

FATHER- HOOD

ACROSS SPACE AND TIME

RUSSIA IN PERSPECTIVE

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In this article, we review previous research on fatherhood in different national contexts and in different historical eras with a particular focus on Russia. We review research conducted on fatherhood in Western Europe and the US from roughly the early 20th century until today in order to put the Soviet and Russian context in perspective. We identify some major theoretical approaches and empirical findings in the previous research. This allows us to illustrate differences and similarities between Russia, and to some extent Eastern Europe during Soviet times, on the one hand, and Western Europe and the US on the other.

But why pay attention to fatherhood in the first place, and why focus on fatherhood in Russia? Well, Russia today is facing a demographic crisis because of its declining population, which in recent years has also led the Russian state to become actively engaged in family and population policy. In Russian state policy, issues of fatherhood are almost entirely absent while the importance of good motherhood is stressed. At the same time, research has shown that fatherhood as a social institution and as a practice has important implications for society, in particular because fathers' behavior and attitudes influence not only their own physical and mental health, but also that of their children and the children's mothers.¹ Alice Rossi has shown that greater commitment on the part of fathers in child raising and family affairs creates more and stronger relations between the fathers and the surrounding society, which in turn decreases their substance abuse (drinking and smoking) and their proclivity towards domestic violence.² Moreover, demographers have established that involved fathers make women adopt a more positive attitude towards

future births, which can lead to higher birth rates and thus affect demographic trends.³ Fatherhood thus influences the public sphere. As we will see, processes in the public sphere also influence fatherhood in the private sphere.

Nevertheless, fatherhood was more or less ignored by researchers until the 1970s.⁴ At that time, interest started to stir, yet studies on fatherhood remained rare until the 1990s. However, after President Bill Clinton highlighted the issue of fatherhood in 1995, research in this field started to grow quickly in the US.⁵ Later it spread to Western Europe and to the Nordic countries, and today there is a substantial amount of work on fatherhood in those contexts.

By contrast, in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space, the study of fatherhood is still in its infancy, although there is a rapidly growing Russian literature on fatherhood,⁶ as well as research on adjacent themes such as parenthood and masculinity (see e.g. the many works of Anna Temkina and Yelena Zdravomyslova). However, international research on Russian fatherhood and other closely related themes is almost non-existent.⁷ Systematic comparative studies on fatherhood in Russia appear to be completely absent.⁸ This article is a first step towards filling that gap, identifying avenues for future research, and pinpointing tools with which previous research from other contexts can aid the study of fatherhood in Russia.

Fatherhood in Western Europe and the US

In this section, we highlight research in the West on fatherhood. We first examine how fatherhood has been defined in this context and how fatherhood is believed

to have changed over time, and then discuss an important point made in previous research, namely that fatherhood is positioned between the private and the public spheres.

Defining fatherhood

How fatherhood should be understood has been debated by researchers in various fields, including feminist and critical studies, and in the context of broader research on men and masculinities, where the discussions concern such issues as how the role of fatherhood is part of a man's identity and how it relates to other time- and context-bound norms of masculinity.⁹

In recent decades, fatherhood has commonly been studied from the perspective of historical institutionalism or social constructivism.¹⁰ From these perspectives, fatherhood is not seen as given or fixed, but rather as a politicized social construction that is exposed to normative pressures from political, religious, and social authorities and institutions, and from more personal and private relations. Fatherhood cannot be understood as something that exists outside society. Rather, fatherhood is constructed through society and a socio-cultural and historical context. There is no single established truth about what fatherhood is.¹¹ What is considered to be "good" or "appropriate" fatherhood, and how individuals live up to those ideals, is bound to history and socio-political context. From this perspective, "fatherhood" designates a social construction which incorporates the ideologies (norms, values, and discourses) and practices associated with being a father.

However, in order not to conflate ideologies and behavior, which might obscure the analysis, it is useful to

make a distinction between *fatherhood* and *fathering*. Fatherhood is a social institution which implies the norms, values, public meanings, and discourses connected to being a father; that is, it concerns the rights, duties, and responsibilities attached to the status of being a father. This involves legislation and informal institutions regulating rights to custody, child support, alimony, etc. *Fathering*, on the other hand, refers to the “performance” of fatherhood, to fathers’ actual behavior and practices. This involves interacting with children and partners, such as participating in maternity care events (e.g. ultrasound), childcare (changing diapers), childrearing (teaching manners), and applying for paternity leave.¹² Certainly, fatherhood and fathering are intertwined. The culture of fatherhood indeed influences the ways a father reflects on his role as a father and the way he acts towards his children, i.e. his fathering.¹³ However, norms, values, and attitudes do not always coincide with behavior. Surveys show that fathering, i.e. men’s actual participation in raising and caring for children, has changed much less than attitudes and norms, with some exceptions among the educated middle class and in some particular countries, such as the Nordic ones.¹⁴ Actual fathering does not necessarily conform to prevalent ideologies or public discourse on fatherhood.¹⁵

Fatherhood in different historical periods

Previous research has identified three overarching models or phases of fatherhood and fathering in modern times in Western Europe and the US. These models, although very general in character, provide a broad and historical perspective on how fatherhood has been defined in the past. Here they also serve as points of reference for comparisons with the Soviet and Russian contexts.

