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Gender in the Everyday Life of the Russian Home

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Gender in the Everyday Life of the Russian Home

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Honors Thesis
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Abstract

Despite significant shifts in Russia's social and political spheres since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, traditional gender norms within the domestic sphere have remained generally constant to the present day. The home is a crucial site of gender identity construction due to its importance in Russian culture as a space that has long functioned as a refuge from public life and official discourse. Based on ethnographic interviews with twenty residents of Ufa about their daily practices in the domestic sphere, this study aims to illuminate the domestic social structures within the Russian home in order to achieve a greater understanding of broader social relations in Russia today. Viewed through the lenses of everydayness, narrative, gender, and the home, traditional gender norms reveal a stabilizing function for families, which there appears to be little motivation to change.

Acknowledgements

I extend my deepest thanks to the residents of Ufa who took the time to share their lives with me in such a profound way. Our conversations not only provided the foundation for my research, but also expanded my view on the lived experience and prompted me to reflect on my own understanding of the home. I am grateful for their openness and for their wisdom. Toor Cummings Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts funded both trips I made to do this research. The following work would not be possible without their generosity and support, and I am truly thankful for the opportunities they have given me.

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To Juanpa and Norah, for accompanying me on this long path.

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Note on Transliteration, Names, and Citations

For Cyrillic transliteration, I use the Library of Congress system, with the exception of commonly accepted English spellings of certain names.

In compliance with the Human Subjects Review Board, I have changed the names of all individuals who I interviewed in order to protect their privacy. Others mentioned (whom I did not interview) retain their original names. I do not cite the interviews each time I quote an informant, but I make it clear who the speaker is in each instance. Information about the interviewees and dates of the interviews are listed in Appendix A, under their pseudonyms when relevant.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Resilience of Traditional Gender Norms in Post-Soviet Russia

Research Questions and Background Knowledge

Everydayness constitutes our daily practices and the narratives we generate about these practices. It is often masked in familiarity, but is not a transparent concept. Our understanding of everydayness arises out of a constructed idea of what is acceptable human behavior, and it is not inherent within us as human beings. Many ideologies and assumptions are concealed within our daily habits and become naturalized into our perception of the world. Although rarely questioned, gender comprises a significant part of how we experience and participate in everyday life. Gender identity greatly influences self-perception and the manner in which people interact with one another, shaping how we experience the home. The way we use domestic space reproduces and reinforces this identity on a daily basis. Since the home is a private space, the way we perform gender within it differs markedly from how we perform gender in the public sphere.

When I arrived in Russia for the first time in 2011, I was struck by how femininity was accentuated in the way women presented and conducted themselves on a daily basis in public. Men, I observed, assumed a hyper masculine role, acting as a protector and guide for women. Traditional gender roles, as I understood them in the cultural context of the United States, did not sufficiently describe the situation that I was witnessing. Gender norms in contemporary Russia arise out of a history of communism in the Soviet Union following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. These norms developed in opposition to pre-Revolutionary norms that were consonant with U.S. and European

values of the time. Under the auspices of state feminism, women took on what is termed “the double burden,” as they were heavily mobilized into the workforce by the state while still retaining domestic responsibilities (Schrand 1999). Ideas of Western feminism did not find broad cultural resonance outside of intellectual circles in post-communist Russia and these concepts are widely rejected in the country today.

However, the gender question is more complex than it might seem from the way it is expressed and performed on the street, and it must be observed in a domestic context. The home has long been a key institution in Russia, clearly distinguished from the public domain as more relaxed and authentic, and I am interested in how gender is taught and expressed in this space. This topic is exceptionally important to address, as understanding gender in the home is vital to understanding social relations in Russia today. It is largely in the home that cultural practices and norms are passed down through generations, and it is precisely this sphere which is most hidden, out of reach, and unquestioned. Given the dramatic changes in other spheres of Russian life, why have traditional roles in the domestic space, if they are indeed still present, persisted? How are gender roles maintained in the everyday life of the Russian the home and passed down through generations? Are they transforming or enduring? These are the crucial questions I address in my thesis.

In this study, I discuss gender in the physical space and narratives of the Russian home through three generations: young college-age Russians born directly before or after the end of the Soviet Union, and their parents and grandparents who grew up during the Soviet era. Each of these generations, and especially the youngest, which has grown up within former Soviet lands after the fall of communism and the disintegration of the

country, has been shaped by very different political and social surroundings. Certain domestic legacies, though, are still present. In modern Russian cities, families live overwhelmingly in apartments and not single-family houses. Two Soviet trends that helped contribute to the modern housing situation are communal apartments, *kommunalki*, and apartment buildings constructed under Nikita Khrushchev,¹ termed *khrushchevki*. These former housing institutions are not only reflected in current practices, but also in the way that Russians conceptualize their domestic culture through narratives.

Communal apartments, part of the same revolutionary project that purported liberation for women, were created to alleviate the housing crisis in the 1920s (Boym 124-125). New buildings were not widely constructed, but rather existing apartments or parts of houses were subdivided and transformed in order to accommodate multiple families. Many of these apartments were forcefully taken from aristocrats and other families labeled bourgeois at the time of the 1917 revolution. The minimum living space allocated was “about 10 square meters per person and 13 square meters per family” (Boym 124). Usually, each communal apartment provided one kitchen, one toilet, and one bathing room for all of its residents, which promised little hope of privacy and many opportunities for discomfort, conflict, and resentment.

Khrushchevki were apartment buildings conceived to alleviate the continuing housing crisis in 1957 under the rule of Khrushchev (Varga-Harris 561). Built of low quality material, they appeared quite similar, if not identical, to one another. The interiors consisted of separate one-family apartments, rather than communal apartments. This arrangement supported the primacy of “the nuclear [as] the normative household and

¹ Nikita Khrushchev was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, leader of both the Party and the state, from 1958-1964.

primary unit of society,” a large step away from other state efforts in favor of collectivism (Reid 147). Still, as Susan Reid discusses, a common and collective experience across family boundaries is created through this “standardization and uniformity in house form,” as it “tends to homogenize...domestic settings’ and, with them, domestic behaviors and values” (Reid 156). Although separate apartments created the opportunity for more privacy and choice in how one decorated and utilized living space, the spatial foundation still had a strong effect on the way that people lived, contributing to a “regimentation of life” (Reid 156). Both Khrushchev-era apartment buildings and communal apartments still exist in Russia today, and specifically in Ufa, where I conducted my research, though the existence of communal apartments has widely decreased. Interaction with and within these physical spaces has changed in material and nonmaterial ways to varying extents, reflecting new political and technological developments, while remaining engrained in and informed by the Soviet housing traditions.

Research Setting: Ufa, Bashkortostan, Russian Federation

Ufa is the capital city of the Republic of Bashkortostan, also known as Bashkiria, located in the Ural Mountains on the *Ufa* and *Belaya* (White) rivers. It has a population of 1,082,000 people, according to the city’s official website. The oil industry is key for the city’s economy, visible mostly in the outskirts and suburbs of the city. Three main ethnic groups, Turkic, Slavic, and Finno-Ugric, as well as over one hundred nationalities, reside in Ufa, which is a point of pride in official discourses. In more casual conversation, the diversity of the city is noted, but with less positive or negative value placed on it.

Certain individuals did express pride in the peaceful coexistence of many nationalities. Bashkirs, a Turkic group, comprise the second largest ethnic group in Ufa, following Russians, and both Russian and Bashkir are official languages of the Republic of Bashkortostan. The Bashkir alphabet is based on Cyrillic, but also includes additional letters. Although the language is taught in schools, this knowledge is not necessarily retained afterwards. All official banners and street signs, as well as many other signs around the city, are written in both languages and bookstores often include a section devoted to Bashkir literature. City mythology relies on the historically peaceful coexistence and cooperation between Russians and Bashkirs. The Monument of Friendship, located near Ufa's city center, was built in honor of the political unity of these two nationalities.

The two prominent religious traditions practiced in the city are Russian Orthodox Christianity and Islam, and many Orthodox churches as well as mosques can be found around the city. While religious practices have been largely secularized, there is a visible presence of religion in bookstores, where the Bible and the Qur'an are always sold, in restaurants during fasting times, and in the religious architectural structures throughout the city. This notable presence of Islam is not typical for all of Russia, but is particular to specific regions, including Bashkiria.

Based on testimonies in my interviews, Ufa has changed a great deal in the last century in terms of urban landscape. When my good friend and interviewee Andrei's grandmother relocated to Ufa from a nearby village in the early 1960s, mostly single-family houses filled the city. "When we moved to this building, there were only two apartment buildings," she tells me, "and only then did they start construction in the

neighborhood. None of these stores or schools or things were here.” Andrei’s grandmother also recalls that there were many communal apartments in Ufa, and that some people still reside in such dwellings today. Separate homes are still visible throughout the city, which makes certain neighborhoods feel like small villages. Ufa is generally considered quite safe and fairly prosperous compared to other cities of its size in Russia.

As in other parts of the country, for residents of Ufa, the term “Russian” does not have a single meaning. Russia is a vast and culturally diverse country, and it is impossible to clearly define what “Russian” means in all situations, or how typical the experience of the home in Ufa is compared to other parts of Russia. I do not address Russian identity directly in my interviews or in my thesis. My informants do assume a collective Russian identity throughout our conversations, in phrases such as “here in Russia,” or “for us, here,” which is expressed in implicit opposition to my non-Russianness. When they adopt this collective identity, through the use of “we” or “us,” it is not specific to Ufa or Bashkiria, but indicates a larger Russian identity. In the Russian language, there are two words that can be translated in English to mean “Russian.” They are *russkii*, connoting an ethnic Russianness, and *rossiiskii*, signifying a civic Russianness. The interviewees would either use the ethnic term *russkii*, or talk about life “in Russia,” in their testimonies. I purport that the views and experiences that I convey, through the voices of my informants, are representative to a certain extent of domestic culture in greater Russia outside of Ufa. While discussing sections of the following pages with a young woman whose parents emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States, she claimed that my ethnographic accounts read “like [her] autobiography.”

Methods

The foundation for my research consists of ethnographic interviews with Russian informants, with a focus on gathering in-depth qualitative material, rather than quantitative data. The approach to ethnography I use for this project is similar to that of anthropologists George Marcus and Michael Fischer. They define ethnography as “a research process in which the anthropologist closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture...and then writes accounts of this culture, emphasizing descriptive detail” (Marcus & Fischer 18). Qualitative and descriptive accounts, as opposed to broad-based quantitative data, lends itself better to approaching complex issues such as gender identity and everyday life in the home. These topics are full of nuanced understandings that surveys or questionnaires cannot address in proper depth. This method also prompts both the interviewee and the researcher to engage in the process of defamiliarization, a concept formulated by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky in his book, *Theory of Prose* (1925). He describes it as “the removal of [an] object from the sphere of automatized perception,” and the act of “seeing things out of their usual context” (Shklovsky 6,9). Shklovsky originally discussed this idea in relation to art, particularly literature, using the work of Lev Tolstoy as his primary example. Defamiliarization is relevant to the study of the everyday as it compels us to step out of our assumptions, and perceive our surroundings in a more complex way than through the terms that we have assigned to various practices. These terms simply act as shortcuts to greater understandings.

The process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting ethnographic interviews employs defamiliarization in multiple ways. In order to participate in an ethnographic

interview, interviewees must distance themselves from their own reality so as to be able to comment on it extensively. The issues that are raised in such interviews are not often considered without outside prompting, and it is through the consideration of these issues and the formulation of answers to various questions that defamiliarization occurs. In the process of analyzing interview material, researchers must separate themselves from the particular stories they have heard to recognize patterns and uncover assumptions within human behavior.

I traveled to Ufa three times in all, for four months total in the summers of 2012 and 2013, as well as in January of 2014 for ten days. I spoke with a total of twenty individuals, in fourteen separate interviews that took place in the summer of 2013 and the winter of 2014. Nine of these individuals are part of the young, roughly college-age generation, including six female and three male participants. They comprise Anna, Emil', Andrei, Lara, Lilia, Aleksei, Liuba, Vera, and Zoia. Their ages range from 18 to 26. There are also nine individuals in the group of parents that I interviewed, including members of Anna's, Lara's, Andrei's, and Zoia's families. They include Anna's mother and father, Lara's mother and family friends, Andrei's mother, and Zoia's mother. Male participants of older age groups were less willing to be interviewed, despite my attempts; therefore, the group of interviewees is largely female dominated. I was able to speak to two grandparents, grandmothers of Anna and Andrei. Due to health constraints and other factors, it was difficult to find others of the same age willing and able to participate in an interview.

The interviews were organized through friends I had met during my trips to Ufa, whose families graciously agreed to speak with me. I first became acquainted with these

young people while participating in an immersive summer language program in 2012. During this program, I became acquainted most frequently with students interested in learning English and meeting American students, and who were thus studying in related fields for the most part. Most people I came into contact with in Ufa, from store clerks to passers-by, were interested in learning more about me because I was an American, and this interest was therefore not unique among those I interviewed. Anna was my assigned tutor, with whom I was required to spend two hours a week speaking in Russian, a minimum we surpassed each week. Beyond our obligatory relationship, we became close friends, exchanging cultural knowledge about Russia and the United States. I met other tutors and their friends who were also eager to share their experiences and to hear from me and other American students about our lives. This cultural divide was less pronounced during my second summer in Ufa in 2013, when I returned independently for an internship at an interior design studio. With a new group of Americans to tutor, my friends would often note the Russian characteristics that I had adopted, citing specific behaviors and understandings of mine that demonstrated seemingly native qualities. My relationships became less about cultural exchange and more about genuinely connecting as friends. While I am clearly still located outside of the culture as a foreigner and an American, the degree of closeness and comfort I reached with these friends allowed me to have more open, meaningful, and insightful interviews. With the parents and grandparents of the friends that I interviewed, my position as an American student was more emphasized and present to varying degrees than in the sessions with my peers.

By speaking with members of three consecutive generations, I was able to track gradual transformations occurring in Russian everyday domestic life. Like all dynamic

systems, the everyday inevitably changes over time. With new generations comes a reworked set of behaviors and attitudes that, although heavily entrenched in the context of the older generations, produces something new and original. This process is often undetectable without further reflection because, as sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre writes, “the everyday imposes its monotony...the days follow one after another and resemble one another and yet – here lies the contradictions at the heart of everydayness – everything changes” (Lefebvre 1987: 10). These are the slow, constant, and inevitable changes that I look for in my research.

My interest in the Russian home was sparked just before my first trip to Ufa, when I first learned in-depth about communal apartments and Soviet housing. This curiosity was heightened by my first home stay experience with my Russian host grandmother, Venera Mukhibovna, a former pediatrician who now works in the administration of the city’s medical university. The pungent smells of her cooking that would stew in the humid summer air, and her compassionate yet unsentimental manner in taking care of me, led me to seek greater understanding of a domestic culture that felt markedly different from my own. I have spent extensive time in Russian domestic spaces, including two home stays in Ufa for a total of four months, overnight visits to friends’ apartments and country homes, or *dachas*, around Ufa, and a four and half month home stay in St. Petersburg in the spring of 2013. As a result, my research is informed by participant observation, a term that denotes the process of actively taking part in a culture while simultaneously assuming the role of spectator (Spradley 1980). It includes immersion and distance at the same time, as researchers learn from their own personal involvement in the activity, as well as from removed perceptions of the activity and how

other participants experience it. My research not only draws on the interviews, but also on my various stays with host families, visits to my friends' homes, informal conversations, and other encounters I had while living, working, and studying in Ufa.

I decided to focus my research on Ufa, and not St. Petersburg, for two main reasons. The first reason is that I made more and closer connections with Russian students in Ufa than with my classmates in St. Petersburg. Residents of Ufa are generally more interested in speaking with Americans, as considerably fewer Americans and other foreigners visit the city. I wanted to interview individuals with whom I had already developed a relationship, rather than interviewing strangers, as the home is a very personal space, one whose details few people would be comfortable discussing with a complete stranger. The second reason I chose Ufa is that I believe it to be more representative of the Russian home than St. Petersburg, which is a large cosmopolitan city strongly influenced by Western European and American culture.

