell and Danahay 2008: 5). The concept of transnationalism has received a lot of attention by social scientists who work with migrant groups (Basch et al. 2005, Vertovec 2010, Coutin 2007). Basch et al. (2005) define this as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link

together their societies of origin and settlement” (7). This process, understood as “a key manifestation of globalization” (Vertovec 2010: 2), points to how migrants become active members in several societies, and claim their loyalty to more than one state, participating in political, economic, cultural and social life across borders. While some scholars have pointed out that transnationalism as a concept cannot be applied equally to all migrants (Kivisto 2001; Waldinger, Fitzgerald 2004; Waldinger 2015), it is an important theoretical framework that allows researchers to avoid discussing migration as a one-way process of people leaving one country and assimilating into another. Recent studies also show that ties to homelands do not impede but rather enhance political participation of immigrants by stimulating their transnational identities (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012, Collet and Lien 2009, Chavez 2008, Panagakos 1998). In their research on Vietnamese and Indian immigrants in the United States, Brettell and Reed-Danahay claim that participation in ethnic and religious associations provide spaces where “immigrants can ‘become American’ in the sense of feeling that they belong” (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 200). My research with Russian-speaking immigrants shows similar tendencies where ethnic organizations become arenas for immigrants’ civic engagement and participation in the Canadian public sphere.

Russian Canadian community organizations serve as an important starting point for immigrants to claim their political presence in the mainstream society. Throughout their events, activists emphasize the need to mobilize as a strong ethnic community in order to be visible in Canadian society and have power to influence political decisions. In their logic, their visibility and political power depend on recognition of Russian Canadians as a legitimate group in Canadian society, and as a community with the right to their own memory and historical narrative. As I already discussed in the previous chapters, political mobilization of the Russian-speaking immigrant community was triggered by the growing political antagonism between Russia and the western countries, including Canada and the United States, over the Russian annexation of Crimea and occupation of Eastern Ukraine. This conflict increased the visibility of the already prominent Ukrainian diaspora in the Canadian public sphere which, from the perspective of Russian Canadians, has strong historical ties with the collaborationist and nationalist movements in Ukraine during World War II. The advocacy of the Ukrainian-Canadian community in support of Ukraine was, consequently, interpreted by some Russian-speaking immigrants I came to know as a major

assault on what they consider to be Russia's moral high ground in international affairs earned through its critical role in defeating Nazism. The so-called restoration of "historical justice" that Russian Canadian activists often understand in terms of whitewashing Russia and its historical predecessor, the Soviet Union, also drags them into "memory wars" with historical narratives that originate from the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, where the experience of socialism and in the 20th century is interpreted as Soviet occupation and Russian imperial domination. As I discussed in Chapter 2, one of the biggest concerns that triggered immigrant mobilization was a perceived historical revisionism and throughout their activism Russian-speaking immigrants struggled to protect their memory and historical narrative as righteous and legitimate. In this chapter, I address these concerns shared by Russian-speaking immigrants in the context of their claims for political participation and citizenship rights.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Russian immigration to Canada has a relatively long history, and there have been numerous examples of political organizations created by Russian immigrants, including Russian Farmer-Workers' Clubs, established in the 1930s and later closed by the government on the grounds of being pro-Communist. The Federation of Russian-Canadians was established in 1942 and was quite popular for a period but had only 800 members by the 1980s (see Jeletzky 1983, Pierce 2013). However, despite this history, I argue that the contemporary political activism of Russian Canadians should be addressed as a new phenomenon, as it is performed by recent immigrants, most of whom moved to Canada after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their practices and modes of political participation are not rooted in those organizations created by previous generations of immigrants. I never heard about the older organizations from my research participants; even if they knew about these historical examples of Russian-speaking immigrants' participation in the political life of Canada, they were not relevant for their own experience of political engagement. The only exception to this tendency is the Russian-Canadian Cultural Aid Society (RCCAS), which was founded in 1950 and occupied a staunch anti-Communist position. While RCCAS still exists and continues to be involved in the life of the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Toronto, their involvement in political activism today is minimal.

This chapter revisits some of the practices that I have already discussed in the previous chapters, but I approach them from a different angle, namely, as cultural forms

through which immigrants understand, perform, and negotiate their citizenship status. I examine how these practices reflect and shape immigrants' relationship to the state (Soviet, Russian, and Canadian), as well as how they claim their citizenship rights through these practices of political participation. The practices I discuss in this chapter include: public celebrations of the victory in World War II; political rallies making demands on the Canadian government to ameliorate relations with the Russian state; the establishment of formal organizations representing the Russian-speaking immigrant community; practices of writing open letters to the Canadian government and elected officials, aimed at expressing the position of the Russian Canadians on various matters of foreign and domestic politics; attempts to influence political decision making and promote their political agenda; and participation in formal modes of political activity, such as voting in local and federal elections in Canada and membership in political parties.

Citizenship and political participation have featured in social scientists' analysis of various aspects of belonging, civic engagement, and transnationalism among immigrant groups (Chang 2001, Stepick 2002, Brettell 2005, Bloemraad 2006, Yuval-Davis et al. 2006, Coutin 2007, Però and Solomos 2013, De Genova and Peutz 2010). From a legal point of view, the naturalization process of immigrants is the final step of crossing the national boundary. However, from an anthropological perspective, citizenship is not just a legal status, but also involves various aspects of participation and belonging. These aspects of citizenship have received a lot of attention in social science research, reflecting the problematic character of the relationship between various layers of citizenship. Even among those who have the legal status of a citizen, not all enjoy equal possibilities for participation and "cultural initiative and effective presence in the public sphere (the capacity to be 'listened to' there)" (Balibar 1988: 724, quoted in Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 3. See also Fassin and Mazouz 2009; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Coll 2010). Renato Rosaldo has famously argued that Latino and other immigrants of colour in the United States were often denied full citizenship. To problematize the notion of citizenship he introduced the concept of "cultural citizenship," which he defines as "the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one's right to belong, in the sense of participating in the nation-state's democratic processes" (Rosaldo 1994: 57). Aihwa Ong develops the idea of cultural

citizenship in her research with Southeast Asian immigrant communities in the United States, and her approach to this concept is quite different. Using the concept of “cultural citizenship” she refers to “the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory. Cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (Ong 1996). The concept of cultural citizenship shifts attention from legal requirements and definitions to practices people adopt to claim their belonging and negotiate their citizenship status, as well as their lived experiences. Kathleen Coll argues that the concept of cultural citizenship is productive for anthropologists “because it provides a frame of reference to study people’s experiences and interpretations of their own political, cultural, and economic position in the United States in the context of relationships of power, the U.S. state, and other groups in society” (Coll 2010: 8). Deborah Reed-Danahay and Caroline Brettell build on these approaches and formulate the idea of participatory citizenship, which implies that “citizenship is not simply a matter of rights granted to immigrants by the nation-state, but also entails forms of participation claimed and enacted by immigrants themselves in order to establish belonging” (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 4). Michal P. Garapich (2008) who studied Polish immigrants in London also argues that the institutional framework of the host country cannot be understood as the dominant factor shaping immigrants’ participation; instead he emphasizes the need to focus on “the ability of individuals within one group to contest a given social structure and dominant discourses” (126). In my research with Russian-speaking immigrants, I build on these ideas of cultural citizenship with the focus on their own interpretations of their position in the society, their claims for political participation and representation, and their engagement in the public sphere.

In this chapter, I discuss how Russian-speaking immigrants negotiate their multiple ways to belong. I consider how an allegiance to their new country, and how they embrace its citizenship practices, co-exists with their sense of belonging and allegiance to their homeland. Inclusion and equal participation in Canadian society is not always a straightforward process for Russian-speaking immigrants, which is partly a result of their transnational belonging in the world where multiple political allegiances are often seen as threatening and questionable. In my research, I focus not on state policies, but on

immigrants' perceptions and understandings of their citizenship status and practices associated with it. I study how they understand and exercise their rights as citizens and how they are looking for ways to become and express themselves as Canadians. The questions I ask here are to what extent they see themselves as Canadians and as Russians, what it means for them, and how they negotiate their notions of belonging and citizenship in their new country and the wider world.