From the middle of the 1800s until World War II, the most common model of fatherhood was the “breadwinner” model. During this period, industrialization moved men from work performed in the vicinity of their homes to work connected more with production and administration. Often this meant that the father worked at a greater distance from home than before, which in turn led to him being more absent from home, family, and childrearing. The father was thus pushed out of the private sphere due to societal transformations, or structural changes if you will, because his role as a breadwinner connected him primarily to the public sphere.¹⁶ According to this model, the father’s primary task in relation to his children and wife was to ensure that the family’s material needs were met. The man thus provided the majority of the family’s income.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, the “sex role” model dominated in the West. In this model, the father was still the main breadwinner, but played a more active, governing, and controlling role. He participated in raising the children, making sure, by providing a masculine role model, that all family members lived by the norms and adhered to the roles (especially gender roles) expected given the family’s social context. Fatherhood was, in other words, a bridge between the private and the public spheres, or between the individual and society. In research on fatherhood in the US, this model has been described as a reaction to the

“ACTUAL FATHERING DOES NOT NECESSARILY CONFORM TO PREVALENT IDEOLOGIES OR PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON FATHERHOOD.”

previous order in which the father was marginalized in the private sphere, so that the home and the children were the women’s domain. During the middle of the 20th century, fathers thus became more involved in the children’s upbringing. According to Kimmel, their involvement was needed largely to ensure that their sons would grow up to be “manly”, thus these changes are connected to concerns with masculinity.¹⁷

In the 1960s, a new model took root: the father as “nurturer”. In this model, the father is more active than before. He participates in childraising and childcare. In comparison with the other models, the father is more focused on the private sphere of the family and has the goal of meeting the children’s physical and emotional needs.¹⁸ A type of fatherhood added by recent research, and closely related to this third model, is what has been called the “new fatherhood”. When considering the praxis of fathering as opposed to fatherhood, we find the corresponding terms “new fathering”, “involved fathering”, and “responsible fathering”. This type of fatherhood is based on equality in the relationship between man and woman in the family, and mother and father share an active responsibility for raising and caring for the children. The father is prepared to balance work and family life, and to allow his partner to do the same.¹⁹

Again, research shows that there is a difference between fatherhood and actual fathering. Fathers’ involvement in childrearing still differs from that of mothers. Fathers are indeed more present, but the proportion of play in relation to caring in the overall time spent with the children is much greater than for mothers, who still are the main caretakers. It should also be mentioned that the rise in active fathering is accompanied by an increasing number of families where the father is completely absent.²⁰ It is also important to note that there are a number of different factors affecting the presence and involvement of fathers in families and in children’s lives. There are fathers who for various reasons choose not to be part of their children’s upbringing, but there are also external factors that can influence fathering. One example is the structural processes mentioned above that took place in conjunction with industrialization. Another aspect deemed important in much previous research is the role of the children’s mother. She is often seen as a gatekeeper who, if she wishes, can push the father out of the childrearing tasks, although potentially

