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**STILL A SUPERWOMAN? HOW FEMALE ACADEMICS
FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION NEGOTIATE WORK—FAMILY
BALANCE ABROAD***

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ПО-ПРЕЖНЕМУ СУПЕРЖЕНЩИНА? КАК ЖЕНЩИНЫ-УЧЕНЫЕ ИЗ БЫВШЕГО СССР СОВМЕЩАЮТ РАБОТУ И СЕМЕЙНУЮ ЖИЗНЬ ЗА ГРАНИЦЕЙ

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Abstract. Since the 1930s, a peculiar ‘working mother’ gender contract was dominant in the Soviet Union formally empowering women. The pressing expectation of this contract and a necessity to combine motherhood, housework and employment led to the image of the near superwoman who ‘has it all’. This paper examines whether highly-skilled Russian-speaking female academics continue to adhere to this cultural ideal striving for work-life balance after migration to the UK and Germany. Based on qualitative interviews with 22 female scholars, the article provides a typology of scenarios for negotiating professional and private life. It elaborates on how role-related partners contribute to achieving balance between paid employment and mothering and explores the consequences for women’s well-being. Moreover, the study suggests a feminist approach to analyzing work-family balance, which valorises women’s point of view, emphasizing motherhood, children and family relations as an essential personal and social value, while also documenting the increasing challenges faced in the realization of these life priorities.

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Аннотация. Начиная с 1930-х гг. в Советском Союзе господствовал гендерный контракт «работающей матери», формально расширявший права и возможности женщин. Необходимость совмещать работу по найму, материнство и домашние обязанности привела к формированию образа суперженщины, которая успевает все. В нашей статье мы задаемся вопросом: насколько высококвалифицированные русскоязычные женщины продолжают придерживаться этого культурного идеала, когда стремятся сбалансировать семью и работу после миграции в Великобританию и Германию? На основе качественных интервью с 22 женщинами-учеными мы разработали типологию стратегий совмещения профессиональной и личной жизни. Мы анализируем, какой вклад в достижение баланса между работой и материнством вносят ролевые партнеры и какие последствия это имеет для благополучия женщин. Более того, наше исследование предлагает феминистский подход к анализу баланса семьи и работы, уделяя первоочередное внимание мнению самих женщин, подчеркивая исключительную личную и социальную ценность материнства, детей и семейных отношений, в то же время отмечая возрастающие трудности при реализации этих жизненных приоритетов.

Keywords: work-family balance, Russian-speaking migrants, highly-skilled women, academia, UK, Germany

Ключевые слова: баланс семьи и работы, русскоязычные мигранты, высококвалифицированные женщины, наука и академия, Великобритания, Германия

Introduction

Scholarly interest in work-family balance and its consequences for personal well-being has been revived through a series of studies on casualization, flexibilization and intensification of labour [Green, McIntosh, 2001; Burchell, Ladipo, Wilkinson, 2001], and the spread of precarious [Kalleberg, 2009] and project-based employment [Marsden, 2008]. Knowledge-intensive work in internationalizing academia is particularly illustrative of these trends in labour transformation. The spread of short-term and flexible contracts, increasing competition for positions and funding, conflicting job demands and growing workloads [Gill, 2016] undermine work-family balance among scholars. These factors induce academics to disproportionately invest their time and effort in professional activities, working irregular and longer hours [Kinman, Jones, 2008], which can lead to stress, health and mental problems in the worst cases, lowering levels of life satisfaction.

This paper aims to address a number of key questions relating to these stresses. What happens when these tensions are accentuated by transnational mobility, nowadays a pressing expectation and an integral part of an academic career [Bauder, 2015]? How do migrant scholars balance professional and private life in the context of adaptation and assimilation difficulties in the host country? And especially how do women, who still carry a “heavier load of responsibility” for “the meshing of work and family systems” [Salaff, Greve, 2004: 160], manage? Our paper addresses these questions by exploring the narratives of 22 female scholars who moved from the former Soviet Union countries to the United Kingdom and Germany in the 1990s-2010s. This group is particularly interesting for analysis, as Russian-speaking women often successfully convert their qualifications from their countries of origin and gain highly-skilled employment in receiving countries [Kalter, Kogan, 2014]. At the same time, they find themselves in a different institutional and cultural context, while continuing with the norms brought from their home country [Gewinner, 2019]. In post-Soviet space, the ‘working mother’ gender contract is still dominant, implying that women combine full-time employment with family and household duties [Temkina, Rotkirch, 2002]. If in the Soviet period realization of this contract relied on a system of state benefits, free childcare and extended family networks, how do women reconcile their increasingly demanding academic lives with family responsibilities abroad, with no access to customary sources of support?