Of the three trips to Ufa, my third was for the distinct purpose of collecting interviews for my research, and the first time I had seen the city in the winter. I focused on four families in particular, interviewing as many of their members as I was able to, as well as interviewing other individual young adults. I drew up a standard list of questions to pose in all of the interviews, however, each conversation turned out strikingly different depending on the interviewees' personal experiences and their particular interests. The topics that I chose to focus on in my ethnographic accounts are drawn from analysis of the interviews as a whole group, based on topics that were most frequently brought up and areas where gender and generational differences were most notable. They also reflect my own interests as a researcher, and while I tried to let my interviewees guide the

conversation, my questions nonetheless framed their narratives. All of my interviews were conducted in Russian, and the English translations provided in this text are my own.

Ethnography cannot exist outside of the researcher's own context, which includes their personal relationships with those they are interviewing. In her book, *Russia and Soul* (2000), Dale Pesmen redefines the discipline of ethnography through her unique approach to the ethnographic interview and through the way she addresses the material in terms of her subjective position as an ethnographer. The topic she addresses, *dusha*, roughly translatable as 'soul' in English, demands a more emotional approach. Pesmen beautifully weaves together narrative and analysis not only to understand the subject matter theoretically, but also to grasp the circumstances from which it arises. Her book has acted as a formative model for my research, as I think a clear recognition of the particular conditions of a study allow for further insights into the subject matter addressed. Rather than the soul, I am addressing the private domestic space using the same narrative approach, which lends itself to this personal and sensitive topic. My reservations in analyzing other people's lives, and claiming to understand them, has been a consistent concern throughout the process of researching and writing this thesis. Reading Pesmen's book, with academic analysis clearly rooted in her subjective and personal experience, has helped me understand how to write through the stories of those I interviewed and in their words as much as possible. Representing their ideas accurately and doing justice to their experience has been my constant task.

This study is also heavily influenced by my identity as a woman. All of my experiences in Russia, the manner in which the interviewees responded and interacted with me, and the information they shared, were informed by my gender. Undoubtedly,

this position made me privy to a greater range of information concerning certain topics, and less concerning others. Even the questions that I posed lent themselves more to the feminine experience. Looking back at my interviews, for example, I frequently ask almost immediately about the kitchen and what happens every day in that space. While the kitchen is a significant place for everyone in the Russian home, it is more intimately related to the female experience of everydayness. The obstacles I encountered in my attempt to speak to a comparable number of male as female family members arose partially from a disparity in gender, and men's lack of comfort in speaking with me about domestic issues. Limited accessibility to the male perspective, as a result, is one of the constraints of this research. Religion and ethnicity were not focuses of my study, and were therefore minimally addressed in my interviews. I do not have sufficient information to discuss extensively the relationship between religion, ethnicity, and the home with authority. This does not mean that these factors are insignificant in forming the culture of the home, but rather that my questions did not prompt the interviewees to examine them directly.

Since, to my knowledge, no comprehensive ethnographic research has been conducted about the modern Russian home, I draw on other related sources in the social sciences to provide the conceptual foundation for my research. These include sources in the fields of cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, history, and gender studies. The lenses through which I view the Russian domestic sphere include everydayness, narrative, gender, and the home, which I discuss in detail in my next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Background: Everydayness, Narrative, Gender, and the Home

Everydayness and Why It Matters

The main subject of my study is everydayness, which includes practices and narratives that we recreate on a daily basis. It is that which is taken for granted, the tasks we complete without thinking about why, such as wearing perfume or taking the bus to work. Henri Lefebvre describes the everyday as “organized passivity,” or the daily decisions we do not have to make for ourselves, as our society and culture have already made them for us (Lefebvre 1987: 10). In French scholar Michel de Certeau’s introduction to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he says, “What interests the historian of everyday life is the invisible” (Certeau 3). We do not naturally notice that which frames and provides a background for what we consider more significant events in our lives. Instead, it is that which we perceive to transcend the everyday that we are wont to pay more attention to, such as vacations, weddings or holidays. It is challenging to define everydayness as it permeates every aspect of our lived experience. As cultural theorist Benjamin Highmore explains, the difficulty lies in that “its contours might be so vague as to encompass almost everything (or certain aspects of everything)” (Highmore 4). For instance, there are various conflicting dualities within everydayness that Highmore outlines in his introduction to *The Everyday Life Reader* (2002). These include the particular and the general, agency and structure, resistance and power, among other binaries. It is not sufficient to approach everyday life from only one of these perspectives;

rather, it is necessary to explore each one, as well as the tension and interplay between these “tendencies,” as Highmore designates them (Highmore 5).

The binary I find most important to address in this context is that of the particular and the general. In the framework of daily life, the particular comprises the details of a single person’s lived experience, while the general constitutes the patterns that arise out of a group of individuals’ experiences. In order to provide a comprehensive representation of the everyday experience, it is necessary to find a balance between these two tendencies. It is unproductive to only generalize daily practices, because despite common threads in behavior within a culture, differences inevitably arise in each household and family. Relying on generalizations can oversimplify a multifaceted cultural landscape. Including variation creates depth, allowing us to appreciate the range of lived experiences within larger frameworks. In the same vein, while each family has its own set of behaviors, experiences, and stories, there are connecting themes that reach across familial boundaries. Focusing too heavily on individual examples is inefficient and results in anecdotal information that has little constructive direction and does not reveal much about culture.

Due to its broad nature, everydayness must be conceptually narrowed in order to be meaningfully employed within the scope of this study. Accordingly, I specifically address the private sphere of the home, as well as the intersection of public and private life with guests in the home and in the neighborhood. Private life, as Slavic scholar Svetlana Boym observes in her work, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (1994), “is a recent cultural phenomenon, a kind of cultural luxury” (Boym 79). While everyone has an inner life, a private life has not always been socially available.

The importance of privacy and of a distinct home life developed in conjunction with the idea of property and individualism in the West, specifically originating in Protestantism, as Boym points out (Boym 80). However, private life cannot be fully separated from work and leisure, since all act together as a system with interrelated parts that inform one another (Lefebvre 2008). Work and leisure both exist outside the routine of daily home life, while still framing it, as each of these elements is in constant conversation with the others. Therefore, I include practices and narratives of work and leisure as well, in the ways that they are connected to the home, the imagination of the home, and private life.

Striving for privacy is seen in “the Russian intellectual tradition” as “synonymous...with...foreign, inauthentic behavior” (Boym 73). It is linked with the West and not accepted as authentically Russian. In official Soviet discourses, the private and public were inextricably linked, and private life was not supposed to be separated from public life; rather, they were supposed to exist as “part of a continuum” (Reid 2006: 147). The Soviet government attempted to exercise “total surveillance” over people’s private lives, as the private was of public importance (Reid 152). “The press and early TV programs in the Khrushchev era sought to establish the correct relationship tenants should have toward their state loaned dwellings,” which included writing incriminating letters against fellow citizens who did not take proper care of their living space (Reid 154). Such media was part of a public discourse concerning how residents decorated and maintained their homes. As anthropologist Mary Douglas explains in her book, *Purity and Danger* (1966), dirt and untidiness are not simply physical conditions, but can also be connected to social disorder. Controlling physical cleanliness is a way to create “a semblance of order,” turning an “inherently untidy experience” into something more

easily understood and therefore ostensibly controlled (Douglas 4). This invasion into home life was underscored by the total control that the Soviet state had over the construction and distribution of housing, causing the large-scale standardization of architecture and apartment interiors. Not only did unclean domestic practices, whether physical or ideological, cause the potential for social disorder, but they also implied disrespect for the state, the provider and owner of the space (Reid 155).

Despite ideological arguments against a separate private life and the state's attempts to control it, in practice, privacy served an important function in the lives of Soviet citizens. It was a way of creating an identity for oneself separate from the state, "a way of carving an alternative space and of personalizing and deideologizing...the official maps of everyday life" (Boym 94). In an article about the Russian home of the Khrushchev era, written by Russian visual culture specialist, Susan Reid, she asserts that "the need for privacy, in the sense of a retreat from anonymous company and unsolicited exposure, was also increasingly recognized as a legitimate one in modern, urban society, even under socialism" (Reid 147). A key process in the creation of a private space for oneself was the transformation of the otherwise undistinguishable space of the home. This was surely a frustrating process for those living in communal apartments, which allocated a minimal amount of space per resident, often only one room per family and a shared kitchen and bathroom. With the widespread construction of separate apartments under Khrushchev, carving out one's own private space was a more realistic endeavor (Reid 148). While the separate apartment did not alleviate the material obstacles, or prevent those of state involvement in housing, residents managed to gain a personal sense

of control over their space through “eclecticism” and “handiwork, mending, and adapting” in their material space and choices (Reid 159-161).

What is significant about the everyday, and what makes it a worthy subject of study, is that it hides within itself larger, more complex systems of thought, power, and ideology. For example, the habitual way in which we consume food is not just about the biological need to nourish oneself. The particular food we buy, the way we prepare the food, with whom we eat, and how the labor is divided in food preparation and dishwashing can all be reflections of larger systems at work. As Lefebvre describes, “Every complex ‘whole,’ from the smallest tool to the greatest works of art and learning...possesse[s] a symbolic value linking them to meaning at its most vast” (Lefebvre 1987: 8). For example, power and ideology are not only characterized in the actions of the state, media outlets, and celebration of holidays. French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault believed that “power...orchestrates everyday life,” and is found in our “repetitive practices” that work to exert control over us (Highmore 10). This idea is relevant to the repetitiveness of everyday life, as ideologies are characterized and masked in the way that people lead their lives throughout each day. They are concealed and unrecognizable in this way, and therefore more unconsciously and effectively absorbed by their practitioners.

In order to understand larger dynamics of power, in addition to directing our attention to power’s most obvious and excessive representations, we must focus on the basic and mundane. In Highmore’s words, “ideology is a product of the relationships and processes of a society (rather than merely the result of thought)” (Highmore 6). One result of this close relationship between ideology and everydayness is that, in its most

flourishing state, an ideology is undetectable to those who recreate it in their habits, actions, and thoughts. When visible and recognized, it loses much of its power. As Highmore concisely frames this issue, “either ideology is both invisible and operative, or visible and contested” (Highmore 7).

Narratives

The narratives produced to describe daily life play a key role in the reproduction and persistence of a specific culture’s everyday practices, and the overarching ideas that frame them. Revealing these narratives helps to uncover the assumptions that provide a background for and an understanding of a set of daily habits and routines. As in everyday practices, ideologies and power relations are hidden within narratives. Boym refers to these stories as mythologies, defining them as “cultural common places, recurrent narratives that are perceived as natural in a given culture but in fact were naturalized and their historical, political, or literary origins forgotten or disguised” (Boym 4). Parents and grandparents pass down everydayness not only through example and teaching, but also through stories, which do not just convey practices but also feelings, thoughts, and attitudes towards those practices, and meanings assigned to them. These discourses fuel “self creation, resistance, or reproduction,” depending on how the younger generation chooses to respond (Ries 39). In this way, the creation, communication, and transformation of narratives within a family actively influence everyday practices themselves and whether or not they are accepted and internalized by younger generations.

Conversation is particularly significant in the Russian context as a site of cultural reproduction and creation; it holds considerable power, and serves not only to narrate and

comment on current events and societal issues, but also to affect these forces and produce change. Anthropologist Nancy Ries suggests in her book, *Russian Talk* (1997), that talk in Russia is “the fundamental vehicle of cultural reproduction, as the primary medium of cultural transmission and national interrelation” (Ries 32). Discourse in this sense is not limited to the public sphere, but also includes discussions that occur at the kitchen table every day. Ries argues that “the extraordinary changes in Russian society [during the time of perestroika] have been negotiated, in large part, through the continual exchange of stories about those changes” (Ries 4). She observes in her research, which was conducted in the 1980s at a time of social and cultural restructuring, as the word perestroika denotes, that “talk was what mattered most for many of the people [she] knew in Moscow; it was the context in which souls could emerge and artifices fall” (Ries 14). Discussion around the kitchen table held an enormous significance in the Soviet era, as it was often the only place one could speak openly with people they trusted. Authentic feelings and opinions could be freely expressed in this constructed space between individuals.

Gender

One important aspect of our identity that everydayness masks is our performance of gender, which is not innate in us but rather a learned identity that we take on. Gender is one of the most easily hidden parts of our experience, as it is created and reinforced from birth. It is also expressed in how we interact with one another through language. The Russian language in particular categorizes nouns and adjectives according to their grammatical gender, and certain verb tenses require gendered conjugations. Thus, gender

is in some form reproduced in each verbal interaction. In her book, *Gender and Everyday Life* (2008), sociologist Mary Holmes discusses the differences between sex and gender, and how these concepts interact with one another. Sex and gender are two distinct notions. Sex is a biological category of female or male, while gender is related to social and cultural ideas of femininity and masculinity (Holmes 2). We must be socialized to fit into a particular gender, and much of this socialization occurs during our everyday routine. To a large extent, we learn to be a woman or man through our daily habits in the bathroom, whether we wear makeup or not, the tasks we perform (or do not perform) in the kitchen, and so on. Class, age, location, culture, stage of life, and power within a society all influence the way in which gender is expressed.

We are socialized to perceive others' gender from a particular perspective as well, and to assign value to the way a person behaves depending on his or her gender. For instance, ideas of positive and negative behavior and of personal characteristics differ significantly for men and women. Often, what is valued in men is devalued in women, and vice versa, a phenomenon that is well pronounced in the Russian context. This disparity is exemplified through gendered genres of talk, as Ries discusses at length. For example, while "mischievous" behaviors recounted in men's narratives are received positively, they take on a negative value when expressed by women; meanwhile, endurance, a positive female trait, is looked down upon in men as restraint (Ries 81). While laughing at narratives about mischief might be characteristic of men and women, "mischief [still] stands in symbolic and sometimes literal opposition to the forms of control emblemized and exercised by the mature female part of the population" (Ries 71).

It is not only our behavior, but also the way we narrate our lives, that is gendered. Although we tend to categorize private and public issues as such, there is a significant intersection of the two where private troubles are contextualized by wider public and cultural concerns. Expressions of gender reflect both personal and social transformation in the way that they change over time. Gender is not only learned during childhood, but also through all of our lived experience. As Holmes succinctly states, although “the first five years are crucial in shaping someone’s gender identity, gender socialization is a process that continues throughout our life” (Holmes 47).

One highly regarded feminine role in the Russian cultural landscape is that of the *babushka*, or grandmother. This extremely important figure not only represents love and nurturing, but she is often an important source of support in rearing children and maintaining a household as well. As sociologist and anthropologist Jennifer Utrata claims, grandmothers do not simply fulfill a symbolic function, but are also “the backbone of Russian society,” which is not a far-fetched claim to make (Utrata 41). Grandmothers are present in all types of households, but are especially crucial for single mothers, who often rely on the help of their own mothers in order to make a professional career possible (Utrata 43). Other family members generally do not view this support as labor, but instead as the benevolent desire to care for and raise their grandchildren. This widely held view is problematic because these women do not always receive proper credit and appreciation for the hard work they contribute, and for the sacrifices that they make in their own lives, in order to have the time to support their families.

In general, the grandfather, or *dedushka*, does not have nearly the same symbolic value in Russian culture, nor does he make the same substantial contribution to the family.

Not only is this phenomenon due to the significantly shorter average life expectancy of men in Russia,² but also to the marginalization of men in the domestic sphere that has been present since the Second World War. As Utrata explains, the presence of a man in a household in the Soviet Union did not secure any additional domestic support (Utrata 42). Women were entrusted with the domestic sphere while “the Party encouraged men to focus on primary breadwinning and service to the state” (Utrata 42). The breadwinner is seen as the primary role for men in the Russian household. As Sarah Ashwin and Tatyana Lytkina assert in their socio-economic study on the marginalization of men in the domestic sphere, “While mothers were glorified, Soviet men were not allowed to compete with the father figures who led the party” (Ashwin & Lytkina 193). The head of the communist party took on a paternal role for the entire state, symbolically fulfilling this function in place of the man in the domestic space. Women did not have to compete with a greater maternal figure, but were themselves elevated for the role they fulfilled in the family.