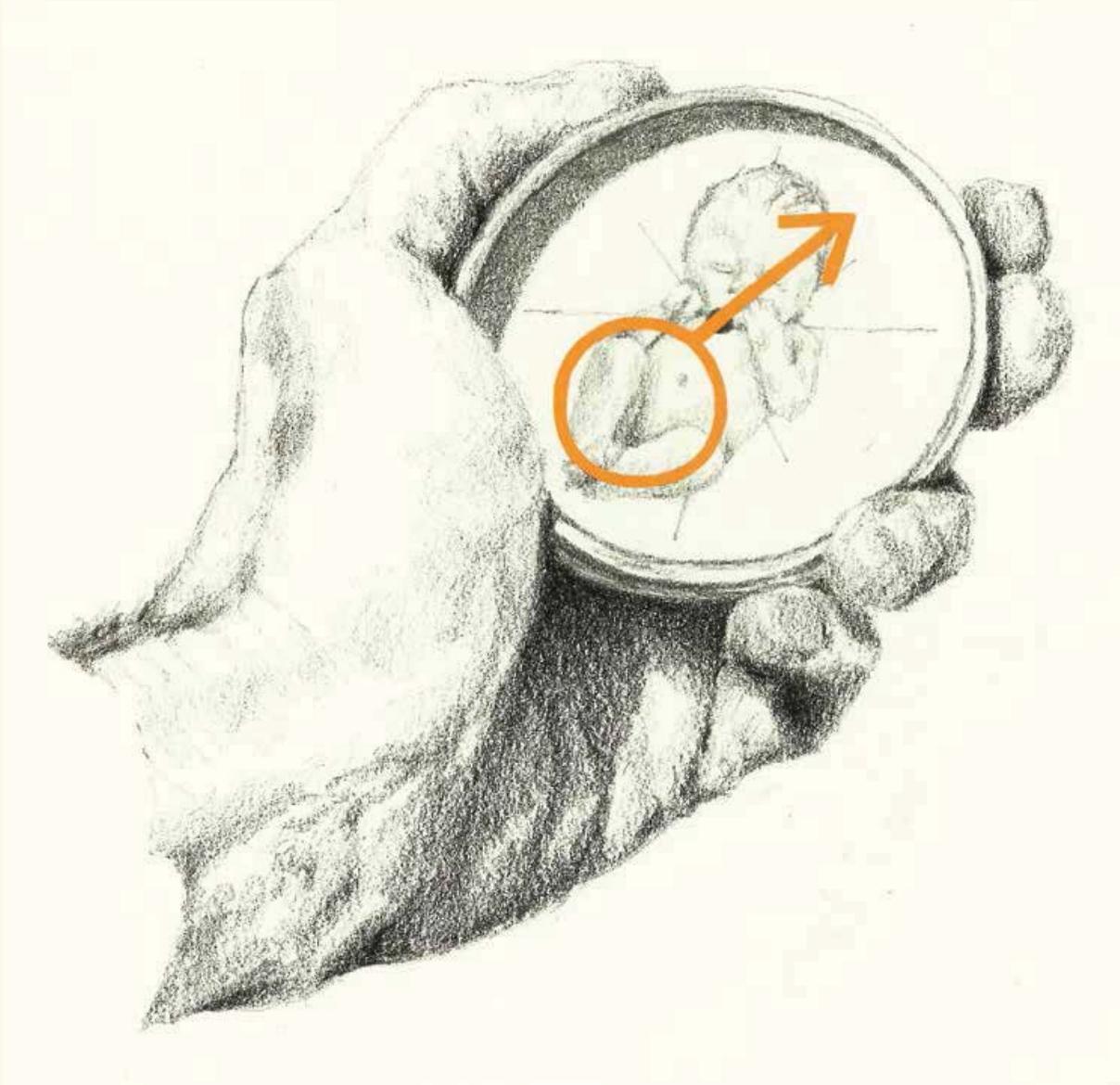
enforcing the breadwinner role.²¹ The latter considerations imply that the father is in a rather powerless position, which may be true in some instances and not in others.

Between the public and the private

In this section, we discuss the forces that previous research has identified as shaping fatherhood and fathering. Fatherhood cannot be defined and understood in isolation from norms concerning motherhood, norms of masculinity, family structures, welfare regimes, and larger socioeconomic processes. It should therefore be analyzed in a wider context, taking into consideration a gender contract, i.e. the “gender division of labor, at work, and by implication, at home”.²² Temkina and Rotkirch make a distinction between “official” gender contracts, which involve public policies, ideology, and legislation, and “everyday” gender contracts, consisting of individuals’ norms and routine behavior.²³ In other words, a gender contract has a public dimension, involving, for example, the welfare system, and a private dimension, including such things as family relations. Let us look at how the connections between the public and the private are viewed in current research on fatherhood.

In its narrowest meaning, the private dimension of fatherhood involves relations between a male parent and his biological offspring and/or stepchildren. Fatherhood also has implications for the father’s relation to the mother, influencing, for example, the role that the father has in the family, whether and how the father provides support during pregnancy, whether he takes part in the delivery of the child, and the extent to which he participates in childrearing tasks. These relations are influenced by the norms and ideas of the close social habitat in the private sphere. This concerns both the relation to the mother (and marital satisfaction) and the mother’s attitudes towards the father’s involvement in childrearing. Research shows that a cooperative marriage and encouragement from the mother to participate in childrearing increases the father’s involvement, and vice versa. Marriage (or a stable relationship and cohabitation) and parenthood are in this way more closely connected for men than for women. This weaker link between father and child makes the relationship more sensitive to contextual factors in the public sphere, as discussed below.²⁴ Moreover, the father’s relation to his own father (or other father figures) and relatives, as well as to friends and colleagues, also plays a role.²⁵

Fatherhood in the public sphere is heavily influenced by the welfare system and general socioeconomic structures and processes. One of the most important societal changes in the industrialized world is the decrease in birth rates and the increase in women’s labor market participation since World War II. This transformation naturally had a direct impact on women’s roles as caretakers. Childbearing and childrearing no longer constituted the majority of a woman’s life, although the mother remained the main caregiver. This new state of affairs necessitated ways for women to combine work and family, which created a new function for the welfare state. Welfare regimes thus became a strong ideological source of influence. The historical development of the welfare



state and variance between different welfare regimes are thus intimately related to the historical models of fatherhood in that they reflect and uphold values and norms of gender, as well as define the legal and economic terms of parenthood.