Becoming Canadian Citizens

For the majority of Russian-speaking immigrants, receiving legal status as Canadian citizens is an important landmark in their life biographies. The process of applying for citizenship is quite straightforward for most of them and is not usually associated with many difficulties. They have to follow formal procedures and fulfill legal requirements, but, as a rule, this process is rather smooth and uneventful (in contrast to the process of applying for and receiving Permanent Residency, which is often unpredictable and complicated¹⁸). There are some people who receive Canadian passports and move back to their home countries or to a third country; for them, having a Canadian passport is primarily a matter of convenience and security. However, this attitude toward Canadian citizenship is rare, and most people I met in Toronto moved to Canada to live there, so a Canadian passport is an important aspect of their identity and self-perception. As one of my respondents told me once: "You just wait until you get a Canadian passport. When you travel with it for the first time, it's such a great experience. You feel like a different person." Another Russian-speaking woman whom I met in Toronto told me how she and her daughter went to Italy after they received their Canadian passports: "I just realized then that I could go online and book a flight. I did not need to plan, apply for a visa, worry about it. I could just go anywhere. And I went ahead and bought tickets for myself and my daughter, and we went to Italy during the winter break." Both

¹⁸There are a lot of steps to this process, and the rules change from year to year, but they usually include certain expectation of applicants' education level, professional experience, language proficiency, financial resources, and health. The process of applying for permanent residency involves the collection of various documents, passing English tests, and completing medical exams with doctors certified by the Canadian government. All these steps might be expensive and time consuming with no guarantee that an application will be approved by Canadian immigration authorities. The current immigration programs and requirements can be viewed at the Government of Canada website at <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada.html>.

statements emphasize the freedom of movement associated with the possession of a Canadian passport, which is particularly important for Russian citizens who need visas to go to almost all European countries as well as Canada and the United States. However, when I asked people directly if they thought of themselves as Canadians, the answer I heard most often was no. "I am a Russian, of course. It will never change," one of my informants said. This sentiment of not being "a real Canadian" is common, and while people have different reasons to say so, and different attitudes to this situation, it shows that their legal status in Canada does not come with an automatic disappearance of symbolic boundaries. People whom I met in Toronto were looking for ways to be included in the society, to belong there; they were attempting to overcome symbolic boundaries and become Canadians. In doing so, they often invoked the language of multiculturalism, in particular, when they referred to themselves as Russian Canadians.

There are different ways to belong, and not all Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada join, or are happy about, the forms of political involvement I discuss in this chapter. For many Russian-speaking immigrants this political activism on the part of the Russian-speaking community is dubious, unjustified, or even ridiculous, absurd, and politically dangerous. They find other ways to belong, to be included in the society, and these might take different forms and content. For others, however, the need to be accepted as a diasporic group whose voice is heard and respected becomes an essential part of their pursuit for full cultural citizenship. They struggle to protect their rights to remain Russians, but this struggle is informed by their Canadian experiences of participation and inclusion.

The majority of forms of political participation adopted by Russian Canadians are related in one way or another to improving the image of Russia in Canada and in the world. It is unsurprising that pro-Russia activists are often criticized by members of other groups in Canadian society, including other Russian-speaking immigrants who are opposed to the current Russian government and its politics. These critics often ask why pro-Russia activists would not simply go back to Russia if they are such patriots of their home country. This question, usually rhetorical and often aggressive, has become a cliché in public debates about the events organized by the Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada who support current Russian politics. I also heard similar questions from some people I met in Toronto during my research. Tania, whom I met for an interview, was actively involved in Russian-speaking

educational activities in Toronto, her children attended a Russian school, and they participated in various Russian-speaking extra-curricular activities. However, she did not participate in any forms of immigrant political activism. When I asked her if she ever attended the Immortal Regiment, she said that she knew about it, and had some friends who attended it, but she herself never did it. “I just do not understand them. We live in Canada, why would they march with Russian flags here?”, she said. Her response was very polite, while some other people would express their disapproval of political activism of Russian-speaking immigrants in much harsher terms, referring to them as “clowns” and “idiots” who support an oppressive regime in Russia, while living and raising their children in Canada. For example, in 2016 the Russian-language newspaper published in Toronto, *Nasha Canada* (*Our Canada*), posted a photo from the Immortal Regiment on their blog with a very offensive description of its participants (Nasha Canada 2016). This mass media outlet has also repeatedly criticized the Immortal Regiment through its articles and social media posts.

These questions and criticisms reveal how demonstrations in support of Russia or participation in highly contested celebrations of Victory Day are seen only as reflections of Russian-speaking citizens’ political allegiance to Russia and its current president, Vladimir Putin. However, I suggest that it is at least equally important to discuss these political practices from a different point of view, one that shows a more complex nature of their activism. This allows me to argue that Russian-speakers’ activism, in fact, grows out of their attempt to belong to Canadian society and, ultimately, to become Canadian, “entering the civic sphere from a position of difference” (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012). Their political activism is a manifestation of the fact that they have successfully internalized Canadian political and cultural discourse and Canadian practices of citizenship. I examine how cultural and political activism among Russian Canadians is informed by their understanding of what responsible citizenship is in the Canadian social and political context. This chapter follows the conceptual framework originally offered by Louis Althusser and developed by Judith Butler, who argue that political and social identities are not essential to any given group, but rather emerge situationally under certain repetitive circumstances when institutions and agents of power interpellate people as political subjects (Althusser 1970, Butler 1997). My argument in this chapter is that, while political activism among Russian Canadians is informed by their historical experience and class position, its main driving (“interpellating”)

force is multiculturalism as the dominant ideology of the Canadian state. Multiculturalism provides Russian-speaking immigrants with a model of political and cultural mobilization that emphasizes their national background and actualizes their belonging to imagined communities outside of Canada. However, the actual effect of this model is that it immerses Russian Canadians in the officially sanctioned culture of Canadian citizenship performance.

Political Mobilization

Until recently, the Russian-speaking community of Toronto kept a relatively low profile in the political landscape of the city and the province of Ontario; there was a network of Russian schools, grocery stores, and cultural centers and events that I described in Chapter 1, but they were fairly limited to the community itself. It was in 2014, when Russia became subjected to sharp international criticism and even ostracism – at least, in the Global North – that a strong demand for political mobilization emerged in the community. This process was a reaction to an international political situation and the dominant news coverage of Russia in English-language mass media as an aggressor state and a threat to global stability, which many of the immigrants interpreted as a threat to their own cultural identity and their very citizenship as Russian Canadians. Their political mobilization was, in turn, inspired by Canadian multiculturalism policies and the earlier mobilization in the older, and at that time much more organized, Ukrainian Canadian community that has been very pro-active in supporting Ukraine’s struggle against Russian annexation of Crimea and against pro-Russia separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

On March 23, 2014, a small group of Russian-speaking immigrants organized a rally in front of the Ontario Legislative Building in Toronto, where they protested against the Canadian support of what they saw as a spread of fascism in Ukraine. In particular, they protested against then Prime Minister Steven Harper’s decision to provide financial support to Ukraine, which was fueling, as they argued, a civil war unleashed by the nationalist-controlled government against the predominantly Russian-speaking population of Eastern Ukraine. Some of their claims regarding Ukraine and its government are often questionable and they might not always be true. However, what is important for my discussion here is that they believe that these claims are true, and these beliefs inform their activism. The rally

featured posters with slogans such as: “Harper gave \$220M to neo-Nazis! Taxpayers disagree” and a crossed-out swastika, as well as several national flags, including those of Russia, Ukraine, and Canada. After the rally, its participants marched along several streets in Downtown Toronto chanting various anti-fascist slogans and playing one of the most popular patriotic Soviet songs of World War II, “The Sacred War” (*Svyashchennaya Voyna*). This event took place in the wake of several much more massive pro-Ukraine rallies, which had been organized by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress beginning in January 2014 at the very same site followed by broad and positive coverage in the Canadian mass media. These latter rallies featured slogans such as “Solidarity with Ukraine,” “Crimea Today – Canadian Arctic Tomorrow,” and some of the posters portrayed Putin stylized as Hitler.

A few months later, on October 4, 2014, another event took place in Ottawa. Its organizers, a Facebook group called Russian Canada, appealed to Russian-speaking Canadians to rally against the war in Ukraine and publicly express their political demands to the Canadian government. The name of the rally was "Harper, stop supporting the war in Ukraine!" After the rally Russian Canada posted the following comment on their Facebook page:

There were 300 of us! 300 of not indifferent, involved Russian-speaking Canadians! We have said our word for all Canada to hear. All the world! I am proud of everyone who went out on that day in spite of rain. October 4, 2014. On this day, all of Canada found out that there is a Russian-speaking community here, and it is uniting. Russian-speaking people who live in three cities (Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto) came together in front of the parliament building in Ottawa to say aloud that we are against the war in Ukraine, against attacks on civilians in Donbass, against Steven Harper's politics towards Russia. October 4, 2014 is a historical day for the Russian-speaking community (*Russian Canada* Facebook page; translated from Russian).

The actual importance of the event, as the organizers suggested, was not so much in achieving political goals, but rather as a performance of unity among Russian Canadians, in which they exercised their conditional rights as Canadian citizens and legal residents to protest against the foreign policy of their own government. When preparing for this rally, one of its organizers was urging everyone to join and spread the word about the event:

Every single person is important... All of you have to understand it. This is our chance to voice our position... Canada is actively supporting the illegal Ukrainian government. Canada has the biggest Ukrainian diaspora and they are lobbying their interests. We are getting closer to the elections. We will voice our stance that there is a Russian-speaking community here, and we do not support the position Canada has taken in the conflict (*Russian Canada* Facebook page; translated from Russian).