For unemployed men, the lack of a defined domestic role can cause gender confusion and deep distress, as most men do not regard their position in the home as a defining aspect of their identity or masculinity (Ashwin & Lytkin 193). This discrepancy between men’s and women’s domestic roles also points to the broader reality that the continuity of culture often falls much more heavily on women’s shoulders and is more closely associated with female relatives. As cultural studies scholar David Morley observes, “women as mothers are frequently positioned discursively as responsible for the transmission of the cultural patrimony to the next generation” (Morley 65).

² The average life expectancy is 64 for Russian men and 76 for Russian women (Utrata 43).

The Home

The home is a key site where gender is performed in everyday life, and where it can be easily masked through the naturalizing of habitual practices. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the home as “a refuge, a sanctuary; a place or region to which one naturally belongs or where one feels at ease” (“home”). It is a place extremely tied to family, and “home” and “family” have become such intertwined concepts, that, as sociologist and feminist Ann Oakley says, they “are now virtually interchangeable terms” (Oakley 65). However, the home is not simply the comforting place we return to at the end of the day. The home is a place where we project our own memories and abstract concepts onto a physical space, and these recollections and experiences are not always comforting and positive. Due to the fact that the home is conceptualized as a nurturing place, where one does not need to perform, it can be difficult to tease out the rules and values that govern how we conduct our daily lives there. Introducing children into the space of the home is one way to reveal these underlying structures. According to Morley, they act as “a chemical agent whose presence leads to the explication of otherwise implicit domestic values, in a process which ‘forces the rules to disrobe’” (Morley 20). This is possible since children have not been fully socialized into the world that older family members have become so accustomed to inhabiting. The adults must teach children how to behave in the various spaces of the house, what is appropriate and where, and through this process, they must formulate these rules once again for themselves. When socializing children into our environment, we must estrange ourselves from it, examining that which we were taught in childhood and perhaps have not questioned since.

Children are also taught what it means to be part of a family, which includes, in addition to basic rules, an agreement and exchange in order to identify oneself as a member of the household and the family. This agreement often involves “common presence,” or times when everyone is expected to be together in the space of the home (Morley 19). For example, some families have dinner together on certain nights of the week. In Russia, it is often expected for the entire family to gather in one house for the New Year’s holiday (*Novyi god*).

Dwelling does not signify the same thing for a woman as for a man, or in the feminine or masculine sense. In general terms, the local is associated with the feminine and the global with the masculine, as Morley points out (Morley 59). The home is often looked upon as a maternal space. While men have typically been portrayed as explorers, able to venture far from home, or simply into the public sphere, women have been portrayed as waiting at home, not suited for such a public existence (Morley 68-69). Although these concepts have become less pronounced, these dichotomies still shape gender roles in the Russian home. What is done in the home can reinforce larger identities as well, such as national identity, especially during holidays and celebrations. In the United States, displaying the flag outside one’s home is a visible and widespread way of demonstrating patriotism, as is the celebration of Thanksgiving. Russia’s flag is not displayed in the domestic space, or in many places other than governmental buildings, and does not occupy both the national and domestic space.

I use the concepts of everydayness, narrative, gender, and the home as a framework for the examination and interpretation of the material I gathered in interviews with my Russian informants, which frequently features excerpts from their testimonies.

For further information about the informants, please refer to Appendix A. The questions that formed the core of my interviews, which prompted these testimonies, can be found in Appendix B. My analysis is featured in the following ethnographic accounts.

CHAPTER 3

Ethnographic Accounts: Domestic Sites and Activities

Byt

Everyday life in the Russian context can be rendered as *byt*, though this term holds a more complex meaning than its English translation suggests. A more precise translation of the word, delineated by Boym, is “everyday existence (everyday routine and stagnation)” (Boym 29). *Byt* has often been placed in opposition to and morally below *bytie*, which is a term that refers to higher spiritual existence. Because this other world, the spiritual world, is considered more important, the daily experience does not deserve as much attention or development. Beginning in the early 1920s, the Soviet government made frequent use of the term *byt* in its attempt to transform daily life under the new regime, using the phrase *Novyi* (New) *byt* to describe the new way Soviet citizens should live, in line with the revolution (Kiaer 2006: 188). This proposed way of life acted as “a campaign for a new topography of the home: an ideal revolutionary home, not a fetishistic refuge of bourgeois coziness” (Boym 35). Transforming daily existence was an important aspect of the Soviet revolutionary project precisely because of the close connection between everyday life and ideology.

While this term has been quite well covered in many scholarly works, I find that one of its significant characteristics has been ignored by previous analysis. An important distinction to make is that *byt* is not connected with life at work, but is rather intimately

ted to the home and activities surrounding it. Home appliances³, cooking, and cleaning, for example, is included in the realm of *byt*, while classes at university or one's desk at work would not be, despite the routine and everydayness of these activities. While it is located outside of the space of the home, grocery shopping is still considered in the realm of *byt* because it is closely linked to important domestic activities. Anna's father sees *byt* as beginning when "a person comes home from work." His description of *byt* is the most comprehensive, and makes the distinction between work and home life clear:

What is *byt*? *Byt* is everything that surrounds you at home, not only things, but also relations in the family. They can be warm, good, correct and respectful. It also happens that the husband, *khozain*, comes home and hits his wife. This also falls within the understanding of *byt*. A person comes home from work, and this is already *byt*. *Byt* is everything. *Byt* is only in the home. I understand it as such. Work is completely different. [*Byt* includes] appliances, furniture, ceiling, balance...a person comes home to relax, because at work you are constantly not only in a professional sphere, but also with colleagues. There are certain demands and there is a kind of social game. We all play them. We cannot always be naked, undressed...not physically, but soulfully. Home is where, in Russia at least, you can relax.

From his perspective, *byt* encompasses material objects and habitual practices, two main components of everydayness. Anna's father views the term not only in terms of material life, but also relating to family affairs and internal balance. He recognizes this everydayness as an affirmation of his identity as an individual and within his family, which is distinct from the persona he portrays at work and in the public sphere. Whether

³ In Russian, the term for home appliances, *bytovaia tekhnika*, contains the adjectival form of *byt* within it.

good or bad, it would seem that *byt* is always perceived as authentic. Lilia sees *byt* more strictly in terms of material existence, depicting it as “not from the realm of thoughts and feelings, but from the realm of what we use...with our hands, what we eat, with what we live.” Zoia’s mother connects it with *uklad (zhizni)*, which can be translated as “way of life.” *Uklad* seems to constitute the intention and wishes people have for their lives, and *byt* is the combination of internal and external factors that determines what actually happens. In that sense, *byt* is portrayed by the informants as not being within total control of the person. The extent that the word reaches past our physical surroundings depends on an individual’s understanding and can vary from person to person, but its link to the home is unanimously recognized.

Although *byt* officially had negative connotations in the Soviet period due to its connection with bourgeois values, my research suggests that it has shed these associations. As Anna’s father explains, *byt* can possess a diverse set of attributes depending on the quality of relations between family members. For all of the young people I spoke with, there was no negativity connected with the term. Zoia, Liuba, and Vera all very quickly asserted the neutrality of the term. Today, its associations are determined more by a family’s particular circumstances than by an inherent meaning. Lilia describes *byt* as “that which we need to be happy,” and considers the term “neutral...or more so positive. Not negative,” as she is very satisfied with her home life. Anna’s mother says that *byt* has “different sides.” External and uncontrollable factors influence a person’s perceptions as well:

Today maybe *byt* is not good, tomorrow it is good. It’s undulating. It depends on the nuances of your surroundings, on external factors. Money, weather,

mood, everything is included in *byt*. A person can rarely...well a person could change *byt*, if they moved. So it is influenced by the person. How he wants to live, so he lives. But there are other acting factors that have influence. There are things we can and can't change. I cannot change the weather.

This concept points to the interplay between exerting control over one's circumstances and surrendering to outside factors that are unable to be controlled.

What is contained in the *dacha*, the Russian country house, for my informants, is more ambiguously situated in terms of *byt*. From the limited discussion I had on the intersection of these concepts, I conclude that while the *dacha* does exist within the realm of *byt*, going into the mountains or going camping does not. Andrei's grandmother includes their summer life at the *dacha*, or *sad*⁴, as she refers to it, as part of the family's *byt*. She lives there with Andrei's grandfather for the entire summer, and grew up in a similar type of household. Zoia's mother regards her mushroom hunting trips as an escape from *byt*. That she views it as such does not signify that everydayness is seen in a negative light, but that it is closely associated with monotony and routine, occasional breaks from which are welcome. It is important to note that Andrei's grandmother grew up in the country, in a setting closer to that of the *dacha* than that of the city, and so her conception of *byt* is, by virtue of that experience, connected to her experience there. It is difficult to determine to what extent *byt* reaches outside of the apartment among those who grew up entirely in the city.

⁴ The Russian word *sad* on its own, without a modifier, typically refers to a garden or a park, with no reference to any specific building or structure. However, Andrei's family uses this word when speaking about their house in the country, an institution most Russians refer to as the *dacha*. This usage may be a family idiosyncrasy or a regional usage that I have not been exposed to.

My informants' descriptions of *byt* did not appear to be strongly affected by gender, however, the ways in which various aspects of everyday life are experienced and discussed are influenced by it. I will discuss these particularities starting with the space of the kitchen.

The Kitchen

Andrei meets me at the bus stop and leads me to his apartment building. I had been there once before two summers ago to make gazpacho with a mutual American friend, but his family was not there at the time, so it was a different kind of visit. We ring the bell on the landing and his mother meets us at the door, introducing herself with just her first name, Nastia,⁵ and welcoming us in. The apartment is noticeably quiet, except for the light noise of a TV in the background. The interior is spotless, while still appearing lived in. Andrei's mother exudes quiet warmth. She is blonde and of small build, wearing nicer house clothes than I often see. Everything about the family and their house is put together, but not in a stuffy way. Nastia offers for Andrei to make me tea, and we go into the kitchen. The table is covered with plates and bowls of cookies and candies. Nastia comes in after a little while to put out the chocolate covered toffees that I brought, commenting on how good they taste. It is custom in Russia to bring a small gift to offer the host when visiting another's residence.

Andrei pours us tea and offers me potatoes, which are heating up in the oven. I have just eaten, but I say yes, and he serves me a small plate. Our slow chatter and laughter interrupt the silence. We have a close friendship that is also sometimes hesitant

⁵ In Russian culture, it is proper to address elders and those in positions of authority by their first name and patronymic, which is a standard part of an individual's full name that is derived from the father's name and follows directly after the first name. Andrei's mother breaks from this convention.

and restrained. I am in Ufa for such a short time and we do not have quite enough time to get used to each other completely again. But I do feel at home here. His mother returns to the kitchen to serve more candy, and asks me some questions about my travels, my school, and myself. She comments on how great it is that we all keep in touch with each other, meaning Americans from my summer language program and our Russian tutors, and how we can speak so easily over Skype. She also brings homemade *varenye*, or jam, for me to take back home – an incredibly sweet gesture. This kind of preserve is a staple on most Russian tables.

It is fitting to spend time with Andrei in his kitchen, as he considers it his favorite and the most important room in the apartment: “There, normally, everyone gets together and because of that, it’s warm there in the winter,” he says, “You make hot tea. We have an expansive kitchen so it’s good.” A typical Russian kitchen is quite small. There is a stovetop and oven, with limited counter space nearby, and the table therefore doubles as a preparation area. Sometimes there is a microwave, used most frequently for heating up leftovers. The refrigerator might be in or out of the kitchen area, depending on how much space is available. There are typically seats for two people, with perhaps a third tucked under the table, which is covered by a tablecloth and often placemats. The table stands against one of the walls, with at least one kind of sweet sitting in a bowl on top. There is almost always a combination of cookies, candies, homemade jam, nuts, and honey tucked in open and closed bowls, with refills sitting on shelves. A small sink for washing dishes stands near the stove. In most kitchens, a television is visible from the preparation area and kitchen table. With clear exceptions, Russian kitchens tend to be tidy, as clutter would encroach on the small amount of space that is available. The sink is often cleared

of dishes immediately, or soon, after they are used. New and larger kitchens appear quite different, visually closer to a typical American kitchen; however, the atmosphere remains similar.

The kitchen in Russia, or *kukhnia*, signifies much more than the preparation and eating of food. It is at once a dining area, a family gathering space, a television room, and a place to relax. In the kitchen, dwellers drink tea, chat, discuss philosophical issues, listen to the radio, and watch television. Eating out is not a daily practice among the people I interviewed. The *stolovaia*, a cafeteria-like eatery has a more functional, rather than leisure, purpose. It is often associated with work or school, when one is not at home but needs to eat. Fast food establishments, especially Western ones such as McDonald's or KFC, are more highly regarded than they are in the U.S., and dining out at one is an event, but nevertheless an unhealthy one. Restaurants are not frequented on casual occasions and do not figure into the everyday experience. The restaurant exists in an auxiliary and somehow foreign space. In some ways, this is due to financial constraints, but not entirely. Dining at restaurants and cafes seems to be more commonly practiced in St. Petersburg and Moscow, especially among younger Russians. In terms of living costs Ufa is quite comparable to St. Petersburg, though regardless of a family's income level, eating out at restaurants is not a priority. "Most often, I eat at home," Anna says, "I only eat at restaurants when I want to meet with friends. So, I go to restaurants not for the sole purpose of eating. I have lunch and dinner at home." Parents seem to eat out even less frequently than their children.

Home cooked food is highly valued, and the lack of a pronounced restaurant culture in Ufa only serves to emphasize the importance of the kitchen. It is truly the

central area of the home and family life. In all of my Russian host family experiences, the kitchen was the most frequent place of interaction and discussion. Additionally, in my interviews, it was commonly identified as the room most connected to family. Zoia explains that it is where everyone comes together to meet. Lilia quickly changes her original answer to my inquiry about the most family-oriented room, from the living room to the kitchen, giving the same reason as Zoia. The kitchen also happens to be Lilia's favorite room in the house. Since many apartments do not have a designated living room space, the kitchen acts as the common area for residents to meet. Zoia observes that when her parents arrive home with groceries, "everyone immediately comes into the kitchen to see what they bought and look in the bags. Even the cats come to see what they bought. My grandmother, too." Vera says that "when [her] friend comes over [they] spend more time in the kitchen than in [her] room even," drinking tea and talking. "The kitchen is also for conversations," she explains. Andrei delves deeper into the particularities of this space:

The kitchen is a special place for me. If I have friends over, we must sit in the kitchen. It's a place that we talk about things, we talk about philosophical things.

In my room, we won't talk about these things but in the kitchen...it's not very visible but it's actually like that. The kitchen is a special place for Russians.

When I ask him why this is, he mentions the small size and warmth of the kitchen, and also the proximity to food. The kitchen table was an important site for the discussion of political issues in the Soviet Union, at a time when raising these topics in public was not acceptable. This custom, it seems, has manifested itself in the younger generation in a slightly different manner.

The kitchen is also the site in the Russian home where gender differences are most noticeable and exaggerated. The regular presence of the female family members and absence of the male family members in the kitchen reaches across generations, revealing an important component in the way Russian children are socialized into their gender. This process maintains stability within the family unit, reinforcing traditional motherly, and less defined fatherly, functions. Socialization for a girl consists largely of spending a significant amount of time in the kitchen, observing the mother and grandmother. It is a key location for understanding what is and what will be expected from them as adults. Furthermore, it is an important space for cultural transmission. Taste defines much of what we know of the home, and food and eating constitutes a significant part of a culture's identity, whose continuation is often, as well as in the case of Russia, placed on women's shoulders. Passing down specific cooking skills and knowledge is achieved more through observation and casual comments than through explicit instruction. Zoia helps her family cook the *Novyi god* (New Year's) meal. Anna's mother comments off-handedly on her daughter's cooking technique when she enters the kitchen as Anna prepares a meal.