However, earlier research on welfare systems, such as Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare regimes (liberal, corporatist-statist, and social-democratic)²⁶, to a large extent neglected the gender dimension of the relation between work and welfare. He defined work as paid work on the labor market, while unpaid work (such as childrearing) performed by women in the private sphere was not included in the analysis. In short, through their paid work men were entitled to pensions and other welfare services and were thus intrinsically regarded as workers and citizens. Women were inherently regarded as wives and mothers, and their unpaid work at home was not attached to the social rights men enjoyed. As Barbara Hobson and David

Morgan have pointed out, Esping-Andersen in effect also disregarded men's experiences as partners and fathers.²⁷ Fully incorporating gender in the analysis of welfare systems thus entails including the roles of both women and men in the private sphere.

In response to these deficiencies in Esping-Andersen's typology, later research focused on the implications of the welfare system for the reconciliation of work and care. In research by Jane Lewis, one of the major contributors to this field²⁸, we find a typology that attempts to bring a gender perspective to the analysis of welfare systems by including unpaid work in the domestic sphere.²⁹ Both Esping-Andersen's and Lewis's work shows that there are important variations among Western welfare regimes. Hence the West cannot be seen as a homogeneous block in this regard. It is reasonable to expect that the same should be true of the different countries of Eastern Europe.

Nonetheless, the historical phases of Western fa-

therhood discussed above and other similar models are important points of reference for comparisons with the Soviet and Russian experiences. It is interesting to note, however, that little empirical work has been done on the influence of the welfare system, including policies such as parental leave or part-time work, on parenthood in Eastern Europe at large. An explicit analysis of these issues in the Eastern European context is beyond the scope of this article. However, we can show how important it would be to apply Lewis's and other similar typologies to Russia and other countries in the region.

Lewis identified three different welfare models which set very different conditions for parenthood, both for mothers and fathers. In the strong male-breadwinner model, female labor market participation may be discouraged through tax policies, the scarcity of part-time employment opportunities, and the lack of childcare, under the assumption that

women are responsible for the care of children and the family. This model thus implies the kind of understanding of gender relations discussed above as part of the criticism against Esping-Andersen's work: women are defined as wives and mothers, men as workers and citizens. This limits men's role as fathers to that of the breadwinner. Great Britain is often mentioned as a country that comes close to this model.

Lewis's second model, the modified male-breadwinner model, predicts that women are more active in the labor market. At the same time, families are to be compensated for the costs of childbearing and childrearing. Women are hence seen both as paid workers and as mothers. Social services regarding childcare and maternity leave are quite generous, which makes it feasible for women to work. Yet family structures remain patriarchal and women dependent on their husbands. France is put forward as an example of this model.

In the weak male-breadwinner model, Lewis's third model, policies are designed in order for it to be advantageous for the woman to work. Tax legislation is very important in this respect. In Sweden, which is often mentioned as an example of this model, the government introduced separate taxation in 1971, which is a reform in line with the development of this kind of welfare model. This model generally directs social entitlements to the woman as a worker and not as a wife. The weak male-breadwinner model is also characterized by comprehensive childcare, a generous parental insurance system, and parental leave for fathers. By facilitating women's participation in the labor market and by encouraging more active fatherhood, it leaves room for a more equal division of labor in childrearing in the private sphere. The model signals that women should not only be seen as mothers, but as workers too. Conversely, men are to be conceived as fathers as well as workers.

Although many researchers seem to agree that welfare systems have a profound influence on gender relations – which are at the same time reflected in welfare systems – one should not forget that parenthood is also influenced by civil, family, labor, and property law.³⁰ Legislation in these spheres regulates the rights and obligations of fathers, such as the right to paternity leave, the right to custody, and the obligation to provide for the children in case of divorce (that is, laws stipulate the mechanisms and magnitude of child support and alimony). It should be noted that there is not necessarily a neat fit between these kinds of legislation and welfare models. For example, liberal welfare systems that envision fathers as strong male breadwinners, such as the UK and the US, do not impose strong economic obligations to provide for children.³¹

Broader socioeconomic and sociocultural factors also influence fatherhood and fathering. Research demonstrates, for example, that unemployment and poverty impede active fathering.³² Furthermore, issues of class, education, and socioeconomic status are also correlated to fathering. Middle-class men appear to be most likely to adopt more progressive gender norms that influence their perceptions of fatherhood as well as their behavior.³³ It has been shown that middle-class men use more progressive fatherhood ideals as a marker of class, distinguishing them from the perceived crude, sexist working-class man or from men of non-European descent.³⁴ Finally, long-term demographic trends also inform many of the processes