A reference to the 2015 Canadian federal election was intentional, as those activists who were instrumental in mobilizing the community in the first place repeatedly emphasized the need to unite in order to influence the outcome of the elections in Canada. In March 2014, as Russian-speaking immigrants were discussing the news that the Canadian government decided to allocate \$220 million Canadian dollars in financial support to Ukraine, some members of the group called to organize “a pro-Russia lobby” in Canadian politics:

Without our own lobbying organization, we won't have any political influence. We are the only large immigrant community in Canada who do not have our own representative body which would lobby our interests on all levels. Indifference to politics among our fellow countrymen (*sredi nashih sootechstvennikov*) is a problem we need to overcome. [...] There are hundreds of thousands of us here. We are a constituency every political party has to consider (*Russian Canada* Facebook page; translated from Russian).

In this discussion, people shared their opinions on how the Russian-speaking community should unite. It is important to note here that some people specifically emphasized that they should not rely on any kind of cooperation with the Russian embassy in Canada. They further claimed that “[t]he only way for this organization to survive is to be organized by our people here and to work for our people.”

A similar idea of becoming a diasporic community powerful enough to influence Canadian politics was also important during the organization of the first Immortal Regiment procession in downtown Toronto. When its organizers were preparing the first event and were advertising it in the Russian-speaking community, they wrote:

When we are together and united, we become a powerful political force... May 8 at 1 pm, we will have a festive demonstration-parade in downtown Toronto. This is not a political demonstration. This is a festive demonstration of Russian-speaking Canadians and support of our motherland Russia. We

will declare there that Russian-speaking Canadians are against sanctions and that we are against demonizing Russia and against Russophobia. (Facebook page of the Russian Canada group; translated from Russian)

Even though these discussions about the need to organize were very active and often intense in this Facebook community, they did not lead to the establishment of any formal immigrant organization beyond their online community. This group and their leaders have remained very active online, and they later organized one of the largest Immortal Regiments in downtown Toronto, as well as several other events. Political rallies similar to those that took place in 2014 have, however, become less pronounced, and political activity of the Russian-speaking community has taken on other forms of participation.

In the fall 2014, the Russian Congress of Canada (RCC) was established by a different group of Russian-speaking activists. According to Svetlana Thomas, one of its first leaders, the idea of the organization belonged to Protopriest Vladimir from the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church. She recounted the early days of the Congress in an interview she gave in 2015 to the website *Russkii Vek* (Russian Century), established by the Russian Foreign Ministry (Efimova 2015). She said in the interview that events in Ukraine were their strongest motivation, and they planned to build an organization that would first and foremost be a political one. From the very beginning, the RCC chose a different form of political participation. Their main strategy has been writing open letters to the Canadian parliament and representatives of the Canadian government, as well as other public figures. The content of these letters was, however, not that much different from the message that previously organized political rallies were trying to deliver. In one of their first open letters, the RCC claimed that their aim was “to bring the truth about the civil war in Ukraine to the attention of all Canadians” (Russian Congress of Canada 2015). Their major concern was what they perceived to be one-sided coverage of the situation in the Donbass region, which led to the escalation of the military conflict through the material support Canada provided to Ukraine. One of the reasons for this one-sided account of the war in Ukraine was, as they believed, the strong lobbying by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress in the Canadian Parliament. They were seen to be responsible for steering Canadian foreign policy strongly in an anti-Russian direction. From the first days of my field research in Toronto, I could see that for many of my respondents the Ukrainian Canadian community was a major adversary in their political

struggles. Ironically, the Ukrainian Canadian community also provided them with a model that they have sought – explicitly or implicitly – to imitate. Consequently, the strong influence of the Canadian Ukrainian community on the Canadian government was seen as something Russian immigrants in Canada had to stand against, and the only way was to unite and present themselves as an organized community. This argument became increasingly reproduced as of early 2017, after Chrystia Freeland, a Canadian journalist and politician with a Canadian Ukrainian family background, was appointed the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau. Some Russian Canadian activists went as far as to publicly accuse Freeland, whose grandfather collaborated with the Nazi occupation regime in Ukraine during World War II, of taking an anti-Russian position precisely because of her family background.¹⁹ For example, just two months after her appointment, in March 2017, the Russian Congress of Canada published an open letter, in which it called on Prime Minister Trudeau to “question Minister Freeland’s integrity” because of her family background (Babalich 2017).

In addition to their concerns that the foreign policy of the Canadian Government contributed to the growth of international tensions, there was a more specific concern that Russian Canadians expressed in regards to what they perceived as a sustained and persistent anti-Russian campaign led by the Ukrainian Canadian community: namely, the marginalization of the Russian-speaking community in Canada itself. When community activists established the Russian Congress of Canada in October 2014, their very first public statement addressed the speech by Andrew Bennett, Canada’s Religious Freedom Ambassador. Bennet accused Russia of persecuting the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the rebel-controlled territories of Eastern Ukraine, as well as of systematic repressions of the Crimean Tatars based on their religion, Islam. In response, the Russian Congress of Canada claimed that Bennett’s speech was “deeply misleading and inaccurate” in his assessment of Russian politics towards various religious groups. More broadly, this letter addressed the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as well as describing the dynamics of the relations between the Russian immigrant community, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and the Canadian government – the relations, in which, according to the

¹⁹ For the biography of Michael Chomiak, the grandfather of Crystia Freeland, see Himka (1996).

statement, the Russian side was largely marginalized. The letter ended with the following claim: “Our community would welcome any opportunity for further discussion and dialogue, but so far, we have experienced only rejection, exclusion, and silence” (Russian Congress of Canada 2014). In my conversations with the people involved in the Russian Congress of Canada in 2017, they shared similar concerns about not being seen and heard by the mainstream Canadian society. This letter I quoted above explicates the logic and motivations of Russian Canadian activists: they perceive the criticism of Russian foreign policy, history, and culture as a threat to their own ability to perform their Russian Canadianness as a particular form of citizenship in a multicultural state. The last part of this statement is particularly important for my argument in this chapter, and in the next section I discuss how Canadian politics of multiculturalism and minority rights becomes a source of activism for Russian Canadians, and, at the same time, a source of their “rejection, exclusion, and silence” in Canadian society.

Canadian Multiculturalism and the Narrative of Recognition

Multiculturalism has been an official policy in Canada since the 1970s, especially after the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed in 1988, and it has since then become deeply embedded in the Canadian political identity. Multiculturalism policies “go beyond the protection of the basic civil and political rights guaranteed to all individuals in a liberal-democratic state, to also extend to some level of public recognition and support for ethnocultural minorities to maintain and express their distinct identities and practices” (Banting and Kymlicka 2006: 1). In this section, I discuss how these policies became the driving force behind the political activism of Russian Canadians who struggle against what they interpret as their exclusion from participation in Canadian society. This feeling of exclusion that many of my informants shared with me is hard to justify in real terms, as the Russian-speaking immigrant community is not subject to any consistent discrimination policy. Yet it makes more sense if we think about it in terms of a structural disjunction between the affirmative action policy which the Canadian state pursues towards many other ethnic minorities and a lack of affirmative action vis-à-vis the Russian Canadians who position themselves as an immigrant minority group. Natalia, who was actively involved in

an immigrant organization, complained to me how all other immigrant groups could organize and be proud of their origin, but Russians “can never say anything, whatever we do, we are always criticized from every direction. I feel like we are supposed to pretend we do not exist.” Following the ideology and rhetoric of multiculturalism, Russian Canadian activists expect the authorities and society to recognize them as a group with a shared identity, historical narrative, and memory. In practice, they often experience a situation when they as a group are being constrained to the private sphere, while other ethnocultural groups remain visible in public space and discourses. Participation in the public sphere is a particularly important aspect of the process “by which immigrant newcomers develop a sense of belonging and become engaged citizens” (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012: 8). A lack of access, real or anticipated, to the public sphere becomes, therefore, linked to a lack of access to civic participation and cultural citizenship by the group.

Before discussing how Russian Canadians seek to create spaces of public recognition and political participation, I will address the politics of history and how it affects cultural citizenship of various groups, including my research participants. One particular manifestation of the politics of history is the practice of historical apologies by state institutions, which are considered within a broader framework of reparation politics. While there are different reasons behind the rise of apologies in the recent years, one of them is “the increased political mobilization and visibility of minorities and oppressed groups wanting to have justice to their collective memories and experiences of the past” (Löfström 2011). The politics of apology and redress is also often seen as a way of democratizing citizenship, orienting it towards equality and equal opportunity for political participation (Gibney 2008; Kymlicka and Bashir 2008; James 2015). The Canadian government has been in the forefront of the politics of apology and supported a recognition framework through which apologies were offered to various groups who suffered systemic injustices in various periods of time, including Chinese Canadians, Japanese Canadians, Punjabi Canadians, people identifying as LGBTQ2S, and most recently, Indigenous peoples (Wakeham 2012; James 2015). The role of such official apologies has been studied extensively, and it has been argued that they can serve as acts of symbolic inclusion in the national community by acknowledging collective memories and experiences of people who were previously marginalized (Barkan and Karn 2006; Gibney et al. 2008; Nobles 2008).