Although there are some exceptions, the kitchen is generally the domain of the women of the house, and there is usually one woman, whether it be the mother or the grandmother, that is its main occupant. Vera's mother is "always in the kitchen;" when Liuba's mother is not at work, "she cooks all day;" Anna and her mother are the only members of the family who cook (though Anna does so only when she is not busy); Lilia, her mother, and her sister are the family cooks; and Andrei's grandmother is normally the one in the kitchen, since his mother works. However, it does not come naturally to my

informants to emphasize the absence of the man in the kitchen, as this is a normal part of the daily routine and taken for granted. Whether or not the male household members cook, it is still most often considered the duty of one or more of its female members. While Aleksei says he cooks about half of the time, he reports that his mother prefers to do it herself. “It’s not about food,” he says, “but about the fact that she wants to fulfill her duties, her motherly duties.” This is a really telling moment, as we see that it is not only men’s lack of initiative to help, but also internal pressures, that place the kitchen responsibilities on the woman. Even when given the option to be alleviated of this labor, Aleksei’s mother feels uncomfortable with his fulfilling an obligation that is directly connected by society to her identity as a mother. If Aleksei took over the cooking completely, this significant aspect of her identity would be compromised. On the other hand, if Aleksei were her daughter, it seems likely that she would more readily share this responsibility.

Zoia’s dad is the only man among my interviewees who cooks often, and this arrangement is justified by the fact that he is currently unemployed. “Whoever is available at the time cooks,” Zoia’s mother explains, “Most often Zoia’s dad cooks, because he isn’t working now and we ask him to make dinner.” This narrative is unlike the others in which women name themselves as the primary cook without naming a reason. The man’s position in the kitchen requires an explanation, because “it isn’t man’s work to cook,” as Lara asserts, while a woman’s role is self-evident. With the exception of Zoia’s family, it is a special occasion when the man cooks. Andrei says that his grandfather can cook, and even makes a delicious potato dish, but only does so once a month or less. “He will cook when you request him to,” he says, “but it’s rare, because

grandmother cooks for the most part.” Anna’s father never cooks, as it “just doesn’t work out for [him],” though he does express his gratitude towards his wife during the interview for being able and willing to cook. Vera and her father cook at times, such as when her mother is sick, but “[her] mother is responsible for making sure that there is always food...[She] is the leader of the kitchen.”

Cleaning dishes is almost always considered the woman’s responsibility as well, and dishwashing machines are uncommon. When male members of the family wash dishes, it is one of the children, not the father or grandfather. Lilia explains that who washes the dishes in her family varies, but that her father never cleans. Although Andrei does the dishes sometimes, he does not see it as a responsibility but as a personal decision. He says, “I clean sometimes, when I feel like it, or I think, ‘I should clean the dishes, my mom always cleans, I should clean some.’” Andrei was not raised to feel accountable for cleaning, and does so almost as a favor. His mother is liable for the cleanliness of the kitchen, as he demonstrates in his description of guest etiquette. “Well, when my mom is home and I’m hanging out with friends,” he explains, “and I know someone is coming over, I call my mom so she knows and she’s ready. Maybe she needs to clean up a bit, or wash dishes.” Regardless of who made the mess, if the house is not clean, it is ultimately his mother who is responsible for its state. On the contrary, Zoia and Anna feel an obvious duty to do the dishes. “I clean the dishes, of course,” Zoia says, “Who else would do it? It’s always me.”

Although everyone could clean up after themselves if necessary in Lara’s family, each person almost always rushes to work or to school after they eat, and the responsibility falls on her grandmother “well, because, she doesn’t work, she is on her

pension.” Next in line to clean is her mother, then Lara, and then her ten-year-old brother, who feels an urge to clean the entire kitchen roughly once a month. When the mother does get a break from some of her domestic duties, it is more often through the help of her mother rather than her husband. Much can be demanded of a pensioner grandmother living with her child’s family. Lara’s grandmother sits in the kitchen practically all day long, alternating between cooking, cleaning, and drinking tea with her sister, who comes to visit almost every day. It appears that even when she is not involved in domestic labor, Lara’s grandmother is located in the kitchen. Grandfathers do not live as long as their female counterparts, which is one reason that they are more absent from the domestic sphere. Even when they are living, they appear only as background figures in the larger domestic scene. I learned a great deal more about Andrei’s grandmother than his grandfather during my interview with him.

Grocery shopping turns out to be more ambiguous in terms of gender roles, and it is impossible to identify a rule across households. It is quite dependent on each particular family how, when, and by whom groceries are bought throughout the week. Grocery shopping is portrayed as gendered in only one instance in my interviews, connected to the female family members’ ability find good deals. “My grandmother or mom buys groceries because they know where you can find discounts, groceries for less expensive,” Andrei explains, “They know in which store there is good meat. I just buy what I need and don't think about it.” The women in his family have privileged knowledge that justifies their role for him.

The domestic division of labor is not necessarily considered unequal. A former host father from another family asserted directly that women and men were equal, despite

the fact that he did none of the housework or cooking. When I asked Lilia about the differences between men and women's experience in the home, she agreed that they are not so dissimilar. "They have their own duties (*obiazannosti*)," she says, "but life is not that different. Women aren't cooking all day. It's not that one person does a lot and the other does nothing...everyone does a bit, and it's good for everyone." Cooking and cleaning are tasks that repeat themselves each day without question. They are necessary for the health and sustenance of the family unit, and there is no option to put off this responsibility for another day. The work designated for the male members of the family, which usually involves household renovations and odd jobs, is often not necessary on a daily basis and can be delayed until a later date without significant repercussions for other members of the family. In short, men's typical duties are less critical in running a household and significantly less time consuming. Considerably fewer tasks are demanded of a man in the domestic space than are demanded of a woman in the specific role each fulfills.

This arrangement is not portrayed by my informants as cripplingly oppressive. In some ways, women derive power from these situations and experiences, as they are in charge of the kitchen, which is arguably the most central part of the Russian apartment. Nevertheless, men still retain leadership over the household overall, despite their lack of control in the kitchen space. Vera and Lilia both directly designate the husband as the head of the family. Moreover, there is an obvious lack of space to challenge the norm on a familial and cultural level. Women have little choice in deciding how they wish to define their motherhood in the domestic space. As a result, this dominant division of labor becomes problematic and structurally oppressive. This is a difficult cycle to break

due to a deep emotional attachment to feminine figures in the kitchen, a role that the male family figures do not fill. When Andrei speaks about his grandmother's cooking, a smile spreads across his face that you can hear in his voice. Although he does not directly admit it, he implies that part of the reason he is remaining in Ufa to study is that he always has food prepared for him by his grandmother.

Whenever I asked about favorite dishes during my interviews, I was told about dishes that the mother or grandmother prepared. Even though her father is named as the main cook, Zoia discusses in detail her mother's pizza experiments with visible enjoyment: "She puts everything she wants, everything she sees. There can be sausages, and cucumbers, and olives, everything immediately. It's not important that people don't do it that way. Tomatoes, ketchup and mayonnaise, and cheese, too. It tastes really good!" Liuba also mentions one of her mother's dishes as her favorite, adding, "I love everything and will eat everything that my grandmother makes. I don't normally eat soup, except when my grandma makes it...I love when my grandma cooks." These praises were never repeated for the father or grandfather, and these narratives of good cooking serve to perpetuate the women's place in the kitchen through positive reinforcement.

When men do cook, they do not cook the same meals as their female counterparts. There are typically masculine and typically feminine dishes. The *pirog*, or stuffed pie, is considered a feminine dish, one that would often be prepared by one's mother or grandmother. Baking in general is a feminine genre of cooking. "My mom loves to make pies," Lilia explains,

It's her hobby. She can make all kinds. She cooks well, and can cook everything you need. She can make things quickly and tasty everyday. She doesn't make it because you can't buy it, but because she loves home cooked food.

It's her favorite thing to do. She makes so many pies, like in a bakery.

Masculine food is often fried, or cooked outside. For example, men characteristically prepare *shashlyk*, Russia's version of the kebab, over an open fire in the summer, outside of the kitchen. Yuri, a friend of Lara's family, responds to my inquiry about his daily kitchen regime by asserting his love of cooking outdoors. "I love to cook in nature, for example," he says, "It is completely different." Cooking outdoors and cooking in the kitchen are regarded as considerably different activities. Both times I left the city to go camping in the forest or swimming in a lake, Aleksei marinated *shashlyk* beforehand and cooked it when we arrived at our destination. When I travelled to the mountains with Anna's family and family friends, the two men prepared a small clay oven in which to cook the *shashlyk*, and completed the entire preparation process. Lara comments, "in Eastern and Caucasian countries, they think that meat should only be prepared by a man, and it happens that my dad makes *plov*, [a spiced rice dish prepared with meat and vegetables], better than anyone else, so he cooks it." The assertion that one member of the family is particularly apt at cooking a particular dish cannot be taken at face value. While individual family members may have an inexplicable ability to cook one dish well, these claims support a naturalized view of gendered abilities. They do not take into account that a strong cooking ability is not an inherent quality, but is attained through years of practice and repetition.

The kitchen is not only the woman's domain when it involves cooking, or even more generally, labor. Women also dominate when it comes to relaxation in the kitchen, while men tend to relax in the living room. Vera and her mom "often talk in the kitchen at night, while [her] dad sits and watches TV in the other room." Zoia's mother retreats to the kitchen when she desires alone time, while Anna's mother does so when her husband is sleeping. If Anna's parents wish to watch different TV shows, her mother is the one to relocate. Contrarily, Zoia's father relocates to the bedroom while chopping, for instance, when the kitchen is overcrowded on holidays. Anna's father says that he does not use the kitchen for anything but eating: "Maybe tea or coffee," he says, "speaking with my wife, or watching TV with Anna." His space is in the living room, and he only takes short interludes in the kitchen. While Aleksei and his brother spend most of their time in the living room, his mother and grandmother are constantly in the kitchen, reading, listening to the radio, watching television or preparing food. On the other hand, Liuba and Vera spend a significant amount of their free time in the kitchen when they are not busy with homework. Therefore, it is primarily female family members, regardless of generation, who tend to occupy the space.

Most of the people I interviewed were not critical of women's domination of the kitchen, or their uneven contribution to domestic labor. Housework is not considered labor at the same level as outside employment is, despite the time commitment that it requires. The self-proclaimed housewife I spoke with at Lara's apartment agreed with her husband in his claim that she had never worked a day in her life, laughing along with him. While this may seem like a playful interaction, women truly do not get the same amount of credit and respect for their contributions, nor do they have much choice in regard to

their workload. Although male family members seem grateful for the work that women do, it is considered a given that it will be done.

In general, domestic labor inequality is not questioned, even by the younger generation. I discussed this issue specifically during only one interview, with Vera and Liuba, who expressed dissatisfaction with the way they saw labor divided in their family. “I feel bad for my mom,” Vera says, “because she has to make something three times every day. I don’t want to become older and have to cook everyday. It’s awful.” Liuba agrees and also hopes for a household where the domestic responsibilities are shared. This is clearly a generational divide that seems to be slowly manifesting, though it is not yet very noticeable. There is not a clear break, as the majority of those I spoke with from the younger generation expressed similar views on labor in the home as their parents did. Such attitudes are partially based on the assumption that women possess an inherent ability for domestic tasks, such as cooking, which leads to them repeatedly fulfilling them. This deeply engrained placement of the women in the kitchen will be difficult to change, as the occupation of the space primarily by female members of the family during work and leisure time ensures their socialization into a sphere that largely excludes male members.

Guests and Holidays

Lara picked me up from where I was staying to bring me to her apartment via public transit. She lives in the outer reaches of the city, and she tells me more about the neighborhoods we pass through on our way, which I have not seen in any of my trips to Ufa. They are large residential neighborhoods, and when we get off at her stop, there is a

beautiful Russian Orthodox Church nestled in between large apartment buildings. When we take the elevator up to her apartment, her dad is standing on the landing, a large man with a prominent mustache wearing a fur hat. Without a word of introduction, he replaces us in the elevator, and we remain unacquainted, perhaps for the entirety of the day.

Lara's mom, who is cleaning the house, greets us explaining that one of her friends always comments on the disorder of the house, though she personally does not mind. Lara's little brother, Andrei, is running around furiously through the hallway of the apartment, which is quite large. I am led into Lara's room, which she shares with her brother, and it is a bit stark. Two large chairs, which appear to transform into beds, stand against the wall and a desk and chair are tucked in the corner, across from a large dresser on the other side of the room. Her grandmother comes in, excited and surprised to greet the first American she has met. She exclaims that she has only seen them in movies and how it is so different to see me in person. She is a thin and short woman, who appears to be youthful and in good health, not dressed quite like a typical grandmother. I give Lara the box of chocolates that I brought, and she exits to put them in the living room. Andrei runs in and out of the room sporadically as Lara and I talk and she changes into snow pants and warmer clothes. We are headed outside to spend the afternoon in the snowy forest next to her apartment building. Numerous comments are made about the lightness of how I am dressed – I am wearing corduroy pants, a shirt, and sweater – but everyone is appeased after I assure them repeatedly that I am really fine, telling me that we can always return to the house if I am cold.

We leave the apartment to meet up with the group, two couples consisting of friends and relatives, and Lara's parents, the two kids, and a pug. I am quickly introduced

to the various members of the group, too quickly to pick up on names, and we begin to walk. Jokes are made about the interview I am going to conduct and possible questions I am going to ask. I am compared to a journalist. This is a close group of people, constantly quipping back and forth, and they have clearly known each other for years. I feel lucky to be included in such a gathering, especially as we enter the forest, which is completely coated with blankets of snow and peppered with people walking and skiing. I am thoroughly impressed that going out to grill and eat in nature is not solely a summer activity. We finally arrive, make a table out of packed snow and cardboard, and unload the food, which includes pickles, chicken wings, *bliny*,⁶ fish in a jar, cabbage, cookies, chocolates, and many other things. I am told not to be shy and to eat whatever I want, and at some point I am given a fork that extends to reach faraway food, which everyone laughs about, but uses without shame.

Everyone is talking over each other, preparing a fire for the *kolbasa*, a word that refers to varieties of sausage. The men are noticeably quieter, making comments between themselves more than with the group. They are also more reserved with me and I am much more frequently addressed by the women. When the topic of my project comes up, one woman says, “Oh I can tell you all about that, I’m a housewife,” and the others chime in agreement. Lara and I chat a bit on the side, as everyone eats the *kolbasa* and makes toasts. The men start out drinking whisky and move to vodka, while we start out with wine and move to vodka only when the wine box is empty. The blonde woman, the self-proclaimed housewife, offers to make a mixed drink for me with the vodka, but Lara

⁶ Russian crepes

assures her that I have been in Russia enough times and I can handle the straight vodka, even though she herself has been drinking whiskey mixed with coke.

The woman with short hair pulls me aside to recount a disjointed history of ethnic relations and issues in Bashkiria, which I sometimes had trouble following and recalling later on. Despite many interruptions, she continues her narrative until she has told me everything she planned to say. Finishing her thoughts on this matter is apparently important to her. One of the men shows me a video of their summer trip to a river somewhere in Bashkiria, which he describes to me. This group of people takes many trips together, and Lara makes an off-hand comment about them having more fun and more of a social life than she does. Alcohol seems to be a very important part of these trips, as they frequently mention how much they brought with them and whether it was enough or not. When we finish the alcohol in this instance, there is “nothing else to do,” and the group decides to return to the apartment. Andrei has been skiing around this whole time, and the dog is dressed in a jacket and booties with the insignia of Ufa’s hockey team, named for the Bashkir hero, Salavat Yulaev.⁷

When we get back to the apartment, everyone rushes to quickly set a table in the hall. Food is put out and so are nice glasses, along with some alcohol from the cupboard. There is a large cupboard with beautiful fancy glassware and many bottles filled to various levels. Everyone is still talking over each other, more and more boisterous with further drinking. There is a lively, festive, familiar energy around the table. Lara starts to play games on her tablet, and eventually the interview begins. As soon as I ask the first question, the men gradually get up to leave one by one, as the women start by taking

⁷ Salavat Yulaev supported the anti-Tsarist rebellion lead by Emelyan Pugachev in the late 18th century, and the monument dedicated to him that stands on the *Belaya* (White) River is one of the most significant symbols of the city.

turns answering each question, and then end up having a conversation that often strays off topic. After realizing how far they had gotten off topic, one of the women prompts me to ask the next question. When two of the men eventually return (Lara's dad retired for the night), they ask, seemingly surprised, if the interview is still going on. The women respond, "Yes but we are talking about the kitchen, so it is our question." The men stay, but contribute little to answering the questions, only commenting briefly, if at all. Lara's grandmother is present throughout the interview, but also contributes minimally. She seems to be close with all of her daughter's friends as well.