“THE RIGHT TO PRIVATE PROPERTY, WHICH IN MOST CONTEXTS HAS GIVEN THE MAN A CERTAIN POWER OVER THE WOMAN, WAS ABOLISHED.”

mentioned above in very fundamental ways. For example, as lifespans increase and fertility decreases (that is, fewer children born per woman), the childbearing period in women's lives becomes relatively shorter. Women are thus not as limited to childbearing and childrearing in the home as they used to be, which can be a factor for change.³⁵

In sum, Western research shows that fatherhood and fathering are connected to the gender contract overall. In other words, the roles of men as worker, partner, and father are closely intertwined with the roles of women as worker, partner, and mother. This gender contract is influenced in turn by parallel yet interdependent social processes in the private and the public spheres. These processes may influence the social institution of fatherhood or the social practice of fathering, or both. A good example is LaRossa's research which suggests that changing fatherhood norms could be explained by changes in mothers' behavior (greater labor market participation), which in turn depends on demographic trends (lower birth rates), the welfare system, and other societal changes (e.g. emancipation).³⁶ However, one should consider that traditional norms of masculinity, as a part of the gender contract, also play an important role here. As Whitehead argues:

What complicates, then, any clear understanding of the relationship of men and masculinity to notions of family and fatherhood is the fact that while ideals of both fatherhood and motherhood changed dramatically during the twentieth century . . . traditional gender stereotypes remain resilient in many cultures. Thus, we have to recognize that while there is some evidence of a shift in attitudes to family and domestic roles by some men, dominant discourses of masculinity do not sit easy with these practices.³⁷

The inconsistencies between norms and behavior among fathers are thus not necessarily surprising and strange, but rather to be expected.

Soviet and Russian fatherhood

The research reviewed above on the Western European and American contexts may serve as a background

for a discussion of previous research on Soviet and Russian fatherhood. In this section we compare that latter research to the Western European experience, with reference to historic fatherhood models in particular: the “breadwinner” model, the “sex role” model, and the new “fatherhood” model.

Although our focus is on Russia, we may note that this country is quite typical of the Eastern European region in several respects, which makes research on Russia relevant for the whole region. First, according to John Hajnal, Russia and Eastern Europe share the same basic marriage pattern and family model. The Eastern European family model, which traditionally included multigenerational peasant families, also included a weaker father role than the traditional one seen in the West. In Eastern Europe, the power relations in the household have been a hierarchy based on age in which the older generation has dominated the younger. In Western Europe, on the other hand, the household was dominated by one man, the head of the family, “pater familias”.³⁸ A man was seen as unfit for marriage until he could support a family.³⁹ This also resonates with the breadwinner model discussed previously. However, this does not mean that the traditional family model in Eastern Europe was not patriarchal, but rather that it was not necessarily the father, as the head of a nuclear family, who ran the household. Frequently it was a male from an older generation. A second feature that Russia shares with the rest of Eastern Europe is the communist legacy of gender policy, which has seriously influenced fatherhood in the region.

Although there are a number of similarities, it should also be acknowledged that there were important differences between the Soviet Union and other countries in Eastern Europe, including differences in welfare policies and other factors bearing on the development of fatherhood. This was true in the Soviet period, and since the early 1990s countries have naturally chosen different paths. Many Eastern and Central European countries today are members of the EU, which also has an influence on state policies, legislation, and so on with respect to matters of the family and parenthood. Although we speak here primarily of Russia, we will also widen the perspective where appropriate to highlight these differences. Even “Russia” is a problematic context due to the vastness of the country. It is highly likely that family structures and ideas and norms of fatherhood would be found to be quite different in an in-depth, empirical comparison between, let us say, the northwestern and the Asian parts of the Russian Federation. It is also reasonable to assume that there will be variation between urban and rural areas. However, the focus of this article is more general. We note these important limitations but focus for now on the broader patterns of the development of fatherhood.

The Soviet gender contract

The room for plurality in private life under state-socialist rule was naturally more limited than in Western Europe or in Russia today. People's life cycles were quite standardized. The private sphere, including family, parenthood, and childrearing, was in this sense not so private, but to a large extent controlled by the state. The Soviet gender contract, or gender order, has

therefore been referred to as “etat-cratic”.⁴⁰ The state made the private political and public. The relation between the public and private spheres was in this sense more straightforward than in the West.

Russian researchers have identified three main periods in the Soviet gender contract that had great implications for the family and parenthood as social institutions and as practices. There is also research on Soviet fatherhood that partly coincides with these periods. Since, as mentioned above, fatherhood is intimately linked to the development of the gender contract we will discuss below the development of fatherhood in connection with the changing gender contract.