The politics of historical apology is further expanded in Canada by its self-image as a benevolent state and a space of tolerance and refuge (Failler 2018; Nijhawan et al. 2018). This aspect is particularly important for my argument here, as this is exactly where tensions arise for Russian Canadians. In some situations, this seemingly laudable effort to provide refuge to people who have suffered injustice in other parts of the world transforms into rhetoric that is interpreted as exclusionary by other groups (Stolcke 1995; Löfström 2011). As Jan Löfström claims, “[p]roper’ citizenship is thereby connected to possession of particular cultural heritage,” while politics of history endorse certain interpretations of the past and diminish the significance of others (Löfström 2011). The creation of a monument dedicated to “Victims of Communism” in Ottawa, Canada, is one quintessential example of such a sense of exclusion. This monument, officially titled “Victims of Communism – Canada, a Land of Refuge”, has been under discussion since 2007, and while there has been considerable controversy regarding the construction of the monument, including its design, location, and its very appropriateness in Canada (Dolgoy and Elżanowski 2018), Heritage Canada’s website lists it as an upcoming project. Heritage Canada claims that this monument “will recognize Canada’s international role as a place of refuge for people fleeing injustice and persecution and honour the millions who suffered under communist regimes” (Government of Canada n.d.). The monument is developed in cooperation with the organization Tribute to Liberty, whose website provides information about the monument and reasons why it should be built in Canada. Tribute to Liberty claims that there are over eight million people living in Canada who arrived from countries where they suffered under communism, and Russians are included in this list of those “affected by communism in their homelands” (Memorial to the Victims of Communism 2016).

Strikingly, the proposed monument is not seen in the same light by everyone in the Russian-Canadian community. I met with Olga, an activist in the Russian-speaking immigrant community, for an interview in May 2017, when the topic of the monument frequently appeared in the mass media following the approval of its final design and location. Olga referred to the monument simply as “unprecedented idiotism.” She mentioned the monument when she started discussing how important it was for the Russian-speaking community to unite and to become a strong diasporic group. For her, as well as a lot of other people, this monument was another example of how her own history was being distorted and

forgotten. As I discussed in the chapter on history and memory in the Russian-speaking community, Russian speaking immigrants felt threatened by the wide acceptance of a version of history which differed dramatically from their own historical narrative, one which emphasized positive aspects of the Soviet Union and denied its image of an oppressor state and an occupying force, promoted by the monument.

The Immortal Regiment, which I discussed in Chapter 2, is a one of the biggest events the Russian-speaking community organizes every year in Toronto. In the context of the current discussion on citizenship and the politics of history, the popularity of this event in the Russian-speaking community can be explained by the importance people attach to the recognition of their version of history in the society. This situation illuminates how historical accounts can be contested and how the question of reparations is politically fraught, especially in regard to a mobile community that goes from considering itself to be in the majority to becoming a minority. People who struggle for recognition typically belong to marginalized groups whose voices are excluded from grand narratives, and their ability to tell their story depends on their power to challenge those narratives. In Canada, a place defined by the politics of multiculturalism, alternative versions of history told by marginalized groups and immigrants are receiving recognition, and in the case of Russian Canadians, they struggle for their right to tell their story. The difference, however, is that their historical narrative was dominant in the Soviet Union and is now dominant in Russian political and cultural discourses. Their struggle to have their historical narrative accepted by Canadian society is still important for this group because their access to cultural citizenship depends on their ability to have their collective memory and historical experience recognized in Canada as legitimate. In this context, it is useful to discuss how the increase in the importance of historical reparation is connected to the concept of cultural citizenship. Some researchers have claimed that “these apologies... are perceived to reaffirm the social and cultural citizenship of the affected groups” (Nijhawan et al. 2018). Jan Pakulski argued in 1997 that “[t]he claims for cultural citizenship involve not only tolerance of diverse identities but also—and increasingly—claims to dignifying representation, normative accommodation, and active cultivation of these identities and their symbolic correlates” (Pakulski 1997: 77). Cultural rights became an important aspect of full-scale citizenship, and this expansion of the citizenship domain is particularly visible in conjunction with the spread of multiculturalism

policies. As Kathleen Coll argues in her book on Latina immigrants and citizenship, narratives of personal and collective pride and self-esteem helped this group to resist exclusionary rhetoric directed at marginalized groups (Coll 2010: 10). She discusses activities by these immigrant women as “demands for social and cultural respect” (13), which constitutes them as active participants in political and social life and challenges our understanding of citizenship.

While Russian Canadians constitute a privileged group in Canadian society in a lot of respects, their perceived lack of access to the public sphere presents a major area of concern for them. In the discourse of Canada as a protector of the oppressed and the country where victims of oppression find their refuge and a new home, Russian Canadians find themselves in a challenging situation. This discourse of inclusion, actively pursued by the Canadian government and various groups of civil society, is interpreted by Russian Canadians as exclusionary. This discourse is built as a dialog between Canada and members of those groups who suffered and finally found refuge in Canada. State institutions acknowledge suffering of certain groups and promise them safety and recognition, while victims share their stories of oppression and express their gratitude to Canada. Discussing refugees in France, Miriam Ticktin shows how humanitarian exceptions to otherwise very strict immigration policies provide legal residency to people with life-threatening diseases or victims of human trafficking and gendered violence and constitute what she calls “the morally legitimate suffering body” (Ticktin 2011: 3). A suffering body becomes desirable for both migrants and those who are involved in their care and support, and this past suffering creates moral legitimacy for the migrants and “mark the French as benevolent, as civilized, as humane” (24). While Miriam Ticktin argues that one of the main negative consequences of such humanitarian policies is the maintenance of status quo in politics and of a second-class status for immigrants who can never become equal, the situation in Canada is somewhat different.

The idea of suffering is important for a lot of immigrant groups in Canada. Even though their legal status does not usually depend on their continuous positionality as victims of violence, their access to cultural citizenship and political participation does. As Ann Rigney argues, “the Canadian memoryscape seems largely populated by a multiplicity of distinct ethnic groups each laying claim to a distinct history of victimhood under the over-

arching umbrella of Canadian respect for human rights” (Rigney 2018: 455). A mass media image of Andrea Khanjin, a Canadian politician, elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in 2018, and a member of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario provides an interesting example of how this theme of victimhood gets exploited (Khanjin 2018). Ms. Khanjin was born in Moscow in 1987 and moved to Canada with her grandparents when she was four years old, several months after the Soviet Union collapsed. In an interview, she tells about “suppression and lack of religious freedoms” in the country that pushed her family to immigrate (Csillag 2018); in another example, journalists emphasize that her family “fled the then Soviet Union and communism” (MacDonald 2020). This focus on her past suffering suggests that a person who fled communism and suppression is perceived in the society as more “morally legitimate” compared to those who did not share similar experiences.

It is difficult for a lot of Russian Canadians to find their place in this dialogue. Few of them are willing to embrace the symbolic position of victims whose cultural citizenship is being reaffirmed through this discourse; many others whose identity is more rooted in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian history and culture interpret the political logic that finds its manifestation in the monument to the Victims of Communism as hostile towards their group since this logic places them in the category of perpetrators. This understanding leads to a fear that, if they do not challenge this distribution of roles, they will be forced to accept that they are excluded from cultural citizenship. While my informants did not explicitly discuss their political mobilization in these terms, it was quite clear from their activities that they do recognize the exclusionary potential of Canadian political discourse, and it motivates them to challenge it. They do not attempt to position themselves as victims, but they do challenge their perceived image as perpetrators, an image which is actively reinforced by the Ukrainian Canadian community and other Eastern European groups in Canada. One of the participants of the Immortal Regiment told me: “They are telling now that the U.S. won World War II. What happens next? Are they going to tell that Russians dropped the bomb on Japan?” World War II remains the most important source of national pride and moral legitimacy of their claims for their historical narrative to be recognized and supported by the larger society, but there are many other aspects of political and cultural discourses where they struggle to have their voices heard, including in the current political conflict between Russia and western countries, including Canada.

The image of Russia as an aggressor is reflected not only in the construction of the monument I discussed above, but also in other political decisions (for example, the Canadian government's official recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide of the Ukrainian people). Analyzing memory and citizenship in the Armenian diaspora in Canada, Duygu Gül Kaya emphasizes that the Canadian context is quite different from a lot of other countries in that “[i]n Canada, the liberal model of cultural recognition allows Armenians, much like other ethnic and/or diaspora groups, to preserve their ethnic identity and their ethnic memory, albeit within clearly defined boundaries and closely regulated norms (Bannerji 2000, Dhamoon 2013)” (Gül Kaya 2018). These boundaries and norms do not currently allow Russian Canadians to have their group experience and their own memory recognized and to claim a place in Canadian society that many of them are striving for. They struggle for their right to participate in Canadian society as a diasporic group, but their association with what is perceived in the Western society as an aggressor state limits their ability to fully participate in the same way as most other communities do. In the case of the Russian-speaking diaspora, we can observe that in their political participation they strive to be included in the existing “narrative of Canadian benevolence and inclusiveness” (Gül Kaya 2018), but their particular situation makes it quite complicated for them to fit into this narrative, which has previously placed the Soviet Union and Russia (both in a capacity of the successor of the Soviet regime, but also as a new dictatorship of President Putin who poses a threat to democracy and peace around the world²⁰) in the position of a perpetrator and an aggressor.