We stop intermittently to drink and toast – the men with small shot glasses filled with vodka and the women with taller glasses that they fill with what is translated as "bird cherry" or "birch cherry." One woman keeps on repeating the phrase in English, laughing hysterically after each time. Lara stops drinking, but they keep on pouring me more as they make toasts. I also play the role of the unofficial American ambassador, responding to various questions about life in the United States, but I do not know answers to many of their questions concerning more statistical information. They drop in a phrase in English every once in a while and then have a good laugh about it. Everyone crowds into the hallway to see me off as I leave, giving me kisses on the cheek and telling me that I will be welcome back to their home whenever I return to Ufa.

The table is a significant site of gathering in the Russian home. When guests come over, including on major holidays, a table is often set in the living room, as it is usually the largest room and will accommodate many friends and relatives. When guests are not present, the table is taken down. Setting the table establishes the space and tone for the rest of the evening. The phrase, *nakryvat' stol*, or to set the table, does not only

refer to the physical object, but includes the typical activities that ensue around it. This expression is frequently used to describe holidays. The kitchen table is for more intimate moments between family members and close friends, while the large table in the living room is for bigger groups and more significant holidays. No matter what traditions a particular family has, they always revolve around the table. For Liuba, her family sets the table “so that everyone can sit, [they] eat, and [her] mom and aunt love to joke and tell stories, as if in a theatre, and it is always so much fun to listen to their stories.” In Vera’s family, she explains, “when relatives come over we sit at the table, play board games...my aunt and many cousins, everyone comes for every birthday, and we always play games.” There is not such a clear gathering location when young people’s friends visit, and there seems to be more movement throughout the home on such occasions. The table is a more formal and family oriented space, especially for the young generation.

The only holidays that all my informants mention that they celebrate are *Novyi god* (New Year) and family birthdays. *Novyi god* is the most important holiday for Russian families, more so than Christmas, a situation largely produced by Soviet campaigns to replace Christmas with an equally important secular holiday. Even during my interview with her in July, Anna noted it as the most recent significant holiday she could describe. Important holidays are not often celebrated outside of the home, but rather in one’s own residence or that of a relative or friend. While some young people meet up with friends after celebrating *Novyi god* with their families, it is still above all a family holiday. Aleksei’s first and only experience without his family on this occasion occurred this past year, while he was already well into his twenties. If a family does not celebrate in its own home, then it will often be in the home of a relative. The most modest

celebration still includes a minimum of typical activities. Anna describes her latest *Novyi god* celebration:

We gathered at the table, we ate and sat there until 12. Then at 12 we listened to Putin, listened to the chiming of the bells, sat a little more, and then I went to my room. Because this *Novyi god* I worked and was really tired, I went to bed. My parents waited, talked between themselves a little more and then also went to bed.

Despite the fact that the family is highly critical of Vladimir Putin, he is still an essential part of their celebration each year. Since Soviet times, the state leader has been a crucial part of the *Novyi god* celebration, delivering remarks on television across Russia. This is a ritual of citizenship enacted in the private space of the home, affirming Russian identity even in opposition to the leader. Other state holidays are celebrated in the city, and are either unobserved at home, signifying a day of rest, or marked simply with a gift, such as on March 8th for International Woman's Day. There is an exception for holidays that specifically concern a member of the family. For instance, Day of the Navy is significant for Zoia's family, as her father served in the navy.

Religious holidays were addressed minimally and superficially in my interviews. Russian Orthodox holidays were never directly mentioned, and do not appear to be widely significant in families' personal narratives. Lilia, whose family is Muslim, explained, "On religious holidays, we go to the mosque, we eat with neighbors, we call guests, and guests come over." Zoia's mother spoke of her recent exploration of Muslim holidays that had "just recently appeared on the calendar," but she had only attended mosque once around the time of *Novyi god* and recognized her minimal knowledge on the

subject. Birthdays are not always very significant holidays; they should be marked, but not necessarily with large gestures or with guests. The Russian word, *iubilei*, can denote an anniversary or a round-numbered birthday, such as forty or sixty five. These birthday occasions become more significant and more largely celebrated than individual birthdays, especially among older generations.

Conversation is an important part of hosting guests, and it is always among the activities the interviewees listed. Anna's dad delineates the topics of discussion as "political problems, critique of the government, and talking about friends, acquaintances, your opinion on their life, family, work." Topics are quite fluid, though it depends on the individual. One other topic worth noting is that of acquaintances and relatives, telling stories and expressing opinions about their lives. Anna's dad refers to the phrase *pomyt' kostochki blizhnemu*, loosely translated as washing your neighbors' bones, which denotes this activity of commenting on the lives of those around you. This topic of conversation not only reflects those individuals discussed, but also reinforces the speakers' own identities to their friends and relatives in terms of what they support and what they oppose in others' lives. Watching television or looking at photographs can also be a communal activity that families engage in when guests are present, but both of these activities generally revolve around conversation as well.

There are many words in the Russian language that refer to the act of conversing with others. Two significant examples that are referred to often in the course of my interviews are *razgovarivat'*, to converse or talk, and *obshchat'sia*, to socialize or visit. While they may appear to be used interchangeably, in fact there are very specific connotations contained in the word *obshchat'sia* that are left out in *razgovarivat'*.

Obshchat'sia may be translated as 'to communicate' or 'to socialize with', 'to commune' or 'to associate with', however, these words do not provide a comprehensive definition of the term. More precisely, the word means to commune with others through discussion, in the home or on shared excursions. It is often used in reference to conversations with friends, while guests are over, or during the holidays. These conversations are more often related to soulful topics, and do not involve mundane everyday subject matter.

Razgovarivat' and other variations on the verb to speak may be used in such situations, but do not contain these connotations in the words themselves. They must be modified or expanded upon to hold any larger meaning. *Obshchenie*, the noun derived from the verb *obshchat'sia*, is a significant activity in itself, and it is not always necessary to specify the particular topic of discussion.

Even before guests arrive for a holiday celebration or visit there is a range of activities that are engaged in almost exclusively by the female members of the family. Due to her clear connection with the kitchen, the woman is frequently the primary host for guests, in charge of ensuring that the house is clean and the food is prepared. Cleaning up is always necessary before guests come over. A tidy house is expected, even when the guests are close friends, as demonstrated by Lara's mother, who was busy cleaning before her guests arrived. When she is cooking and preparing for the arrival of guests, Lara's father "often just sits and doesn't do anything at this time. [Her] brother also, as it's not a man's job to cook." If a male family member does cook, the female family members are nevertheless in charge of planning the menu and ensuring that the apartment is neat and presentable. Zoia's mom says, "The man generally cooks [in our house]. He cooks food, and I just give advice, help, and make the menu. Because he likes [to cook]."

And I try to keep order at this time for when the guests come.” Regardless of Zoia’s dad’s help with cooking, preparing for guests still remains her mom’s responsibility overall, and she therefore prefers to invite guests when she is not working, so she has time to prepare properly. Since women look after the domestic space so closely, it makes sense for her to take responsibility for the guests as well. Although it seems that the men are just as involved with the guests, they do not engage in activities related to preparation for the guests’ arrival. Instead, they participate in activities not directly linked to the home and therefore more within the typical male sphere of attention.

The consumption and discussion of alcohol is a site of considerable gender distinction. Wine is more proper for women to drink, followed by cocktails. Hard alcohol, such as vodka or whiskey, on its own is largely reserved for men, and beer is also more of a man’s drink. My experience as a guest at Lara’s house provides a vivid illustration of these points. Although I was offered any drink of my choice while we were in the forest, the three adult women began by drinking the boxed wine, so I followed suit. While Lara drank whisky, she mixed it with Coca Cola, something none of the men did with their drinks. The men finished the remaining bottles of whiskey and vodka, and only after the wine was finished did the women begin drinking vodka. While inside the apartment, the gendered consumption of particular drinks was further established. The women, myself included, drank a homemade wine drink while the two men at the table drank vodka. They would toast on their own as well as with the rest of the table. However, it was clear that their drinking ritual was separate from ours, due to the frequency and manner in which they went about it, while the women’s drinking ritual always included the men.

The topic of alcohol in general is more acceptable for men to address. As Reis discusses, in *Russian Talk*, male identity is connected to mischief and irony in unofficial discourses, and the cherished recounting of tales of misbehavior includes those about alcohol consumption (Reis 1997). This issue was quite rarely addressed in the course of my interviews, which may be attributable to the heavy representation of women among my informants. Anna's father expresses remorse that, according to him, not only are holidays in post-Soviet Russia quiet, but "even alcoholic joy isn't there."⁸ "Everyone was on the street, drunk," he says about past celebrations, "but it was already an event. Now, there are fireworks at 12, but the holiday isn't there. We drank a lot and lived poorly, but it was still a holiday!... There isn't sincere, soulful joy [now]. This Putin show (*Putinskoe shou*) has killed everything in the people." Reis discusses further that alcoholism could be "an elaboration of ironic resistance to the mundane, practical disciplines of family, community, and state" (Reis 69). Following this interpretation, Anna's father's loss of "even alcoholic joy" conveys a sense of hopelessness over his life, mirroring his pessimistic attitudes toward the current regime, which he does not support.

Andrei speaks about alcohol carefully, noting that "Well, of course there is vodka, but I don't drink it myself. [It's for] my grandfather, uncle, and dad. A little, you know, it's fine." He justifies his family's alcohol consumption as he describes it, more to himself than to me, as he knows that I do not disapprove of these practices. Many young people whom I meet are quite wary of drinking alcohol, especially in excess, for various reasons. Due to the large local Muslim population, religion is one reason noted by young people for this choice. Others refer to negative experiences they have had with alcohol, as

⁸ This phrasing reflects a well-known quotation by Prince Vladimir of Kiev in the tenth century that alcohol is the "joy of the Rus" (Herlihey 1991: 131).

Andrei does, noting that neighborhood men drinking beer in his courtyard as one reason he spends little time there. Around holidays, though, it is generally acceptable for young people to drink some wine or champagne with their families.

While there are general modes of behavior towards guests, not all guests are treated in the same way. Andrei tells me:

Of course when someone comes over, you have to clean up unnecessary things, dust a bit, thinking about what kind of guest is coming over. If it's a good friend, they just come over and I don't do anything. If it's an important person, then you have to be attentive.

I ask Andrei what constitutes an important person, worthy of attentive preparation, and he names adult guests who might come over to see elder members of the family, especially non-relatives. Among peers of the younger generation, the rules of hosting a guest are not all followed. For example, Anna thinks that the great importance of tidiness and formality with guests is lessening with her generation. Most young people, in fact, draw a very clear line between their parents' guests and their own.

The distinction between young people's standards of hosting and those of their parents are visible. I have been to Liuba's apartment twice, both times when her parents were out of the city. The first time, I was there with her boyfriend and his younger brother to watch a movie and spend the night. We spent most of the time in the kitchen while Liuba was making pasta with sausages; I cannot remember if the guests helped or not. The apartment is spacious and family members have their own rooms. At times the house felt eerily clean and untouched until we occupied it. The second time, I visited with Andrei, who attended school with Liuba, and two of their mutual friends. We sat around

the kitchen table talking about university, Latin, and television shows, while Liuba cut up potatoes and the “Chicken in a jar” sat cooking in the oven. The only time we helped prepare was to help put the chicken in the jar. Thomas made a comment about the small size of his own kitchen at home and noted that Liuba had a large kitchen. He said that “the kitchen is the most important room in the house in Russia,” and Liuba noted to me, “That’s good for your research.” When the chicken was almost done, we sat up from the booth-like bench to grab a large jar of *kompot* (fruit infused water) from beneath us. There were jars and jars of it, filling the entire inside of the bench. Preserving fresh food, purchased in the country or grown in a family’s own garden plot, for use in the winter is a common practice. We sat back down as Liuba served us potatoes and *kompot* and began to eat. Liuba made more potatoes for herself, as there were not enough in the first batch, and after a short time Andrei served everyone a portion of chicken. We all sat down to finish eating the chicken, which was delicious. No one cleared or washed the dishes. We all migrated to Liuba’s sister’s room to play Krokodil, a game similar to charades.

Without a doubt, visiting friends while their parents are not home is a more informal and relaxed experience. However, the typical script followed by the parents’ generation is not abandoned completely, but rather altered. The kitchen and food are still overwhelmingly present and central. Every time I have been invited to a friend or acquaintance's house while their parents are not home, whether or not we have recently eaten or it is a typical meal time, food is always offered, and we often sit in the kitchen.

The *Dacha* and Nature

My first trip to a *dacha* was with Anna and her family on a weekend in early August 2012. A *dacha* is a house outside of the city, often visited solely in summertime, though some *dachniki*, as owners are known, also venture out in the winter. It is usually a small house, often with a wooden *banya*, or Russian bathhouse, and a small garden. Anna, her mom, and I drove down to their *dacha* in the morning, greeted by her father as we pulled up to the house. It was located in Bashkiria, about an hour and a half away from Ufa. During the drive, Anna's mom pointed out the river nearby where the fish they eat are often caught. The house was almost exactly like I had imagined it – it was quite small, with a living room connected to the kitchen, a large stone oven, and a bedroom on the side. There was no bathroom indoors, but an outhouse in the backyard, with a sink on the side of the wooden *banya* for washing hands.

After a tour of the house, a bowl of borscht, and some political discussion including a listen to a radio program, other visitors arrived. They were friends of the family and they brought fresh fish from the river we had passed on the way. Anna and I were sent to buy milk from a family down the road, and took off walking. The sun was beginning to set, and the family we sought for the milk did not appear to be home. We walked back to the house, passing a vast field on the way, lit beautifully from the setting sun. Late into the night, we all sat on the front patio talking about many things, including our mutual friends from the summer program and classic American movies that I have yet to see. The air was still and quiet, though I had heard complaints about how young people would sometimes come to the neighboring houses with friends and make a lot of noise, which evidently was not in compliance with the unwritten rules of *dacha* etiquette.

Before beginning our trip back to the city the next day, Anna and I prepared a cold summer soup, *okroshka*, chopping various ingredients on a small table in front of the house. This soup is made of a combination of chopped vegetables, sausage, and egg, over which *kvas*, a fermented beverage, or *kefir*, a yogurt drink, is poured.

While holidays such as *Novyi god* (New Year) and birthdays are notable occasions in which there is a clear set of expected behaviors and occurrences that diverge from the routine, they still exist within the realm of everydayness. This is not the case for life at the *dacha*, or for spending time in nature (*na prirode*). These spaces transcend routine and provide an escape from the monotony of daily life. This time cannot be simply equated to leisure time, as leisure can be a part of routine and labor can be included in the time spent at the *dacha*. Leisure and work are defined differently in the city and outside its borders. Although one can relax in the city, true relaxation is perceived to happen outside, in or near nature. All the families I met travelled to their *dachas*, located twenty minutes to two hours outside the city, by car. Young people interested in camping or spending the day in nature would not always drive, but might go by bus or *elektrichka*, the local commuter rail line.