The first period in the Soviet gender contract, from the 1917 revolution until the beginning of the 1930s, involved Bolshevik-style emancipation. The bourgeois family structure that enslaved women in the kitchens was to be combated. At the same time, women, especially peasant women in the countryside, were perceived as politically backwards and in need of ideological support. This was a view that legitimized and facilitated state intervention in the private sphere, which some claim was the main incentive, as opposed to genuine feminist concerns.⁴¹ Soviet emancipation policy, which aimed to undermine the traditional family, led to a significantly higher degree of participation by women in working life. In fact, the “working mother” was a pillar of the Soviet gender contract.⁴² Work would both liberate women from oppression in the private sphere and integrate them in society. To this end, the domestic functions of childcare and child-rearing had to be transferred to the public sphere. The state was now the main parent. As a result, public childcare institutions increased dramatically.⁴³ Thus the Soviet state and the woman/mother entered into an alliance, while the man/father was pushed out into the public sphere as the defender of the fatherland and worker. This development persisted during the second period, which will be described below.

The bourgeois family was also attacked in other ways. Marriage based on religious foundations through the church was abolished, and simple procedures for divorce were introduced. Abortion was legalized.⁴⁴ And, importantly, the right to private property, which in most contexts has given the man a certain power over the woman, was abolished. The man was no longer the natural main breadwinner. Moreover, legal provisions regarding the determination of fatherhood in extramarital relations were extremely vague, which both worsened the father’s chances of being officially recognized and gave him the opportunity to escape responsibility if he so desired. In case of divorce, the father’s responsibility was limited to paying alimony.⁴⁵ Hence, the father’s role during early Soviet times was severely weakened.

The second period, from the 1930s to the mid-1950s, was a time of intense modernization and industrialization in the Soviet Union. Work migration and urbanization were highly relevant processes during this period, especially among men. It became difficult to form and preserve families. Lone mothers in the countryside were very common. Other historic events also contributed to the increased separation of fathers from their families, including the persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church (which had been the guarantor of the man’s almost absolute power in the

patriarchal family of Tsarist Russia),⁴⁶ political purges, deportations, and World War II.

The demand for labor also consolidated the role of women as workers. At the same time, the need to secure population growth turned childbirth into a duty towards society. Abortion was therefore prohibited. To strive for a private life and individuality was considered egoistic and bourgeois. In many ways, the private sphere ceased to exist. This tendency was further strengthened by housing policies that involved various forms of collective living.⁴⁷

Thus, the Soviet gender contract in some ways established a gender order that severely undermined the conditions for a traditional breadwinner model of fatherhood that dominated in the West at that time. Applying Lewis’s welfare typology, we can conclude that the welfare system of the Soviet Union during this period resembled the weak male breadwinner model in several respects. Women were encouraged to work and social benefits were directed to the woman as a worker rather than as a wife. There was comprehensive childcare and a generous social insurance system.



This photo of a father visiting a parade with his child was published in *The Moscow Times* in 2011, in connection with an interview with a father who felt mistreated at his place of work after taking parental leave.

PHOTO: ANDREI MAKHONIN / FOTO MEDIA

Interestingly, this model did not emerge in the West until much later, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the consequences for fatherhood were quite different from those in the West. Whereas in Western countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden, such developments in the social or public sphere paved the way for more active fatherhood, both as a social institution (for example the introduction of paternity leave) and as practice (fathers actually participating in childrearing tasks), they had the opposite effect in the Soviet context. Fatherhood as a social institution became irrelevant. In the families, fathers were marginalized and sometimes completely absent.

This trend continued later during the Soviet era. Until the late 1960s, fathers were deprived of a number of legal rights connected to parenthood, and the financial responsibility for the children was assigned to the state more than to the father. The state basically took over the role as the family's main provider. The mother became the children's primary nurturer and caretaker with responsibility for childrearing, the condition of the home, and the material and moral prosperity of the family. The father was marginalized still further in the family sphere.⁴⁸

Some of these changes bridge over to the third period in the evolution of the Soviet gender contract. This was between the mid-1950s and the end of the 1980s, and was still characterized by the etat-crat approach, but with some distance reemerging between the public and private spheres. Family affairs, childbirth, birth control, and childrearing were now considered private responsibilities to a greater degree. Housing policies again influenced the social sphere as single-family apartments were built en masse in the 1960s.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union, like many other state-socialist countries in Eastern Europe, started to experience demographic problems with shrinking populations due to low birth rates, poor health, and high mortality. To combat these problems, the state began to promote early marriage and large families, and to discourage divorce. In this context, the Soviet gender contract assumed more traditional forms. In official ideology, the woman was increasingly seen as the main caretaker of family and children. She was still expected to be working, however, which created a double burden. This problem was debated at the time among sociologists and demographers, which shows that there was a growing degree of political and social diversification, although harsh censorship remained in force. Some traces of a neotraditional discourse were detectable, as well as more a progressive critique of women's double burden. Men were still considered more or less detached from the fertility side of the demographic problem and were associated with high mortality, especially among middle-aged men.⁴⁹

A number of legal and social reforms were carried out from the end of the 1960s until the mid-1980s.