In this context, members of the Russian-speaking diaspora find themselves in a situation where, in order to preserve their collective ethnic identity, they have to oppose the existing official narrative while preserving their status of loyal citizens and emphasizing their allegiance to Canada. As a result, their activists feel the urge to change these norms and to diminish the credibility of the groups that position themselves as victims of socialism in order to fight the image of Russia as an aggressor and perpetrator. There are different groups

²⁰ This convergence of the Soviet legacy and contemporary Russian politics is very clear in the speeches of MPs when they discuss Bill C-306 as a way to recognize the deportation of the Crimean Tatars as genocide. One example is a speech by Conservative MP Tom Kmiec: “[t]he crime of the Holodomor, the recent invasion by Russian military forces, and the illegal occupation of Crimea, as well as the massive deportation of Tatars in 1944, are all part of the Soviet pattern of behaviour we are seeing today in the Russian Federation whereby only force matters.” (Bill C-306 2016).

in Canada who could relate to the status of “victims of socialism,” including some Russians, but the Ukrainian diaspora is the largest, the most powerful, and considering the current open conflict between Russia and Ukraine, it became the main symbolic adversary for Russian-speaking community activists I met in Toronto.

In their struggle for recognition, Russian Canadian activists draw connections to other groups whose status is not contested in Canada. One example is the victims of the Holocaust who are often commemorated in the context of celebrating the end of World War II and the role of the Soviet Union in freeing the world from fascism. For example, celebrations of Victory Day in the Russian neighborhood of Toronto, which take place in the Earl Bales Park, include a ceremony of laying flowers at the Holocaust memorial located in this park. Another example is the tradition of displaying a variety of flags during the Victory Day celebration, emphasizing the fact that various nations were fighting fascism together, and that they still stand together. Any event organized by the Russian-speaking community in Toronto usually includes national flags of Canada and Russia, but the Immortal Regiment also includes flags of other Allied nations who fought in World War II. These flags are usually brought by people originating from those countries; they are always encouraged and celebrated by the organizers who interpret the variety of flags as a sign of their recognition beyond the Russian-speaking community. The most interesting example of this was probably during the Immortal Regiment that took place in May 2019. The organizers, a group called Russian Heritage of Canada, posted the following press release after the event:

This year, several other communities were inspired by the idea to march with portraits of their dead ancestors and they joined our Regiment. Groups of the Greek, Armenian, and Assyrian communities with portraits of those killed in 1915-1923, the Association of Jewish Veterans, representatives of China, India, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Rwanda carrying portraits of their relatives killed in wars or genocides participated in our procession on May 5. The Yazidiz and Rohingya communities, whose people are being cruelly killed in genocides nowadays, also joined the Immortal Regiment. In addition to people from the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Baltic countries and Central Asian countries, other communities participated in the procession including Poles, Bulgarians, Arabs, Serbs, Cubans, Venezuelans, Kenyans, as well as other nations. In Toronto, the most diverse city in the world, the Immortal Regiment became a centerpiece that united people from all over the world.

For the first time, representatives of the legislative branch of government took part in the Immortal Regiment, - one of the Ontario MPPs joined the procession. Prior to the event, its organizers managed to have our press release officially distributed by the Canadian Association of Journalists, Press, and the Mass Media.²¹ Over 800 Canadian mass media received the information about the Immortal Regiment, its goals and traditions. A lot of representatives of the mass media attended the event, filmed it, and interviewed its participants. The politics of openness that were chosen by the organizers have positively influenced the image of the Russian community in the eyes of Canadians (Russian Heritage of Canada 2019).

The reference to victims of various genocides is particularly interesting here, as it is closely related to the event that happened a few days after the Immortal Regiment was held in 2019. On May 9, 2019, Ontario's Bill 97, an Act to Proclaim Genocide Awareness, Commemoration, Prevention and Education Month, passed through the second reading in the Ontario Parliament (Babikian 2019). This bill was introduced by Aris Babikian, an Ontario Progressive Conservative MPP. The bill proposed to expand a list of genocides already recognized by Ontario and Canada and to recognize the genocides committed against the following groups: the Assyrians-Chaldeans-Syriacs, the Pontian Greeks, the residents of Nanjing, the Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka, the Yazidis in Iraq, Christian populations of Iraq and Syria, and the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. The following day, a representative of a Russian-speaking immigrant organization published the following post on their Facebook page:

Two Canadian organizations, "United Communities of Canada" and "Russian Heritage of Canada," were officially acknowledged for the first time during the session of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which took place today, on May 9, 2019... Our two organizations, which organized the Immortal Regiments in Toronto and Ottawa, managed to have the reference to the Holodomor as a genocide of Ukrainians removed from the bill [Bill 97]!!! Our organizations promised to support Bill 97, which has a strong opposition, on the condition that it will not contain a mention of the Holodomor as a genocide of the Ukrainians. The MMP who introduced the bill came to our Immortal Regiment. He recognized how strong and friendly our community is, and how many of us there are, and he immediately agreed to our conditions and accepted our support!... The Russian community has demonstrated that we are strong! We will be respected and regarded! We have laid the

²¹ It is not clear what association they refer to, and there is no link to the press release that was distributed.

foundation for it! (Русская община показала, что она сильная! Именно поэтому с нами будут считаться и уважать! Начало этому положено!).

The following day, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) published a “Statement on Ontario Bill 97 and the Holodomor” by UCC CEO Ihor Michalchyshyn, where he expressed his concerns that organizers of the Immortal Regiment in Toronto were “actively bragging on social media that they worked to remove reference to the Holodomor from Bill 97” (Michalchyshyn 2019). He further demanded that MPP Babikian clarify his relationship with these organizations and what role they played in Bill 97. The statement concluded with the following appeal: “We are extremely troubled by attempts to whitewash the horrendous crimes of Communism and present Soviet totalitarianism in a positive light. Denial of the genocide of the Ukrainian people – lines up with the official Russian state view of the Holodomor.” It is interesting, however, that the recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide was not a subject of Bill 97. It had previously been recognized as a genocide in 2008 at the federal level (Bill C-459 “An Act to establish a Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (“Holodomor”) Memorial Day and to recognize the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33 as an act of genocide”). In the first reading of Bill 97, Holodomor was mentioned in the list of genocides already recognized in Canada and/or Ontario, and in the second reading, this mention was removed. This small change was seen, however, as an important achievement by the leaders of the Russian-speaking community in Ontario and as an important violation of historical justice by the leaders of the Ukrainian community.

There was no further update to this episode at the time I wrote this chapter (in September 2019), and Bill 97 is currently being reviewed by the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. However, I found this situation to be very interesting for my current discussion, as it brings together several aspects of Russian Canadian political activism, including adversarial relationships with the Ukrainian community, and clearly demonstrates their desire for recognition as a community with the right to their own history and memory. In a similar way, the Russian Congress of Canada wrote an open letter to the Canadian parliament to reject Bill C-306, an Act to establish a Crimean Tatar Deportation (“Sürgünlik”) Memorial Day and to recognize the mass deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944 as an act of genocide (Russian Congress of Canada 2016). The letter was published in November 2016, and the bill was defeated at the second reading in December 2016. It is

difficult to say if the letter by the Russian Congress of Canada played any role in this outcome, but these two situations show the dynamics of attempts by the Russian-speaking community to influence Canadian politics, which transitioned from writing letters to becoming more actively engaged in establishing cooperation with certain members of parliament. It is still difficult to say whether they have been particularly successful in reaching their goals, but they are actively looking to expand the forms and formats of their political participation as an organized community.

Russian Canadian activists perceive that they are often treated differently from other communities both by mainstream Canadian media and politicians. We can argue that the reason for this is the nature of their political demands, which often support the denial of historical facts, as is the case of the Holodomor. However, the question I seek to answer here is not the reasons why their political demands are denied and whether they are legitimate or not, but rather what effect this continuous exclusion has on their political participation and civic engagement, as well as on their sense of belonging. They engage in political practices which are rooted in principles of multicultural politics and are successfully pursued by other groups in Canadian society, but their efforts are most often met with criticism and accusations of them being threats to Canadian democracy, or simply with disregard. As members of the Russian Congress of Canada wrote in one of their open letters:

It should be noted that it is a widespread and perfectly democratic practice by various ethnic communities in Canada to communicate their concerns to the government. We do not understand why the RCC is singled out and accused of wrongdoing when other ethnic organizations do it openly (Russian Congress of Canada 2019).

In my interview with Anna, one of the organizers of the Immortal Regiment, in 2018, she told me that things were getting better:

Everything has changed now to the better. There is less Russophobia now. Even some Russophobes who used to write bad things about Russia, about the Immortal Regiment, became our sponsors this year. We were very surprised, but we agreed. I don't think they completely changed, but I think they see that the society is changing, and they are trying to change too. I think we won.

However, shortly after this interview, it was announced that the War Museum in Ottawa prohibited the celebration of the Victory Day on its grounds (I discussed this episode

in more detail later in this chapter), which suggests that Anna was probably too optimistic in her interpretation of the situation.