Anna's father attributes his closer relationship with nature to his age and stage in life. He does not feel as much motivation to go out and engage with life in the city, preferring to stay "sometimes at the house in the country. It is the natural process of ending a phase in your life. You want more unity, discussion with nature, eternity, water, mountains." Although Anna's father would like to spend more time at the *dacha*, he explains that it is difficult because "in Russia there is such a small pension." Anna's mother works full time as a dentist, while her father is currently retired, working part-

time also in dentistry. Being close to nature is considered by my informants, as well as by many others with whom I have spoken, to be healthy for one's body and soul. Apparently, Anna's mom "often has a headache and goes [to sit by the river] and her head doesn't hurt anymore." Physical closeness to nature itself is viewed as healing. The country in general is a healthier environment than the city, which can be quite polluted from the surrounding oil industry. Nastia notes that at the *dacha* there is "fresh air. Here we have all this gas, and there it is better." Life in the country is the ideal, considered better than the home in the city for those in the middle to older generation. It is "calming" and "relaxing" there, and while it is in a certain sense a part of the domestic space, it does not follow the same rules as domestic life in the apartment. For example, holidays might be celebrated differently at a house in the country. "If we get together at a house," Lilia notes, "[There might be a] barbeque, *shashlyk* (kebabs), songs, dances, I don't know. In the village or at the *dacha*." In my discussions with Anna's dad and Andrei's family about the *dacha*, I was enthusiastically invited to join them there if I returned to Ufa. This space, more than the apartment, is one to share and a source of pride.

Andrei's grandparents spend the entire summer at the *dacha*, while Andrei and his mother, Nastia, only visit when they wish. When I ask whether they find it better in their city apartment or at the *dacha*, Nastia explains, "I got used to living in the city, my generation. [My mother's] generation lives easier there, because they were born in those exact conditions, in their own separate houses. There were cows and goats, chickens. Now this happens less." Andrei's grandmother expands:

We had a small home. A bit bigger than this room. And it was our parents and five children. And there was a small lamb, and cow, and there was an oven

and we would all gather around it. We lived before in these conditions. Then we went to the city, but we were born in the land and so it's better for us there. While Nastia "managed to go to [her] grandmother's to live in the country" for an extended time in her youth, Andrei has not had this experience. He visits the *dacha* in the summer, helps out with work around the house, cooks, tends to the flowers, and knits socks. However, his experience there is markedly different from that of his grandmother, as these are only short trips, while he grew up and lives full time in the city. There is a subtle downward trend in knowledge of and interest in country life and nature among the younger generation. While some do thoroughly enjoy these activities in the summer, they are not as indispensable and are not referred to in such reverent terms.

Zoia's attitude toward mushroom picking exemplifies this shift. She is no longer driven to accompany her parents to collect mushrooms. "I've stopped loving [mushrooms]," she admits, "At first I was enthusiastic...but then I got tired of it. These people love mushrooms so much, and they have friends they go with." Her family's mushroom hunting is a source of familial mythology. Taking pictures of the various mushrooms they find and sharing them with friends and family is a significant part of the ritual. When guests come over, Zoia's mother "immediately turns on the computer and shows them: 'These are the mushrooms we found,' and 'it's great of course'." Her mother explains in detail about how she loves gathering mushrooms, the various kinds that one finds in different geographical locations, and the best season for mushrooms to grow. This activity is a source of excitement and discovery for Zoia's parents, and one that cultivates a respect and appreciation of nature and also binds them to their specific natural surroundings. Mushroom species vary according to location, and so mushroom

hunting is very particular to geographic locations. “We always want to find a new place,” she says, “And are always excited about a new season for mushrooms. It used to be in the fall, but now we are already gathering summer mushrooms that are growing in August. And every time it’s an opportunity to find a new place. We really like to gather mushrooms.”

Zoia’s mother names her latest trip to the Ural Mountains for this purpose as a memorable recent event. Among the interviewees as a group, one of the worst received questions I ask during my interviews is related to memory. I am curious if my interviewees have any vivid or important memories of their home, and if they are discussed among family members. Most are confused about the question, and I only receive two straightforward answers concerning memories of events that actually took place in the space of the apartment. Notable recollections are most often associated with being outside of the home, either taking a trip, spending time at the *dacha*, or being somewhere else in nature. Zoia’s mom very directly tells me that “the best memories are of the time spent out of the home,” while others convey this idea through less direct means. My question is confusing to them, I think, because it forces together the notable and the routine.

My informants’ memorable escapes from the routine include trips abroad, to other Russian cities, or out to the country. While we were roasting sausages in the snowy forests, Lara’s parents and their friends discussed past camping trips taken together, reminding me of my own friends recounting mischievous summer adventures. They spoke about the alcohol they brought and consumed with youthful glee and one of them showed me a video he had recorded while boating on a river somewhere in Bashkortostan.

It was clear that these were some of their most prized recollections, and they took joy in recalling them collectively. I never heard stories that took place at home recounted with nearly as much enthusiasm.

Apparently, for the Russians that I interviewed, the apartment is so closely associated with the routine and established structures that it is difficult to recall specific moments as standing out from the rest. Memories related to the home are often connected to repeated occurrences. Anna's grandmother, for instance, says that there are not any particularly significant stories to tell, but that she always feels positive emotions when she meets with her friends. While she "[loves] to be at home" and "loves[s] [her] home," this love is very general. She has good memories from, for example, "the time Anna and [she] went to Greece." Lilia answers my question about domestic memories by referring to her love of the ritual of drinking tea at home. "I have this consistent memory," she says, "I love drinking tea. We drink it many times a day at home – 8 times, 10, all the time." Drinking tea is indeed a common ritual centered around the kitchen table, paired with a cookie or sweet, and often over conversation. Aleksei says he must have memories of birthdays or New Year's celebrations, but fails to name a particular occasion. Anna remembers often, she says, how she and her parents "gathered every evening at home in the living room and talked, because now [she] is at home rarely and so this happens rarely." The difficulty of producing a specific memory does not point to dissatisfaction or unhappiness in the home, but rather to a different conception of the domestic space. The people I spoke with all value their homes, not for outstanding moments, but for the stability and consistency they provide. I did not encounter the same nostalgia for childhood that many people of the same age have in the United States, perhaps partly

because the young Russian generation grew up against a backdrop of instability in the 1990s. The Russian version of the home seems to be more fit for consistency, while other places, such as nature and the *dacha*, have greater potential as spaces of excitement and variation.

Remont

Anna, Zoia, and I meet Aleksei at the entrance to *tsentralnyi rynek*, the central market, exchanging the usual greeting and inquiries as we walk up to the food court, laughing a lot. Aleksei is a short and very fit student in his mid twenties in his last year at Bashkir State Pedagogical University (BGPU). He has short hair, a slight lisp, and a huge smile and acts, without fail, in the typical Russian gentlemanly way, very politely and correctly. I think he must have the heartiest laugh I have ever heard, deep and resounding, and we always laugh when we are together. We find a table, joined by Anna and Zoia, who also study at BGPU, and know Aleksei because they are all tutors for my summer language program. We talk about school, and Aleksei's approaching trip to Sochi as a translator during the Olympic games. Eventually, Anna and Zoia leave to sit at another table and I start the interview with Aleksei. It flows smoothly, punctuated by side comments and laughter. A colorful children's train passes by regularly, playing a high-pitched jingle that makes it hard to hear what the other person is saying. When it passes, Aleksei and I look at each other and giggle, surrendering to the sound of the train, especially since we are in a busy food court surrounded by many voices. It is truly a comical situation.

Aleksei holds back a bit in his interview, and it is not as though he is hiding something, but it seems to me that maybe there are certain feelings and ideas that he is not quite sure how or if he wants to express to me. These ideas are implied but not spelled out to the full extent. Aleksei has a certain humorous and accepting view of his home life, even though there is a lot he would change. He is usually quite straightforward in his observations, as when, for example, he admits that he doesn't invite friends over to his house because “there are a lot of things [he’s] unsatisfied with.” He specifically names the small size of his apartment as a reason, mentioning the fact that there are four beds in the living room. All members of his family sleep there, including his brother, mother, and grandmother. It is common for parents or grandparents to sleep in the living room, or hall. There are two words for living room in Russian, *gostinaya*, which translates more directly as living room, and *zal*, which might be translated as hall. However, I have found that *zal* is used more often, at least in this region. *Zal* can also be used interchangeably with the term *bol'shaya komnata*, meaning the large room, drawing attention to the significance of size. However, it is rare that the entire family sleeps in one room.

Although Aleksei has tentative plans to move out of his family apartment in the future, he also has ambitions to undertake *remont*, a term loosely equivalent to remodeling. When I ask whether he likes spending time in the kitchen, he begins to speak about *remont*, and as I prompt him, he explains his ideas to completely renovate the entire apartment. These plans include changing the layout and moving the walls. The wiring is apparently from Soviet times, and should be changed. He also lists the kitchen, bathroom, windows, doors, and floors as areas he would like to focus on. According to

Aleksei, much in the kitchen and hall has remained in the “traditional style,” and he asserts, “I can say that I’m a modern (*sovremennyi*) person. I’ll do everything as modern as possible, yeah, that’s a hundred percent.” In many ways, Aleksei’s desires reflect a clear break from the world that his mother and grandmother inhabit. While he imagines dramatic changes in the apartment, he notes that his mother hates change, preferring a decorative approach to *remont*. His aesthetic sensibility mirrors the way he imagines his future life, and he wants to embody his modern identity in the physical space of his prospective future home. The plan is to merge all that is good from his mother with what he finds useful in modernity. He says, “I already managed to soak in all that is bad from the modern world or almost everything from modern life, but it is good that I also remember, thanks to my mom. And so this combination will give me the essential tone that I want to give my future life.”

Although *remont* can be translated as remodeling, repair, or renovation, these terms do not encapsulate the nuances contained within the term. *Remont* is a particularly Russian concept, negotiated by different rules than how Americans conceive of remodeling their home. Contained within the word are aspirations for the future, one with more space, more comfort, and therefore a better life. The range in scale of changes that *remont* refers to is quite large, including simply buying new furniture as well as knocking down walls to build new rooms. Demand for this kind of work is apparently high, judging by the quantity of stores around the city dedicated to making physical changes in the home. There are various kinds of such stores, including ones that focus on specific rooms, such as the kitchen or the bathroom, as well as ones that deal only with tile or wallpaper. Interior designers are sometimes consulted on such matters, but this can be quite an

expense, and many Russians choose to do *remont* on their own. With or without an interior designer, the process seems to drag on. The term also includes the renovations that are implemented in an entire building, which are notable in that they often result in a lack of hot water, or any water, for periods as short as a couple of days or as long as a couple of weeks. However, building-wide *remont* is not instigated by the inhabitants of the building, but is put into action by the government.

Unlike its counterpart in some other cultures, *remont* exists within the realm of everydayness. Although large-scale changes might be seen as notable events, the changes that are made throughout the course of the year are not separated from the routine. Lilia says, “Not every time we do *remont* do we change everything. We do it little by little, maybe three times a year. In this room, then in this room.” For certain families, *remont* is a constant state of being. Once it has been done in one room of the house, it will start in another room. By the time the whole house has been done, most likely it will already be time to restart the process. Although there hasn’t been a holistic *remont* in Andrei’s apartment that he can remember, “there is constantly something new. [They] buy something, do something, reposition, change [things].” When I asked Zoia’s mom if she had plans to do *remont*, she said:

Of course, without fail...permanent *remont*, it doesn’t ever end. We have a big apartment, so if we do *remont* here, we finish, then we go here, here, every year we do *remont* in at least one room. When we do *remont* here, it is already time to do it there. We do it little by little because we can’t, due to financial and time concerns, do it all at one time. Actually, we moved to this room, but [my husband] is changing the furniture for Zoia, making a shelf. We’ll finish them

and then we need to change floors. Then maybe a short pause, and then the bathroom, for example.

This exact phrase “permanent *remont*” (*permanentnyi remont*) was also used among Lara’s family.⁹ Without giving any reason, it is expected that *remont* will cycle around the house endlessly, fitting into a longer-term routine. There is a consistent and unconscious expectation that something will need to be changed, and that some kind of dissatisfaction will arise. Though this idea is not directly expressed, “permanent *remont*” reveals a permanent process of transformation stemming from a constant desire or impulse for change. Perhaps the knowledge that *remont* will continue indefinitely also lessens the motivation to push through any single project, resulting in endeavors that last much longer than planned.

The existence of *remont* in a family’s narrative is not class based. Clearly, the amount of funds available dictates the scale and quality of the work, as well as the materials used. Interior designers are only accessible to a portion of the population. However, I interviewed families from a wide range of means, including Aleksei, whose entire family sleeps in the living room, to Liuba, whose family has a living room, a large kitchen, as well as separate bedrooms for the two children and their parents. Regardless of this economic disparity, each family discussed plans to do *remont*. A popular form of *remont*, entitled *evroremont*, or Euroremodeling, is excluded from the typical conception of the term. *Evroremont* includes changes that are fit for a European standard, uses European products, and costs a great deal of money. A family does not complete this project on its own, but usually hires outside help. *Evroremont* has a definite beginning

⁹ A Google search for the phrase *permanentnyi remont* yields 31,700 results, demonstrating its common usage and suggesting that it holds significant meaning in the greater Russian cultural context.

and end; it is a process that is limited and not everlasting. It is also only accessible to those people in a higher economic class, and quite concretely defined, unlike *remont*, which can be conceived of as a variety of activities depending on the family and situation.

The two most in-depth responses I received on this topic were from the two young men in their mid-twenties, Emil' and Aleksei. Both explained in detail which aspects of the space they wished to change. Andrei also said that if he could change something at home, he would do a major *remont* of the entire apartment, starting with the floors. These interviewees all expressed ideas that encompassed the entire apartment, addressing the whole space, whether the plans were detailed or not. Anna's father did not mention *remont*, but when asked what he would change in the house, he responded that he would "above all buy a new apartment," and proceeded to describe each room and delineate the ideal size in square feet. All four men envisioned drastic changes that would subsequently alter the lives of the inhabitants. None of the women spoke in such far-reaching terms about their wishes. Rather, they expressed specific and manageable tasks, such as adding a door to the balcony or buying new furniture. At times, their desires did take on more abstract forms, though this almost always related to size of the apartment or number of rooms. This disparity in responses demonstrates that male members of the family feel more agency over the entirety of the apartment, and in a position to make large-scale changes. Female family members are more focused on specific spaces and details rather than envisioning an entirely new apartment.

While this constant desire for improvement would probably be interpreted in the United States as consumerism amid a free market, it has quite different origins in the Russian context. Unquestionably, the free market and recent arrival of foreign companies

in Russia has given rise to more opportunities and choices in transforming the physical space of one's home. However, the constant alteration of the physical space does not reflect the impulse to consume, but rather the ongoing creation of the post-Soviet identity in the home. Inhabitants are finding new ways of expressing their identity through their dwelling space. Many perceive home life concerning relations between family members as unchanging, while material aspects of the home have been changing noticeably. Comforts, such as home appliances, that were once inaccessible have become widely available. The constraints that were placed on the physical aspects of home in the Soviet era made it difficult for anyone to fully make it their own. There is now a realization that the space is one's own property and that one can make choices about how to live in it.

Emil' has this realization during our conversation. When I ask him about *remont*, he talks about the last time it was done as "an important event for our apartment." This event took place the year before, and his family was already planning to do more the next year. However, he does not take any ownership over the process, attributing these plans to his mother, until I ask him what he personally would like to change about his apartment. He starts to assert that he would not wish to change anything, and then changes his mind, explaining that he would like to alter how everything looks. He references design pictures he has seen and the room displays in Ikea, a popular recent addition to the large shopping center outside of the city. Emil''s priority is the way the apartment looks; he wants it to be "cool...striking, stylish and beautiful." These plans are not necessarily possible to realize, but they nevertheless reflect a feeling of control over the living space and the prospect of improvement in the future. However, this sense of control and hope for what is to come is not always present. In my discussions with

Anna's father, there is hopelessness in the way he speaks about changing his life, both in the abstract and physical sense. "There is the dream, and there is reality," he says. Although he may wish to buy a new apartment, it is not realistic due to financial constraints. He laughs as he says for the second time in our interview, "Our train has already left." Throughout the interview, Anna's father also expresses doubt about improvement in the country politically, mirroring his skepticism of prospective domestic improvements.