Among these was an obligation for fathers to provide child support after a divorce and the right to parental leave for women. The father's role in the family, in the private sphere, continued to be very limited during this period, however,

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despite some reforms in the opposite direction. In practice, the mother took sole responsibility for all parts of the children's upbringing, often together with her mother, the *babushka* (grandmother), much like in the traditional Eastern European multigenerational family model.

Men's role in the public sphere of state-socialist countries was clearer. Here the man was able to secure a position and a career in his role as the builder and defender of the country. A man's self-realization was thus expected to have a public character. Fatherhood was a formal duty and more of a potential distraction from the father's real duties towards society as a worker.⁵⁰ Masculine identity was hence based on work rather than patriarchal power in the home.⁵¹

The main thrust of the Soviet etat-crat gender policies thus entailed a dismantling of traditional masculinity in the private sphere in particular.⁵² The Soviet system abolished two of men's most important power assets: private property and being the breadwinner. The Soviet economic system made it unfeasible to be the sole breadwinner, and since a man's primary role was tied to his career and work, being cut off from domestic responsibilities also meant that the father was unable to act as a sex role model or a nurturer.⁵³ These roles had been taken over by the mother and the state. While motherhood was politicized, and to some extent glorified, what the father's role was, if there even was a role, was a question left unanswered.⁵⁴

In the communist realm, and especially in the Soviet Union, this development made fatherhood different from its Western counterpart. In the West, fatherhood remained an important institution. Fathers played a key role in the private sphere since their dominant position in the public sphere as workers and citizens also gave them power in family life as breadwinners and sex role models.

In the Soviet Union, the traditional patriarchal system was replaced by a hegemonic state, which took over the father's role as the provider and the head of the family. The man, husband and father, was pushed out of the private sphere, being redundant at home.⁵⁵ In the West, the mother was generally confined to the domestic sphere until relatively late, and the father had a role to play in both the private and public spheres. As a result, Soviet fatherhood has come to be associated with the concept of “the absent father”.⁵⁶

Interestingly, that concept, in somewhat different forms, has frequently been used in the West since the 1970s in connection with fathers' often passive parental role after divorce. Today, in many contexts and in particular in the US, it is seen as one of the most serious social problems.⁵⁷ In the Soviet context this problem received some attention in academic circles, but only limited attention at the political level.

Fatherhood under construction

The political and economic reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s had great implications for the family and parenthood. The breakdown of communism and the introduction of a more market-oriented economy and democratization entailed a gradual reprivatization of family life, which brought on a wider range of attitudes, norms, and behavior regarding family life and parental roles.⁵⁸ Tatiana Gurko has argued that there was a certain normlessness concerning fatherhood in Russia during the 1990s. This, she claims, was due to the state's lack of ideological mechanisms to establish a uniform image of ideal fatherhood.⁵⁹ As a result, men have increasingly been able to carve out new roles for themselves in the private realm as fathers and husbands. Some mothers appear to be prepared in turn to change Soviet patterns of family life, although resistance among women against more active fatherhood can also be detected.⁶⁰ There are fathers who still are quite absent or passive in their domestic roles, a smaller group who are assuming a more nurturing role, and a third rather large group of men who are trying to create a more traditional, dominant position in the family. These are tributaries of a larger process of changing family and gender relations in the post-Soviet era.⁶¹

As early as the end of the Soviet era, it is possible to discern a quite conservative or traditional discourse concerning gender roles and the family that comes close to the breadwinner model of fatherhood, and in some respects also the sex role model. This tendency was further strengthened after the fall of the Soviet Union. The retreat of the state and the resulting inability of the state to support the family, in combination with the reinstatement of private property, increased the demands on men to be the providers of the family. Furthermore, the new gender discourse conveyed the notion that, under socialism, women and men had lived in opposition to their true, biological nature. According to this discourse, the primary role of men in the private sphere is to be family providers, i.e. breadwinners. This also seems to have a high degree of support among the population.⁶² Another important role is that of bearing responsibility for discipline and punishment, as well as playing with the children. Women, meanwhile, are expected to take on their “natural” role as the caregivers of the family and the children, responsible for feeding and clothing them, and for other physical needs.⁶³ Women's participation in the labor market was no longer a pillar of the gender system. This neo-traditional discourse has dominated post-Soviet Russia,⁶⁴ and some researchers have called it a “patriarchal renaissance”.⁶⁵ Such a discourse can most likely be linked to the increased influence of the Russian Orthodox Church since the fall of the Soviet Union. The church has actively op-