This different treatment is discussed not only in official communications, but also on a personal level. “Why can’t we be just like any other diaspora? Like Italians? They just say ‘Yes, we are Italians,’ and everyone is happy, but for us there is always something else,” complained an activist of the Russian-speaking community of Toronto when I attended one of their meetings. I heard this comparison with the Italian diaspora on several occasions, and I found it particularly interesting, probably because I did not expect any proximity between Italian and Russian Canadians. I suggest that the Italian community appeal to Russian Canadians as they perceive them as an example of the most neutral diasporic community with whom they do not have any potential tensions, and which has a strong visibility in Canadian society.²² This choice of a model diaspora seems to reflect their need to be “normal,” to be included, and to belong. In the end, their activism is not about Ukraine or Russia; they want to belong in Canada, and not to choose between hiding their Russian origin and bringing public censure upon themselves when not hiding it.

Political Discourse

Starting with political rallies in 2014, Russian-speaking immigrants have been continuously positioning themselves as Canadian citizens. They have skillfully deployed the political repertoire of democratic societies and state policy of multiculturalism in Canada. While this political mobilization began spontaneously, affected by the momentum of the “desire for the political” (Dzenovska and De Genova 2018), the form of discourse was deliberate. We can assume that the leaders of the community were familiar with the inner workings of the Canadian social and political system, and they have been very consistent in using a discourse that reflects this. From the first events they organized in 2014 to the current open letters they write in 2019, they routinely refer to their community members as Russian Canadians or Russian-speaking Canadians. In their open letters to the Canadian parliament and mass

²² This image of Italian Canadians is not historically correct; in particular, during World War II Italians were treated as enemy aliens and interned (Iacovetta et al. 2000). In conversations with Russian-speaking immigrants, however, this aspect of Italians’ experiences in Canada has never been mentioned, and they only emphasized their positive image in the country.

media, they have always emphasized that they are Canadian citizens. They routinely refer to the Canadian constitution and to the politics of multiculturalism to substantiate their demands. There are several examples taken from open letters written by the Russian Congress of Canada:

As a Canadian organization, the RCC strives to represent our community's interests before the Government of Canada, as is our democratic right. We also seek respect for Russian history, culture and traditions, in accordance with the fundamental principles of Canadian society. Canada is a free and multicultural country where the freedom of speech and expression is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Russian Congress of Canada 2019).

For the majority of Canadians who came to this country from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, it is common to commemorate the fallen in World War II and celebrate the Victory Day as a sacred holiday... Each year, all levels of authorities are bombarded with defamatory letters and petitions that insult our veterans, volunteers and organizations. The end goal of these campaigns is to strip the Canadian citizens of Soviet descent of our constitutional rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, to silence our community and to besmirch the memories of our veterans and heroes... Thankfully, we live in a country that has democratic principles and protects the human rights of its citizens, including freedom of assembly, association and speech. These basic freedoms are enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And while we as Canadian citizens feel secure that our rights are protected by the state, we find it troubling that assaults on our ability to exercise them continue (Russian Congress of Canada 2017a).

One particular example of such a political action was a petition addressed to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism in 2019. While it was not initiated by the RCC, the council was important in mounting community support behind it, and eventually it was signed by almost 3,000 people. The subject of the petition was a conflict between the Russian-speaking community and the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. For several years, the Russian-speaking community in Ottawa organized May 9 celebrations (to commemorate the end of World War II for the Soviet Union) at the Canadian War museum, but in 2019, the museum sent a letter to the organizers of the Victory Day celebrations to inform them that "the museum is no longer the appropriate venue for the [Victory Day] event." The museum also planned to remain closed to the public on May 9, 2019. The Museum's refusal to host the event was most likely the result of the previous year's incident during the celebration at

the museum, when a pro-Ukrainian activist provoked a conflict with Russian-speaking participants at the event. I will quote a part of this petition here to demonstrate how Russian-speaking activists position themselves as Canadian citizens with full rights and obligations, and how they appropriate the language of Canadian political discourse:

We consider the ban against the celebration of VE Day by the War Museum, an organization funded by taxpayers, to be unacceptable. This is: [a] flagrant violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights, namely the Right to Peaceful Assembly; [a] flagrant violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights, namely the Freedom of Speech; [t]argeted discrimination of vulnerable social groups, namely World War II veterans - who fought alongside Canada and its allies - and the people who honour those veterans; [t]argeted discrimination of ethnic groups, namely immigrant populations from the countries which were allied with Canada in the Second World War. It is tradition for these groups to celebrate VE Day on 9th of May.

We are asking the Government of Canada to defend the constitutional right of World War II veterans, and the communities which surround them, to celebrate VE Day in the form of organized gatherings in the Canadian War Museum, at a reasonable time, on May 9th, 2020 and the years thereafter. In addition, we ask that the museum not be closed to the public on May 9th, preventing such gatherings (Ottawa Russian Speaking Community 2019).

Persons who wrote this letter skillfully used political language to present themselves as citizens who can demand certain actions from their government, by referring to themselves as taxpayers, and by demonstrating knowledge of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. At the same time, they borrow from the language of human rights activists, referring to the discrimination of vulnerable social groups, ethnic groups, and war veterans. They also repeatedly refer to the fact that Canada and the Soviet Union were allies in the war to further justify their demands and create an image of deserving Canadian citizens. It is also interesting to look at the comments left by those who signed the petition:

Any person in Canada – whether they are a Canadian citizen, a permanent resident or a newcomer – has the rights and freedoms contained in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of expression - are the fundamental freedoms and democratic rights that Canadian War Museum seems to willfully ignore.

I am signing this petition because that museum is carrying the memory of humanity for fighting Nazism and fascism cultivated by Hitler in Germany. 27 million Soviet people died in that war. Canadians have to understand these

sacrifices. Atrocities of the war maybe repeated, if people don't remember.
The museum carries on that memory through generations. USA AND
CANADA WERE ALLIES WITH SOVIET UNION DURING THAT WAR.

Preserving my heritage is important right of a human! These actions are
violating my constitutional rights!

The Canadian War Museum in Ottawa violated my civil rights and prevented
Victory Day celebration on May 9th, 2019 by closing the museum.

People who signed the letter and left their comments also used the same rhetorical
devices to substantiate their demands. As in this comment, others also invoked the violation
of their rights. The fact that the Soviet Union and Canada were allies in the war was also
something people considered important to mention in this petition. Their use of the language
demonstrates that Russian Canadians are learning to use the language of civic participation,
through which they aim to attain cultural citizenship and get involved in the public sphere.

There are a lot of different ways for immigrants to negotiate their belonging, to find
their place in their new country, as well as in their country of origin. There is no single way
for any immigrant population to approach this question, and Russian-speaking immigrants in
Canada are no exclusion. They find different ways to live in Canada, to become Canadians,
or to remain Russians. Political activism of some Russian Canadians I discuss in this chapter
is only one way to negotiate their belonging, and it is not supported by all Russian-speaking
immigrants in Canada. For some people, however, political activism as an ethnic group is an
important way to participate in the Canadian society and to attain cultural citizenship.

The military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as described in chapters 1 and 2,
did serve as a trigger of political mobilization among this group of people. A lot of them
genuinely care about people suffering from the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. They regularly
organize fund-raising campaigns to send humanitarian aid to the affected regions, and they
gather together to commemorate victims of this war. Some of the Russian-speaking
Canadians have families and friends living in the conflict-affected areas of Ukraine.
However, I want to emphasize here that a peace in Ukraine, which they were rallying for,
was neither the ultimate goal of this political mobilization, nor its driving force. This
community struggles for political recognition, and they struggle for their belonging.

Being able to be proud of their country of origin is essential to their ability to mobilize as a diasporic community, and for their ability to remain Russian Canadians and for some, not to assimilate in the Canadian society. Assimilation might be desired by some people, but not by everyone; we also need to consider that a full assimilation is not always possible for first-generation immigrants even if they desire it. As I discussed in the previous chapter on education, maintaining Russian cultural competencies is particularly important for many Russian immigrants. As the sociologist Elke Winter (2018) discusses in her research conducted in 2013 on the naturalization process in Canada, highly skilled immigrants of any racial and cultural background often feel that their integration in the Canadian middle class is easy and straightforward due to their education and economic success. However, her research also showed that “some elements of the naturalization process actively produce differentiated citizenship both within the group of newcomers undergoing naturalization, as well as between new Canadians of certain ethnocultural backgrounds on the one hand, and, on the other, “old stock” Canadians, as the former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper notoriously called them” (Winter 2018: 234).