There is value attached to doing work on the home oneself rather than hiring outside help, which does not necessarily stem from financial constraints. "My dad does *remont* [himself] not because we don't have the money," Lilia explains, "but because he can do it well." Among men, this work forms a significant part of their domestic identity and is a point of pride. When *remont* is done directly by members of the family, it is an exclusively male activity. This is indeed one of few typically male domestic tasks. Zoia reports that her father also prefers not to hire others to do work on the house:

He loves to renovate everything. If I, for example, tell him that I need a shelf or a dresser, he doesn't like to buy things, he likes to do things himself. He buys the materials and makes it himself. He built me a dresser and it was really nice, as if from a magazine. When something is needed, he'll do it himself. If he can't then, well okay.

Lilia outlines the gendered division of domestic labor in a very straightforward way. Women "wash dishes, cook, and clean" while "men...in general...deal with the plumbing and *remont*." Men's work is considered more physically demanding. She says that they "do *remont*, lay down the toilet, sink, or do difficult physical things...bring something or

cut meat. Difficult things, that's how it's done." Her father also does much of the renovation work around the house, though not for financial reasons, she affirms, but because he does a good job. While women's skills are highlighted concerning everyday upkeep and food preparation, men's contributions are mentioned when speaking about physical labor and *remont*.

Remont is not just a practice, but also a common narrative, one that allows the speaker to discuss dissatisfaction with his or her residence, and how it would appear in an ideal world. One of my host mothers in Ufa would tell me about the new furniture she was buying, the *remont* that had already been completed, what she liked and disliked about it, and what she wanted to do next. A common portion of the narrative encountered in my interviews regards the amount of space in the apartment. My informants address this issue in various direct and indirect ways. For some, size is dismissed as a non-issue. Zoia's mother says that they "have a big apartment," so the *remont* she discusses is unrelated. Anna's grandmother lives alone in a two-room apartment, a space sometimes inhabited by entire families, so this question is not addressed directly by her either. In all instances when size is not mentioned, each member of the family has a separate room for themselves. Anna and her family all desire more space and more rooms. Liuba expresses satisfaction with her new large kitchen, but dreams of having a two-floor apartment because she thinks "staircases make things great." Vera desires a larger kitchen. Lilia says the only thing she would change would be "size." "I would make it bigger," she says, "Height and width. And that's all."

The common fixation on the size of the home is part of a narrative genre of complaining. While size is clearly an important factor in considering the comfort and

satisfaction with one's living spaces, larger space does not have inherent value. The amount of space we think of as acceptable or ideal to live in is socially constructed to an extent. The significance of size in Russian notions of dwelling space is not a recent phenomenon, but arises from Soviet-era policies, as discussed in the first chapter. In an attempt to equitably distribute this limited resource, the state established very clear measurements for how much space a single person or a family was entitled to in a communal apartment or other living arrangement. Khrushchev-era apartments also exemplify the state's authority over the size of living space, as they were all standard in this respect. This standardization was just one of the many aspects of living conditions under the strict control of the government. A larger apartment does not just signify more space, but also the ability to exert control over one's own living situation. Furthermore, expansiveness is one of the qualities that draw Russians to nature, a place and a concept that is valued highly as an escape from the everyday; perhaps this open space is something they are looking for in their homes.

The size of a room can be valued positively or negatively for various reasons. Andrei, for instance, discusses the compactness of his kitchen in fond terms. Describing why the kitchen is such an important place to Russians, he says, "usually it isn't very big, and it's warm there in the winter and when there's a lot of people. It's warm and cozy, not like in other rooms." He later contradicts his own description, referring to his kitchen as expansive, when explaining why it is his favorite place in the apartment. This internal contradiction in narrative demonstrates the malleability of our perceptions of a space's physical properties. Vera wishes for a larger kitchen, because "the kitchen is the smallest room in the house, and it's hard to want to cook in a small kitchen, and it's all tense."

These distinct views of size also reflect the gendered way these young people of the same age interact with the space. Andrei speaks about his leisure experiences in the kitchen, conversing with friends, while Vera focuses on the labor of cooking in the kitchen. Although both engage in each of these activities, their conception of the space is affected by what they see as its dominant purpose, which is directly influenced by their socialization into their respective genders. The kitchen is primarily a leisure space for Andrei, and although food is an important aspect of that space, he is primarily the consumer. Vera views the main use of the kitchen as related to labor, and food is significant in the sense that she will be preparing it. Her concerns with its size and hopes for *remont* are related to her ability to fulfill this role.

Located where the possible and the dream intermingle, *remont* accumulates a history and always has a future in my informants' narratives. Zoia's mother and Anna's father, among others, both mention financial constraints as holding them back from creating a more ideal situation for themselves. Sometimes there is not enough motivation to make the desired changes and the project loses momentum as it prolongs. As a symbolically loaded concept, *remont* reflects a view of life as a constant process, one that has no end. Regardless of the outcome of a particular project, a follow-up is assumed. In a philosophical sense, it is the recognition that life is unpredictable and constantly shifting, resulting in a constant need for change. It is also an area in the home where it is possible to exercise limited agency within a larger stable structure. Agency and structure make up one of the binaries that Highmore outlines as part of everydayness, and *remont* exemplifies a balance between these two tendencies. The home acts as a secure

background upon which residents can exercise physical control, through *remont*, without disrupting the social order of the family.

Generational Shifts

Meeting at a food court became the norm for my meetings with young people during my January 2014 trip. They do not seem to go to cafes often and perhaps they prefer to meet me away from their parents. At least when I met with Zoia, the food court was less busy and therefore quieter than the one in the other shopping center, where I met Aleksei, Vera, and Liuba. Zoia and I chat briefly and then proceed to the interview. She is quite open and really thinks about the questions when I ask them. In some of my interviews, the interviewee answers more automatically, but in this case she seems to reconsider everything that I ask, and questions herself to find more clarity. I mentally compare notes to what I heard from her mother, also trying to pretend that I know less so I can fully understand her side of the story. The conversation flows easily.

When I ask her if she sees a major difference between her generation and that of her parents, she answers, “Probably. Because now society is more mobile and everyone...all young people know how to use electronics, computers. Parents don't quite understand.” Among all the people I spoke with, use of technology is perceived as a notable divide between generations living in the same household. The radio, which was once an important source of news, city information, and entertainment, is not always present, or not often used. Television sets are also less utilized by the young generation, presumably due to the availability of most television shows and films on the Internet. Zoia says, “I use my television just to watch movies that I download onto my flash drive.

I rarely watch TV.” The majority of young people I spoke with express a similar sentiment, finding the programs or films they want to watch online rather than sitting in front of regular cable programming. Many watch shows that are not Russian, and not always available on Russian cable stations.

Young people note that their parents do not understand how to use the Internet or cell phones as readily as they do. It is an area where they feel at an advantage over their elders, possessing knowledge that they can pass upward. Computers are not used by all adults, and seemingly never used by grandparents. When parents do use the computer, it is often for a specific purpose, as opposed to their children, who have the habit of “sitting on the computer,” which denotes a variety of activities. Sitting on the computer may include visiting social media sites, watching video clips, finding television shows and movies, and speaking with friends, among other activities. Young people normally spend at least an hour a day doing a combination of these things. All family members, including grandparents, own cell phones, and landlines are still present but less central. The mobile phone is one peice of new technology that has been adopted by all generations, though older generations tend to use the device purely as a phone, while younger Russians have many uses for them. The landline has been an important part of the home as a way to keep in touch with relatives and is used frequently among the grandparents' generation. One reason for the wider adoption of the cell phone as opposed to other devices is that it directly mirrors the home phone, and fulfills a need that existed before. The Internet is less accessible because of its greater breadth of uses and also because it does not correspond directly to a previous tool. For example, older Russians are more adept at

keeping in touch with friends and relatives via telephone, and therefore demand less from social media sites.

Most of the changes identified by the informants are material. Home appliances and consistent availability of food are both noted as making home life more comfortable, and raising quality of life. Lilia says:

Yes of course, a lot has changed. When my parents were children, there was a deficit. They couldn't buy what they wanted, and the living space looked awful. Well not awful, they all looked the same. Very modest. Now everything is bigger, people can choose more, decorate more...there are more home appliances accessible. I know [in the U.S.] you had access [to these things] in the fifties, already, from films I saw. But we didn't have that...There wasn't Internet, computers, cell phones.

The lack of groceries in stores and difficulty in obtaining necessary domestic goods is noted frequently in my interviews as a collective memory that has been adopted by the younger generation, though they never actually experienced these conditions. These material changes also affect non-material relations, although this was rarely addressed directly. In terms of relationships between family members, most people I spoke with perceived little or no change since their own childhood, or they had adopted this perception from their parents. They said that family life had been generally stable in their own household. Anna's father says, "No. Not a lot, no, [has changed]. But it depends on each family; every family has its own relations. For us...it has been stable."

One non-material change that was addressed in different ways by multiple people concerns dwindling collectivity and movement inward of the family unit. For example,

the neighborhood has become less important as a social unit for certain age groups. Andrei's only memories of engaging with his neighborhood revolve around playing outside as a child. "When I was young," he says, "I did spend time in the courtyard. I played soccer with friends. Now I don't speak to any of those friends. I don't know why. But then we were friends, and every day we would hang out, play with a ball." The courtyard is a large square area around which a group of apartment buildings is arranged. There you can find parked cars, playgrounds, manual exercise machines, and scattered benches. Andrei recalls his time spent there without a sense of nostalgia, in a detached way. Now, he associates the courtyard, *dvor* in Russian, with older women, children, and men drinking beer. While many families have amicable relations with their neighbors, few rely on them for any real support or consider these relationships important. One reason for the decline of the neighborhood is the perception of safety in the city, which, according to Zoia's mother has changed drastically. When she was young, she was able to travel around the city with her slightly older sister without any supervision, which was considered safe. This is no longer the case, and parents have become more concerned with their children's safety and whereabouts. Relief from their concerns is facilitated by the easefulness of contact by cell phones. This shift, along with technological changes, has brought young people indoors and made them more isolated from each other.

Children in Ufa do not play outside as often as they did in her youth, according to Zoia's mother. Instead "the kid comes home from school, goes on the computer, and that's it...they leave to a virtual world." She expresses concern for the well being of Zoia in relation to her time spent isolated and in this virtual world:

If Zoia starts to talk with friends on the phone, that's already great, because it's already live conversation. And if Zoia says, 'I'm going over to Vika's,' I know Vika, where she lives, her parents. That also means a lot to me because she won't be sitting in front of her computer... So, now already children aren't the same as we were.

Vera recognizes this change in herself, explaining, "[Earlier] people talked more on the weekends. We go on the Internet." This statement is quite powerful, as it shows that the Internet has replaced a significant portion of time spent together with isolated time on the computer. There is less drive to see and speak with one another with the Internet as a constant distraction. "It seems to me that people used to get together more with their family," Liuba adds, "not just for holidays, but at any time. Now everyone does things for themselves, I only see my aunts at holidays. I think they used to take trips and spend more time together. I think that has changed. People met with their family more." Even on the household scale, decreased use of television in exchange for movies and TV shows found online means that watching TV has become a less collective activity, reducing the amount of time spent with those in the domestic family unit.

Lost collectivity points to a break with the young generation not only due to technological advancements, but also due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and its implications. While there are more opportunities for contemporary Russians as a result of these changes, there is also a sense of significant loss. "No I don't think [these are good changes]," Vera says, "Now it is considered that life is better than before, there are more comforts... yeah, more opportunities. But on the other hand, you lose relations... Really, people have started to speak with one another less." Anna's grandmother references her

experience living in a communal apartment and remarks, “This generation really doesn’t know what it means to live with neighbors, this young generation.” Anna thinks it must have been awful, but her grandmother counters her. “It wasn’t awful at all,” she says, “People just communicated (*obshchalis*) differently, and saw each other more often.” She does not directly attach positive value to communal living, but her views and those of her granddaughter clearly arise out of vastly different social contexts.

Another important shift that Vera and Liuba spoke with me about concerned gender relations in the home. Both young women study at Bashkir State University in the English philology department. Liuba is an intense 18-year-old with long blonde hair, extremely confident in her academic abilities, while still shy speaking English around me. I know Liuba quite well, after spending two summers with her, but this is the first time I am meeting with Vera, a bright eyed, lighthearted classmate of Liuba who begins speaking English with me without much hesitation. Liuba nervously joins in and it is clear that others around us notice that we are speaking English. We are sitting in the same busy food court where I met Aleksei, drinking tea and eating pastries. After some fifteen minutes conversation in English we switch to Russian for the interview and the girls take turns answering questions. Although they have different home experiences, they build off of each other's responses, especially when talking about their future families and how they want their husbands to share more of the domestic work with them. At some points they begin to discuss among themselves and I feel as if we are just friends casually talking.

Listening to the last two young people I interview, I can really start to feel the differences and similarities among them. I see how each individual inhabits a distinct

home world which shapes one's perceptions, and how even when similarities are identified they exist in these various unique contexts, influenced by a particular environment. This makes the similarities more impressive, as they can permeate even the most diverse families. After the interview finishes we speak a bit more in English and then leave the food court, planning to possibly meet up again during the weekend. They walk me to my bus stop and say goodbye as I run to my *marshrutka* (minibus).

On my ride back home in the bumpy bus, I think back to what both Vera and Liuba said about the changes they would want to see in their own homes. Among the young people that I interviewed, these two presented the most radical view of domestic life. Their thoughts were driven by empathy for their mothers, and a desire for a different fate for themselves. Liuba's mother “does all of the house work. She cooks, she cleans, and [her] dad thinks that home responsibility is women's work.” Vera's father “thinks he should come home and relax, and not do the dishes, [because] that's woman's work.” The wife is not only responsible for work in the kitchen, but also “cleans everything, should work, raise kids, make decisions about the house,” according to Vera. “I don't think it's right,” she says, “but we have it like that in almost every family – that the wife is the housewife.” Liuba and Vera want their husbands to help around the house, and they defy the typical role of wife as sole homemaker. This dynamic is changing domestic experiences outside of the marital and familial settings. Liuba's experience with her boyfriend, Viktor, is of shared responsibility. “When my family leaves and Viktor comes over,” she says, “we do things together all the time. I know when I'm with him, he'll cook with me, he'll clean with me, I want it to be like that. My grandma has it like that, my grandma and grandpa do everything together. I would want for my own family too.” In

this temporary domestic experience between Liuba and Valeryi, the roles are actually already transforming. However, it is hard to know whether these changes will last in the long term. Vera is also friends with a couple who live together in an apartment, both sharing the responsibilities of cooking and cleaning. Domestic partnership is also being redefined through a “civil marriage,” in which a couple need not register their marriage, but simply live together. Both Vera and Liuba recognize that these changes are not yet accepted by their parents, and do not endeavor to change their views, or the culture in their current household.

Vera thinks that a more equal division of labor is a common desire of girls her age, although I did not hear this opinion expressed by any of my other interviewees. If this view is a prevalent one, it is not visible or discussed very often. None of the older interviewees spoke about these issues either. Lilia expressed a perceived lack of agency over creating her own family. “I think if I were a man, and if I had a family, I would have the same life as now,” she says, “But since I am a woman, my family will be the way my husband wants it. If he lives with his own order and habits, I will more likely go towards his ways. Yeah, it is common [that] the woman turns to the man’s way of life.” Despite her deep satisfaction with the way her family functions now, she believes that she has little control over how it will operate in her own household. Even Vera, who challenges traditional domestic dynamics, questions her power as a woman in the family unit:

It depends on the husband I guess. I think that the husband is the leader of a family...what atmosphere he wants to create. Well, no, the wife also influences the atmosphere, I guess. Well, shoot, I don't know. I like the atmosphere in my family. It was all friendly when I grew up. I don't know. It

is, by the way, a hard question. I think you can only answer when you have your own family, when you see what you can do with your family.

Zoia sees families everywhere as the same: “I think there will be little differences [in my own family]. I have my own principles, my own upbringing. I think families are almost everywhere the same. I don’t know how else to say it.” With the outlook that families do not dramatically differ, it can be difficult to envision alternative modes of behavior.

Families in various cultures can often appear similar, but their particular practices and the way they are represented through narratives say a great deal about ideologies and various social structures that are not always obvious. In fact, Zoia’s family behaves differently from all of those I spoke with in Ufa. Of all I interviewed, she is the only one who lives in a household where her mother and father share the domestic labor in the kitchen, even if her mother oversees the cooking and cleaning. Nonetheless, she feels that her family fits in among families everywhere.