posed abortion and homosexuality, while promoting traditional family life. At the same time, however, the response of the political elite to Russia's rapidly shrinking population reveals that the definition of fatherhood remains vague. The remedies that have been introduced are frequently directed towards the mother. This resembles the Soviet authorities' response to similar problems in the 1960s. As then, it is striking that the father and fatherhood are so weakly linked to the low fertility rates of the Russian Federation.⁶⁶ It thus appears as if the Russian fatherhood discourse continues to involve an unclear and sometimes weak role for the father. A search in the main guideline documents⁶⁷ on demographic policy shows that the words for "father" (*otets*), "dad" (*papa*) and "fatherhood" (*otsovstvo*) are not present at all. This pattern is also reflected in the constitution of the Russian Federation. Article 7:2 mentions fatherhood as a protected social institution, but in the section on the rights and freedoms of the citizen fatherhood is not mentioned while motherhood and childhood are (see Article 38:1). Moreover, men's ties to their children are in many cases weak due to the high numbers of non-marital births and high divorce rates, which frequently imply separation from the children too.⁶⁸ Thus it appears as if at least the legislative conditions for absent fatherhood are still largely present in post-Soviet Russia.

There are, however, some tendencies indicating that ideals of the "new father" or "nurturing father" are also emerging. Among Russian fathers in the well-educated middle class in the larger cities, a more active fatherhood and some degree of equality in the family are increasingly common. Childrearing continues to be a primarily female task, but fathers are more likely to be present at delivery, for example, and are less inclined towards domestic violence.⁶⁹ One concrete example of the emerging Russian nurturing father is the prevalence of "daddy schools" in northwestern Russia (mainly in Saint Petersburg, but also in Novgorod and Petrozavodsk). These groups are places for fathers-to-be to meet, learn about and discuss issues related to becoming a father with a clear agenda oriented towards taking up a role as an active, involved, and nurturing father.

According to Olga Bezrukova, the majority of the participants in the daddy schools are men with a more democratic and gender-equal outlook on the family than is generally found. A clear majority has completed higher education and almost all fathers that take part are employed. Although such categories are more arbitrary in Russia than in the West, these men can be referred to as middle-class.⁷⁰ In this regard, Russia follows the Western pattern in which middle-class fathers appear to be the first to adapt new fatherhood ideals, although actual behavior does not always follow suit.

Concluding remarks

The review of the literature on Russian fatherhood confirms that fatherhood as a social institution is bound to the context of political and socioeconomic processes. These processes have important implications for the gender contract, that is, for the distribution of power between the sexes in the private and

public spheres, and in particular for people's roles as mothers and fathers.

Soviet emancipation, which was based on the notion of the working mother, changed the previous gender contract. Mothers' increased labor participation did not lead to a more active and engaged fatherhood, however, as it later would in the West. Rather, the gender policies of the Soviet Union transformed fatherhood from the main source of authority in the family, linked to other patriarchal structures – the Russian Orthodox Church and the Tsar (the father of the nation) – into a marginalized social institution.

Although some traits of the "breadwinner" model, which was dominant in the West until World War II, were also present in the Soviet Union from the 1930s through the 1950s, the Soviet state and its policies gradually took over most of the role of the provider for the family. Thus the Soviet state left fathers in Russia without a clear role in the private sphere. This is different from experiences in the West. Even if the role of Western fathers was more focused in the public than in the private sphere, they still had a larger role to fill in the family, at least as a provider. In the Soviet context, socio-economic circumstances also undermined the role of the father as breadwinner. Fatherhood was thus not a basis of recognition and legitimacy, neither in the private nor in the public sphere.

When the etat-cratic gender system eroded as the Soviet Union fell apart, fatherhood in post-Soviet Russia became an arena for competing discourses. In some contexts, fatherhood remains marginalized in state discourse. However, neo-traditional images of the ideal father as a reliable provider or breadwinner have also emerged in the wider neo-traditional discourse that is an important part of Russia's current political climate. At the same time, there are some traces of a competing discourse among Russia's growing urban middle class that speaks of a more active and nurturing father. Thus there is no one dominant image or discourse of good fatherhood in today's Russia, as seems to be the case in large parts of Europe where a "new fatherhood" is actively promoted.⁷¹

The review of previous research also shows that there is a need for further research on fatherhood in the Eastern European context, especially in Russia. Empirically there is a need for a more detailed analysis of Russia's contemporary welfare system and its implications for parenthood, and in particular for fatherhood. In this regard, Lewis's typology and other similar typologies and models could be applied to specific welfare mechanisms, such as parental leave, flexible working hours, and childcare facilities, as well as to fiscal and family legislation, which together set the conditions for fatherhood both as a social institution and as a practice.

There is, in addition, a need to modify existing theoretical and analytical tools or develop new ones that are suitable to increase our understanding of fatherhood in the Russian context. Future analysis will show whether Western welfare typologies are apt for the analysis of the influence of Eastern European and post-Soviet welfare systems on contemporary parenthood. ❑

Note: All essays are scholarly articles and have been peer-reviewed by specialists under the supervision of Baltic Worlds' editorial advisory board.

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