The question “where are you from?” is one of the most typical small-talk lines, but it is also a big trigger of insecurities. For Russian speakers, accent remains a feature that always gives away their “foreignness,” and it is hard to avoid giving details of where one is “actually” from without being rude to the person who asks the question. This question is perceived neutrally by some immigrants, but it causes strong reactions among others. “Why does everyone need to ask me where I am from? I am so fed up with this question!” – complained a Russian-speaking woman when we talked about her experience in Canada. Most Russian-speaking immigrants do not try to hide that they are Russians (although, there are some exceptions), but many of them do not like the way Russia as a nation is perceived in contemporary Western societies. Russian-speaking immigrants face negative information about Russia on a daily basis, and it leads them to believe that this negativity is transferred to them and their children. In the beginning of Chapter 4 on education, I described a conflict between a group of Russian immigrants in Toronto and a radio station that shared some unfavorable facts about Russia. Russian-speaking immigrants were disturbed by a strong criticism of the Russian government and its foreign and domestic policies in Canadian mass media, a criticism that they interpreted as a form of Russophobia, leading them to questions

of how this political atmosphere would influence them and their children. “Our children will live here! Will they be second-class citizens?” asked one of the participants of this discussion. Another person claimed that Canadians “wanted us to be the way you describe us, but we have never been and never will be.” The reason I invoke this story again here is that it illustrates not only attitudes towards education as I discussed in the previous chapter, but it also reveals the need for recognition that many members of this community share. They are striving to be accepted in the mainstream society on their terms, and they are looking for ways to reach their goal.

On October 4, 2017, *The New York Times* published an article titled “Canadian Lawmakers Say Pro-Russia Group Tried to Derail Sanctions Law.” This article addressed the story about the new legislation that would allow Canada to sanction any foreigners engaged in corruption and human rights violation. This legislation, Bill S-226, Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, also called the Sergei Magnitsky Law, was a response to the death of the Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in a Moscow prison, and was believed to target primarily Russian officials and businesses suspected of corruption and money-laundering. Magnitsky uncovered a large-scale tax fraud that involved Russian authorities, and he was later arrested and died under suspicious circumstances in jail. Similar legislation had been passed in Europe and the United States, so Canada was following an international pattern. The article in *The New York Times* focused on the criticism of the Sergei Magnitsky Law and attempts to disrupt its adoption by the Russian Congress of Canada which submitted a petition to Canadian MPs asking them to withdraw their support for the proposed legislation. Quoting several MPs as well as a foreign policy expert and a human rights activist, the article accused the Congress of taking orders from Moscow and dismissed as “pure nonsense” the claims of the RCC leadership that their organization was a grassroots organization representing the Russian community in Canada (Levin and Becker 2017). The NYT journalists wrote, “[t]he pro-Russia group denies any connection to the Kremlin, but lawmakers say the push fits a pattern of Moscow-backed interference in the West.” They also quoted James Bezan, a Conservative MP, who said that “[t]hese groups are trying to disrupt and discredit this legislation in Canada and democracy within our own borders.”

This article caused a lot of resentment among certain groups of the Russian-speaking community, in particular those who were involved in writing this letter to the Canadian

parliament. The RCC published an open letter to reply to the accusations made against them by the journalists and politicians: “Our statutory activities are in no way different from similar activities of other ethno-cultural organizations across Canada. We resolutely object to all insinuations representing the Russian Congress of Canada as an organization taking orders from the Russian government to disrupt and discredit Canadian legislation and democracy” (Russian Congress of Canada 2017b). As this letter suggests, Russian Canadians are struggling for recognition and political participation, but also, in the end, for a normalization of their community in Canada, for their right to be “in no way different.”

A lengthy article discussing this situation was published in the Russian newspaper *Komsomolskaia Pravda* (Azaeva 2017). Its author was a well-known member of the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Toronto, Evelina Azaeva. She discussed the situation where the Russian-speaking community became the target of criticism after they wrote the letter against the Magnitsky Law. She describes the letter as “a request, a humble petition [not to further worsen relations between Russia and Canada].” She further continues to complain about the reaction of Canadian MPs who treated this letter as the Kremlin’s attempts to influence Canadian politics:

If only Canadian MPs just visited the Russian Congress, who are their electorate. Just came there and asked: “Why do you, guys, keep writing letters to us? First about Christia Freeland, then about the Magnitsky Act, then about Ukraine? What makes you do all this?” We would tell them everything. We would tell them how we were crying in 2014, when the war started in Donbass where a lot of our relatives live, how we mourned people burned alive in Odessa, how we were getting upset reading all these non-stop speeches against Russia in newspapers and suddenly found ourselves in a hostile country (Azaeva 2017).

In the end, she quotes Irina Bronnik from the Russian Congress of Canada who said that they invited MPs to visit the Congress, to take part in their Victory Day celebrations, but nobody came: “they do not see us, Russian immigrants, do not want to notice us. [...] Even though we are a registered organization comprised of Canadian citizens.” They repeatedly emphasize their legal status as Canadian citizens, and they are also aware that having this status is not enough to be included in the society and to equally participate in its political sphere. Their activism is informed by the ideas of cultural citizenship, which suggests that in order to establish belonging in their new country, immigrants negotiate their presence in the

public sphere, their relations with the state and the civil society and claim their right for political participation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed various forms in which Russian Canadians engage in political activism in Canada. As I have argued throughout this chapter, Russian Canadian activism is primarily informed by Canadian multiculturalism policies and political discourse, and by engaging in this activism Russian-speaking immigrants are striving to become Canadians. Participation of various ethnocultural groups in political life in Canada is a widespread and recognized practice, and their political engagement is the result of their performance of Canadian citizenship. For Russian-speaking immigrants, this form of belonging has not existed until recently, and their participation as a group in any form of political activity has been very limited. They maintained their cultural and ethnic identities, but they mainly remained within the private sphere of their families and friends, and they rarely felt a need to expand it to the public sphere. The current political conflict between Russia and western countries, including Canada, became a trigger as some members of the Russian-speaking community in Canada realized the need to be recognized as a group with their own identity, memory, and historical narrative. In the context of this political conflict, their private identity as Russian Canadians was threatened by an increased wave of negativity towards Russia, and in order to protect their sense of self, they sought to claim a political voice in the public sphere.

Russian Canadians are often accused of being Kremlin marionettes, but their forms of political activism, including the very idea to organize in order to protect their interests, mark them as belonging to Canadian society. Their political participation is rooted in Canadian practices and rhetoric, and their forms of mobilization are borrowed from the Canadian political scene. The idea of a formal ethnic organization is largely a response to the mobilization of the Ukrainian Canadian community, which has been their main adversary, but also their inspiration (even though the latter argument would probably not be supported by Russian Canadians). The Ukrainian Canadian Congress traces its history back to 1940, and it is well integrated in the Canadian political landscape, and since the beginning of the

military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, it has been very successful in promoting its vision of this conflict in Canada at all levels, including the federal government. Russian Canadians who were observing their activity, as well as the involvement of other ethnocultural groups in Canadian political life, started to mobilize, and while their activism was addressing Russia and was focused around their Russian background and Russian identity, the forms of their participation were informed by their Canadian experience. While rallying in support of Russia in front of the Canadian parliament, they were performing their Canadian citizenship. The Immortal Regiment seemingly stands out in this argument, as this event in both its content and its form is borrowed from the Russian political and cultural practice, but once it became part of the Canadian political context of multiculturalism it started serving the same purpose of performing diversity and pluralism, the essential qualities of modern Canadian citizenship. The very idea that they can organize the Immortal Regiment and march along the streets of downtown Toronto is a result of their understanding of Canada as a society where they as Russian Canadians have the right to be included in the society as a group with their own cultural and historical narrative. Moreover, they believe that in order to be recognized and respected, they have to engage in political activism as a diasporic group.

Conclusion

In March 2018, during the Russian presidential election, the Russian Consulate in Toronto organized a polling station where Russian citizens currently living in Canada could cast their votes. The consulate was definitely not ready to accommodate the large number of people who came that day to cast their ballots. As a result, people spent hours waiting in line outside the Consulate to vote. 75.95 % of Russian citizens who participated in the elections in Canada supported the incumbent president of Russia, Vladimir Putin. Out of seven candidates, Putin won the 2018 election with 76.69 % of the vote (Central Election Commission 2018).

Such active support of the current Russian president by Russian-speaking immigrants is often interpreted as a demonstration of their allegiance to Russia and a proof of their identification as Russians. For many Western political analysts, this interpretation turns these people into potentially dangerous subjects, whose activities should be monitored, controlled, and perhaps even limited by the authorities. After all, the Canadian government has condemned and confronted the Russian government's foreign policy, and a vocal opposition to this line on behalf of Russian Canadians leads to a question whether this situation could, perhaps, be interpreted in terms of insufficient loyalty to Canada (Todd 2010).