Male interviewees of this age group are quite silent regarding their own desires for domestic relations. Aleksei expects that every part of his domestic life will change when he moves out of his family apartment, combining the good from his mother's traditions with modern culture, but does not expand on what this means in detail. While his plans for *remont* in his current apartment are concrete, his ideas about the structure and environment of his future home are abstract. There is no clear vision among those I interviewed about what they hope their own domestic lives will look like, making any drastic transformations unlikely in the near future. Lara's mother and family friends were also doubtful of major differences between their own generation and Lara's, even though their immediate reaction to my question was that “basically everything has changed

[since they grew up].” When I inquire how young people relate to domestic life, one of the women declares that despite apparent disparities in outlook between the generations, “There is one ‘but.’ [Our children] will get married, they will have their own children, and will do exactly the same [as we did].” Regardless of any other cultural shifts, marriage and family are conceptualized as unwavering forces that unite individuals across generations. Another woman agrees:

I don’t think that anything big has changed. At that age, I acted the same exact way [as my children do]. I didn’t do anything at home, I couldn’t cook, couldn’t do anything. My mom and grandmother did everything for me...But you get married and you do everything yourself.

The institution of the family, from the perspective of these women, transcends age and retains the same routines and significance it had when they first got married. Although the group spoke at length distinguishing current domestic culture with that of their own childhood and adolescence, they eventually arrived at a conclusion that supported a view of persistence in the domestic sphere.

The Russian domestic space is comprised of many interdependent parts that are all deeply interwoven, which means that any changes in daily habits affect not only one space, but the entire order of the home. These parts fit inside a dynamic system of domestic activity that, in practice, cannot be divided by clear borders. However, separating this system into parts allows us to understand cultural scripts that change based on space, situation, and generation, and particularities of one space can inform another. For example, gender plays a role in the way that each aspect of the home is structured, though certain areas, such as the kitchen, reveal such divisions concretely and

visibly. These vivid examples bring light to the structure as a whole, forming the picture of the Russian home as a living and changing mosaic of customs and their accompanying narratives.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusions: Stability and Flux

Uncovering the attitudes and expectations that shape everyday life in the Russian home reveals that the complex gender structure of the domestic space does not directly mirror what is observed on the street. Women exercise more agency and hold greater responsibility than men do in the private sphere. Their responsibility for the cleanliness of the kitchen and the home is significant not only in terms of the physical space, but also extends to sustaining social order in the family. Stability in the domestic space is very important among the Russians I interviewed, exemplified through their lack of clear ambition for change and the positively valued assertion that few changes have occurred in terms of family relations. In general, the younger generation is reproducing their parents' cultural narrative of the space of the home, maintaining and perpetuating existing structures with limited alteration. Women truly maintain the status quo in the domestic sphere. Besides the physical labor of cleaning and other household chores, women also take responsibility for the coordination of these activities, making their position crucial in running the home, regardless of which family member actually carries out a task.

Men do not fulfill roles defined enough to maintain the family structure. Given the roles and habits I observed, it is possible to imagine a working family household without any men, but difficult to imagine a family household devoid of women. Following Mary Douglas' assertion that dirt and untidiness relate to social disorder, the responsibility of the female family members to keep a tidy house is also the responsibility

to create a vision of a socially orderly life (Douglas 1969). The family's concern with accepting guests in a messy house is less about the physical space than about portraying a sense of order in the family unit. Maintaining this image is a task left exclusively to female family members.

Women in Russian cultural discourses have been held to higher moral standards than their male counterparts, often portrayed as honorable sufferers for a greater good. Nancy Ries refers to the “moral self-proving of women...where the heroine proves her spiritual purity by not choosing the object or path that would most benefit herself” (Ries 59). A morally elevated path, and the expression of suffering, gains an individual symbolic capital and “moral power” (Ries 89). While this figure exists in a pure sense only in theory and literary works, the idea permeates daily habits. For example, it is visible in women's responsibility for the kitchen and domestic work, in the *babushka's* service to her children and grandchildren, and in greater modesty in terms of alcohol consumption. Despite any negative repercussions these customs might have on the woman individually, they are valid because they contribute to ostensible familial and societal normalcy, benefitting the family unit at large.

Ries poses a question that I think is crucial to address here: “What constitutes real power in both families and nations?” (Ries 73). There is no single form of “real” power and no straightforward way to define it. Power manifests itself to various degrees in each sphere of our lives and of society, and men in positions of official authority are not the only ones influencing society. As ideologies are contained within everyday practices, domestic and national power are not completely distinct, but inform one another. It is pertinent to discuss what domestic power is, who holds it, and how this issue relates to

the world outside of the home. Consistent with my argument that everydayness holds within it ideologies and structures of power that transcend their physicality, the domestic sphere likewise affects what happens in the political and public realm. A related Russian joke that Ries refers to is told as follows:

A wife, talking to a friend about her marriage, says, ‘I make all the trivial, unimportant decisions – where we will vacation, if we will move to a new apartment, if we will buy a car...My husband makes the really important decisions in the family, you know: can we build Communism in one country? Should the two Germanys reunite?’ (Ries 73)

This sense of divide between domestic and public work is reflected in the fact that a self-proclaimed housewife, and friend of Lara’s family, agrees with the statement that she has never worked a day in her life, despite her daily housework. It is clear that real work is considered to be done outside of the home, which ignores a huge amount of labor expended in the home each day. However, this conceptualization of work as existing solely outside of the domestic realm is consistent with the clear division between domestic and public space in the concept of *byt*.

A mother cannot realistically choose to opt out of her domestic responsibilities without great repercussions. Neither women nor men have much choice in how they define their place in the home, though the female role is much more clearly outlined, while the male role is delineated through its lack of definition. As Ries recounts, “The absence of men [in the family] has been a prevailing theme in Russia, among all classes, for several hundred years” (Ries 75). This absence resonates deeply in my research. Fathers were rarely mentioned in the narratives I heard, and they were less accessible to

interview about the topic; at times they even physically excluded themselves from the conversation, as in Lara's apartment. In another instance, a discussion of domestic practices turned quite political. Anna's father referenced political themes in his answer to most of my questions, informing his discussion of the home with larger issues. None of the mothers I spoke with around the same age brought up such topics without prompting. My lack of breadth in male parent interviewees limits my ability to generalize about this issue; however, this example does point to a trend in men focusing on public and political issues instead of domestic ones. While the male interviewees I spoke with were more inclined to speak about philosophical and political topics, these concerns were not limited to the male sphere in the household. I have found that these topics are discussed in daily conversation regardless of gender, and views passed down to children most likely come from both channels. Anna and her mother participated in political discussions when I would spend time with the family, and there was not a clear gender divide in participation. However, Anna's father's unprompted transition to a topic contained within his comfort zone, rather than directly addressing the questions I posed, reveals that the domestic space is a passive experience for him, and not one over which he has full ownership.

Male family members are also limited in the way they define their domestic identity: the typical everydayness of a man at home has little to do with control over the actual space. Perhaps the father works during the day to help provide for his family, but in the physical home he does not contribute very concretely to necessary functions. Women have an authority over and understanding of domesticity that gives them an upper hand, in a certain sense, over men. Another aspect of male passivity in the home is related to "Russian men as victims of history in one form or another form, with women as

the eternal attendants and caretakers of sacrificial males” (Ries 75). In this narrative, men achieve change in the greater world, but this change is only possible with the support of women. With less time devoted to daily concerns, male family members are indeed allowed more time to reflect extensively on philosophical issues, political developments, and in-depth plans for *remont*. *Remont* is the one practice in the home very clearly male dominated, and men seem to take advantage of it. As it was in the Soviet Union, alteration of the apartment is a way of creating a distinct identity in a standardized space. In this context, the home is simultaneously a site of conformity and resistance. Amid familial consistency and stability, *remont* allows for controlled change that does not disrupt the everyday systems and structures.

Despite the lack of choice and the greater household burden within their roles, women do hold a great deal of power in shaping the home and its environment, and this power is not insignificant. In their interviews, the women discuss their domestic responsibilities with ownership and command, rather than portraying these tasks as an outside imposition. Much of Russians’ daily lives, among all generations, revolve around the home. Meals are eaten most of the time, if not always, at home. Significant holidays are more often celebrated in the apartment. According to my interviewees, the majority of their time not spent working or studying is spent at home. Even university students still living with their parents do schoolwork at home, rather than studying in the library or a café. This domestic power, therefore, is both quantitatively and qualitatively significant and holds weight, as residents inhabit this space for a great portion of their lives.

For female family members, especially wives and mothers, there is some comfort in having a defined and indispensable function to fulfill, regardless of employment status.

The women I spoke with did not conceptualize their experience at home as oppressive and did not express strong discontent with it. It is possible that they would not feel comfortable sharing these feelings with me and would not articulate these issues using the same terminology. Instead, they were accepting of and resigned to their typical duties. In a study on the marginalization of men in the home, an unemployed single mother from Samara notes, “Men are kind of confused after all these reforms and crises. Things get to them more than they do to a woman. She’s more stable in the face of any crisis” (Ashwin & Lytkina 189). While many challenges arise in times of crisis in terms of managing a household, this role remains necessary, and women have been known to go to great lengths to fulfill it. In the Soviet Union, women transitioned into the working sphere, but men did not transition into the domestic sphere in the same way, and are still struggling to find their place. In the case of Zoia’s family, the father’s lack of employment has led him to take on roles in the kitchen more often designated for the wife or *babushka*. Vera and Liuba, representations of the younger generation, express a desire for their husbands to do the same, seemingly regardless of his employment situation.

There are signs of forthcoming shifts in Russian domestic culture and labor division, both in practice and intent. However, the majority of the calls for and celebrations of change revolve around material comforts, reflecting more superficial transformations and a deeper attachment to older orders. In profound ways, views of gender roles have not shifted significantly from the current generation of grandparents to that of their grandchildren, and domestic culture has been remarkably consistent through political and societal transitions. There are two main arguments articulated in scholarly literature and contemporary discourse that explain the resilience of traditional gender

norms in modern Russia. One of them points to the communist past as the main cause of the current situation, as state feminism did not improve women's conditions significantly, but rather added greater responsibility to already demanding domestic duties. After experiencing this version of feminism, Russian women do not seem to find the egalitarian philosophy of gender equity attractive. The other argument, less articulated in scholarly works than in daily discourses, dissociates Russian women from Western feminism because it is perceived as markedly non-Russian. Within this line of thought, Russians have an alternative way of life that is equally valid.

Both of these views are articulated in a recent article, featured in a section of *The New York Times* sponsored by the Russian government, entitled "Why Do Most Russian Women Hate Feminism?" In this short piece, Diana Bruk provides a background and explanation for why Western feminist ideas have not taken root in Russia, but are rather met with aversion. "The iconic Soviet female...was productive rather than glamorous," Bruk explains, "It's no wonder then that with the fall of the Soviet Union... Russian women welcomed a return to traditional gender roles and felt the urge to overcompensate for years of subjugated femininity" (Bruk 2014). She goes on to argue that the current portrayal of family life in American sitcoms "is concerningly reminiscent of the issues that made Russian women weary of feminism" (Bruk 2014). Years of lost opportunity for feminine expression have led to an exaggerated return to femininity and traditional gendered divisions. The West, namely the United States in this case, has not offered desirable alternatives for Russian women.

I propose a different explanation for the endurance of traditional gender roles in the contemporary domestic sphere. This view was not directly expressed by any one of

my interviewees, but can be inferred from my interview material as a whole. The apartment in Russia acts as a source of stability and strength amidst other unexpected circumstances, and many everyday practices have indeed persisted regardless of larger societal changes. Shifts in gender norms would not only transform the way the kitchen runs, for instance, or who cleans the apartment, but would very deeply alter the structure and mythology that socially control the dwelling space. For stability to be maintained within the household, fathers and grandfathers would need to assume greater responsibility within the domestic space and begin to fulfill functions typically designated to women. As my informants' comments and practices illustrate, a clear role has not been delineated for male family members, or mythologized in the same way that certain female figures, especially the *babushka*, have been. This shift would require not only a change in practices, but also in a deep-rooted conception of the home, and the introduction of instability into this heretofore reassuringly reliable space. The Russian young people I spoke with have grown up with their mothers and grandmothers at home as unwavering sources of support, providing a stable foundation for their families, whilst expressing minimal discontent in the amount of labor demanded of them. Enduring domestic structures serve a significant stabilizing function in the Russian home, one that my interviewees are unwilling to give up for an abstract idea of change.

APPENDIX A. Informants' Information

All interviews were conducted one-on-one, except where noted.

[Name, Age (* denotes approximation), Occupation, Date of Interview]

Families/Groups:

Anna's Family

Anna, 18, University student (07/31/2013)

Anna's mother, *60, Dentist (01/07/2014)

Anna's father, *65, Pensioner, part-time dentist (01/07/2014)

[The following interview was taken with Anna present]

Anna's grandmother, *79, Pensioner (01/06/2014)

Andrei's Family

Andrei, 18, University student, (08/07/2013)

[The following individuals were interviewed as a group]

Nastia, Andrei's mother, *42, Employed (occupation unknown) (01/12/2014)

Andrei's grandmother, *75, Pensioner (01/12/2014)

Zoia's Family

Zoia, 18, University student (01/10/2014)

Zoia's mother, *47, Works in the government (01/06/2014)

Lara's Family (including family friends)

Lara, 19, works at a hotel, applying to university (08/14/2013)

[The following individuals were interviewed as a group]

Lara's mother, *50, University instructor (01/11/2014)

Two female and two male friends/relatives of Lara's family, *48-55 (01/11/2014)

Individuals:

Aleksei, *24, University student (01/06/2014)

Lilia, 25, Animation Studio (01/08/2014)

Emil', 26, Guitar Store Employee (08/09/2013)

[The following individuals were interviewed as a group]

Vera, 18, University student (01/10/2014)

Liuba, 18, University student (01/10/2014)

APPENDIX B.

Interview Questions

Preliminary Information:

- Name, age
- Simple map/layout of your home
- List of residents
- How many years ago did you move to your current residence? From where?
- Do you remember why specifically you chose to move to this apartment/neighborhood?

Themes/Spaces

Please explain your daily regime in the kitchen.

- How often do you cook for yourself? How often do you eat out?
- Who buys groceries? Cooks? Washes dishes?
- Other than eating, how do you use the kitchen?

Describe your sleep routine. Do you have your own room?
What happens right before and right after you sleep?

What happens when you invite guests over?

- Who is allowed to invite guests?
- How often?
- Where do you gather?
- How do you prepare for your guests?
- What do you do together?
- What do you speak about?

Do you have a cleaning regime? If yes, please describe it.

- How frequently do you clean and who does the cleaning?
- Are there priorities in what should be completed first, if there is little time?

Describe your family's everyday regime in the bathroom.

- Is it the same everyday?
- How is time divided?
- Does conflict ever arise in the use of the bathroom?

Electronics: What kinds of electronics do you have in your home? Which of these do you consider most important?

General Questions

Describe a typical weekend or holiday day. What happens at home?

- How much time do you usually spend home on such days?)

Describe a typical workday or day at school/university. What do you do at home on these days?

Which room do you consider the most connected to family?

Describe the last significant holiday that you celebrated– either personal or state.

- Did you celebrate it at home? If yes, then how?
- Which other holidays are generally celebrated in your home and how?

Do you keep photo albums in your home? Where do you keep them? How often/when/with whom do you look at them?

Describe your most vivid memories that took place at home. Do you discuss these memories among members of the household?

In your opinion, which part of the home is the most central and important?

- What happens there? Who often spends time there?
- Is it the most utilized room? If not, which room is?

What is your favorite place in your home? Why? Describe this place. What memories do you have of this place?

Do you have any renovation plans in the near future? Were there any significant changes in your apartment since you moved there?

Do you have storage? If yes, how is it used?

If you could change anything in your living space, what would it be?

The word *byt* (roughly translatable as everyday life) does not have a direct correlation in the English language. Can you explain this term for me in other words?

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