My research suggests that this question should, in fact, be turned on its head: it is precisely the practices and opportunities of practicing citizenship, including multiculturalism, in the Canadian context that drive political activism in the Russian-speaking immigrant community. It is equally important to consider the forms of political participation practiced by my informants as their attempt to belong to Canadian society, to enter its political sphere from a position of difference as Russian Canadians. In June 2018, Russian-speaking immigrants increasingly chose to participate in the 2018 Ontario general election, where they overwhelmingly supported the Conservative Party. Similarly, in October 2019, even more community members chose to vote in federal elections in Canada. Based on conversations with people I met in Toronto and on social media discussions about the upcoming elections, I suggest that many people who voted in the 2018 and 2019 elections in Canada did it for the first time in their lives, even though many of them had acquired their citizenship status much earlier. These recent elections were widely discussed even in those Facebook groups that do

not usually permit political discussions. For example, a post on the federal election results in the Facebook group *Toronto Mommies* collected several hundred comments in the first couple of hours after the results were announced. The vast majority of people who participated in these discussions voted for the Conservative Party, and they were dissatisfied with the outcome of the elections. Participation in Canadian elections was a novel experience for many Russian-speaking immigrants, which was evident from the widespread complaints about pencils supplied at the polling stations. Some voters turned to social media to complain about this and warn others that they should bring their own pens. They were particularly concerned that pencil marks could be easily erased, which would allegedly provide an opportunity for electoral fraud. While the use of lead pencils at polling station is not a new practice, many Russian-speaking immigrants apparently knew nothing about it and interpreted it as an attempt by the Liberal Party to tamper with the votes. In addition to participation in provincial and federal elections, Russian Canadians have gotten increasingly involved in other forms of formal political participation through political party membership and involvement in election campaigns. In the 2019 Canadian federal election, for example, a group of Russian-speaking volunteers worked with the Conservative Party on a social media campaign that targeted Russian-speaking voters with Russian-language content.

This increased political participation among Russian-speaking immigrants suggests that we need to approach them as political actors who exercise their rights as Canadian citizens and whose diasporic sense of belonging shapes their identification as being a part of the society and being different at the same time. From this point of view, their visible support of Russia and its political regime becomes for them a necessary element in claiming their cultural citizenship, as well as a basis for their dignified representation and participation in the public sphere. This observation parallels some previous research on other immigrant communities and their participation in ethnic and religious associations as a form of involvement in host societies and of establishing their belonging (Siu 2005, Gaparich 2008, Collet and Lien 2009, Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012). What my dissertation contributes to these debates is an analysis of the legacy of socialist and post-socialist realities in the political, cultural, and social activism of the immigrant groups. Political activity and civic engagement in the Russian-speaking immigrant community might have a backdrop of ties with their homeland, but my research has found that such civic engagement is largely

informed by immigrants' Canadian experiences, including their insecurities related to their ability to reproduce themselves culturally and socially in their new society. These concerns lead Russian-speaking Canadians to engage in the public sphere in an attempt to reaffirm their own agency and gain control over their own lives and the lives of their children. The fear of losing control over their lives has been an important element in the immigrants' discussions of sex education and liberal gender politics in Ontario. Having grown up in the USSR and its successor states, my respondents incorporated the Soviet and post-Soviet biopolitical discourses, including a strong pronatalist orientation and associated expectations of a rigid binary gender system. It is these biopolitical discourses that translate into their understanding of the "traditional" family and their way of life. In turn, these discourses compel them to interpret a different understanding of normative sexualities and gender roles as an intrusion of the Canadian state into the minds and bodies of their children.

This understanding is not shared by all Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada. It is rather a relatively small group of Russian-speaking parents who engage in the public sphere to protect so-called "traditional" family values and parental rights against what they perceive as the corrupting mainstream discourse of human rights and inclusivity. In the dissertation, I did not discuss other attitudes towards gender politics and sexual education that also exist in the Russian-speaking community. The way I framed my research questions shaped my analysis in a particular way, and instead of adopting a broader comparative approach to address the internal diversity of the community or to provide comparison with other immigrant groups, I have prioritized a thick description of a specific segment of the immigrant community. This approach has certain limitations in terms of leading towards a larger comparative analysis, but it also provides an opportunity to create a more detailed, ethnographic description to understand motivations and cultural logics of a group of people who strive to influence the public sphere, share their values and ethical norms, and act against dominant discourses.

While cultural difference of this particular group is important, it should not be overstated: after all, immigrants' understanding of the biopolitics of the Canadian liberal state as corrupting, especially in regard to such questions as children's bodies, teenage sexuality, and gender fluidity, resonates with similar views of many conservative political groups in Canada and elsewhere, as well as with other immigrant groups, such as Chinese

Canadians. The common denominator between the Russian-speaking community and the latter groups, and an important factor in their political mobilization, is social class. An ability to have control and to be able to shape their own futures is experienced by many Russian Canadians as an attribute of class position. In their cultural logic, education is a crucial element in reaching these goals, as only those who are educated and have strong moral values are believed to be able to resist control by the state and the political establishment. Having such a degree of social agency is contingent upon class privilege, something that most Russian-speaking immigrants are well aware of, as they invest heavily in their children's education to provide them with ability to shape their own future and not to be absorbed by the state. The ability to shape a desired future for themselves and their families is also clearly manifested in their political activism through which Russian Canadians are striving to achieve a more powerful position in their new society.

While none of my informants spoke of their class position in terms of social privilege or agency, they routinely conceptualized class in ethical terms; for them, social agency is something that has to be earned through acquired and constantly performed cultural competences and moral values. The social agency that Russian-speaking immigrants strive to achieve in Canadian society is not only an important element of cultural citizenship; for them it is also a vital ability to maintain and reproduce their cultural identities as Russian Canadians. This moral factor drives many immigrant parents in their efforts to enroll their children in extracurricular educational activities focused on developing such skills as proficiency in Russian literacy. For the same reason, many Russian-speaking immigrant activists were inspired by the model provided by the Ukrainian-Canadian community with its well-established diasporic networks, a deep tradition of political activism, active advocacy in the realm of Canadian foreign policy, and a strong and visible pride in their ethnic heritage. My respondents were particularly attentive to Ukrainian Canadians' use of historical narratives in their effort to mobilize the Canadian public and government against Russia's annexation of Crimea and their support against separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. Recognizing that through these efforts Ukrainian Canadians acquire social agency, realize their full citizenship, and reproduce their diasporic identities, Russian-speaking activists have also sought to use history in a similar way to achieve their citizenship rights. At the same time, the imperial character of Russian history fails to provide them with narratives of

victimhood similar to those used by the Ukrainian diaspora, and instead they turn to another key event of Soviet and Russian history: namely, the Soviet and Allied victory in the war against Nazi Germany. Their commemorative events, in the form of the Immortal Regiment and festive activities during VE Day, for instance, have been borrowed from current commemorative practices in Russia, and so are part of a globally circulating Russian culture. Yet, at the same time these commemorative practices became integrated into the Canadian political and social context as a means for Russian-speaking Canadians to perform their cultural rights as Canadian citizens.

The Russian-speaking community is thus structured by an interplay between the class awareness of its members and the inclusive model of Canadian citizenship with its encouragement of an active performance of one's belonging to an ethnic community. In this context, the immigrants' rootedness in Soviet and post-Soviet social practices, their high cultural capital imported to Canada in the form of university degrees, and their command of cultural literacy all entitle them to highlight and maintain their immigrant identities precisely in order to be competent and responsible Canadian citizens. Their political participation is closely related to class aspiration shared by members of this community. Recognizing Canadian society as a classed society, Russian-speaking immigrants use their historical experience and cultural competences to navigate themselves and their families through Canada's system of social stratification. The Russian-speaking community is part of the global Russian diaspora, but, more importantly, this is a community that seeks to be an integral part of the Canadian society.

While Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada have their unique cultural, socio-economic, and historical background, the study of this group provides us with a more nuanced understanding of how various immigrant groups and diasporas define their role in their home countries and host societies. This dissertation contributes to knowledge about diasporic spaces and the role of the Internet and social media in establishing and maintaining communities and shaping forms of interaction both within diasporic communities and with a larger society. I have also shed light on the multiple ways of engaging in a public sphere, through active participation in ethnic organizations. Furthermore, the dissertation contributes to understanding how social class and privilege is maintained and transformed in immigration, and of how immigrants compensate for the loss of social status and attempt to

claim their subjective location in a system of social stratification in host societies. These and many other questions are applicable to many other immigrant groups in Canadian society who, like Russian-speaking immigrants, also strive for recognition, share insecurities about their social status and futures, have experiences of feeling intimidated by mainstream cultural and moral values, and feel concerned about losing their children to a foreign culture and society.

My dissertation contributes to the understanding of multiculturalism, and also to how class and citizenship work among immigrant groups. In particular, my dissertation shows how class aspirations formed in a socialist welfare state produce social insecurities, drive educational efforts, and fuel political activism. My research shows that social class and distinction practices acquired in home societies “stick” to the bodies of immigrants; it is this practical reason, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term, and not foreign ideology or propaganda that makes them engage in such activities as commemoration of the Allied victory in World War II, support of the Conservative Party political agenda, or extracurricular education using Soviet-era textbooks. My analysis of Russian Canadian activism contributes to further understanding how multiculturalism practices, which have been a part of the Canadian political landscape for several decades, have significantly impacted how various groups of Canadians are included in the society as groups with their own distinct cultural and historical narratives. Involvement of diasporic groups in political life in Canada is a common and established practice, and by borrowing forms of civic engagement from the Canadian political scene, Russian-speaking immigrants are striving to become Canadians. Russian Canadians embrace Canadian citizenship practices, but for them, their allegiance to the new country co-exists with a sense of belonging to their homeland. In a world where nation-states mostly still imagine citizenship in a singular form, with political allegiance and belonging grounded in one state, the Russian Canadian experience is illustrative of how diasporas the globe over negotiate their multiple forms of belonging and growing investments in exercising their rights as citizens.

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