Drawing on existing literature on highly-skilled female migration and a role-centered understanding of work-family balance (WFB), we conduct qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, and provide a typology of strategies for achieving satisfactory balance and their effects on personal well-being. The United Kingdom and Germany represent particularly suitable cases for comparative analysis because there are substantial differences between academic career structures and welfare state

provisions between these countries, which may produce different effects on female scholars' WFB. While British neoliberal academia represents a system with relatively more opportunities for obtaining a permanent position (from lecturer to professor), the German academic structure consists of predominantly temporary positions, with tenure being accessible to a clear minority and mostly at professorial level. The British welfare state is known as market-led and liberal, whereas Germany runs a conservative model, yet with considerable changes in family policy towards the socio-democratic regime over the past ten years. At the same time, the cultural notions of motherhood are similar in Germany and the UK: in both countries the role of a caring and selfless (middle-class white) mother goes along with an economically dependent woman. While her husband is the breadwinner, she works mainly part-time to be able to care for dependent children [Raddon, 2002; Miller, 2013, 2017; Zimmermann, 2019].

Highly-skilled female migration and work-family balance: between domestication and work centrality

The feminization of skilled migration across OECD countries [Dumont, Martin, Spielvogel, 2007] and critique of highly-skilled mobility research as “a genderless story” [Kofman, 2012: 64] has led to growing attention to female experiences in cross-border movements. However, WFB rarely attracts attention despite being one of the major difficulties and challenging tasks in women's post-arrival period, having profound impact on their life satisfaction and the consequences of migration, i. e. successful integration or marginalization in the host country. In the existing literature, WFB of highly-skilled female migrants is discussed in relation to women's employment prospects and labour market incorporation, but this research is inconsistent suffering from normative bias and individualistic discourse.

Studies document substantial diversity in WFB experiences among female migrants, ranging from greater immersion in family affairs to concentration on professional advancement. “The increase and/or intensification of housework and childcare” [Meares, 2010: 479] is the most common outcome of transnational migration, especially for dependents and tied movers. Often this takes the form of ‘unwanted domestication’ due to unsuccessful attempts to secure employment, which results in compromised careers and traumatic erosion of professional identities [Liversage, 2009; Yeoh, Willis, 2005]. Some women decide to completely “opt out of their careers” themselves because of “the burden of care and household responsibilities” [Van den Bergh, Du Plessis, 2012: 153] or reduce working hours, transfer to a freelance activity or entrepreneurship. Despite the variety of these scenarios, the outcome is re-domestication and re-feminization, confining women to traditional gender roles, leading to downward occupational mobility and undermining their professional realization [Yeoh, Willis, 2005; Meares, 2010; Riaño, Baghdadi, 2007].

In other cases, highly-skilled women seek to attain a ‘golden mean’ in combining working and family lives [Cretu, 2017: 140] and might be successful in “managing motherhood, their professional responsibilities and their international mobility” [González Ramos, Bosch, 2013: 625]. Women employ various means for this success — taking advantage of flexible working regimes and sharing household chores with their partners, using public and private daycare services and paid domestic as-

sistance. However, when both spheres compete for women's time and commitment, compromises are unavoidable. As a result, women tend to lower their professional ambitions and salary expectations, favouring "convenient" work with a suitable regime or opting for "relaxed" and "middling careers" [Cretu, 2017: 148—149].

Compromises of a 'golden mean' strategy, however, hardly enable women to achieve the highest levels of professional success, especially in academia, built around a masculine work ethic and male career patterns based on research [Knights, Richards, 2003]. When foreign-born female scholars conform to such professional requirements, prioritizing work and research, they necessarily reduce their involvement in the family and minimize maternity commitments. They realize their career through outsourcing their domestic duties and childcare responsibilities to their mothers/mothers-in-law or using professional domestic and childcare services [Sang, Al-Dajani, Özbilgin, 2013; Fernando, Cohen, 2016]. The costs are high: women often compromise their private lives in order to make room for professional activities and do not allow hobbies, leisure or children to "interfere in their work" [Fernando, Cohen, 2016: 1290]. Sometimes women postpone motherhood or decide against having children altogether, since parenting might "disrupt their career progression" [Sang, Al-Dajani, Özbilgin, 2013: 167]. Other 'personal' sacrifices include living apart from their partners or breaking up the relationship [Vohlidalová, 2014], suspension of friendships and reduction of social contacts outside the work and family circle [Sang, Al-Dajani, Özbilgin, 2013]. A career-oriented strategy is usually only feasible for women in privileged middle-class positions, as private childcare requires substantial financial resources. Also cultural norms matter: for instance, Asian women (such as Indian and Chinese) view career and social status attainment as a part of the parental role, implying an extensive financial provision for their children, while the everyday caretaking routine is relegated to elderly relatives at home or in their host country [Salaff, Greve, 2004; Fernando, Cohen, 2016].

In summary, female migrants' strategies range from domestication to work centrality, but neither option seems optimal for women's well-being. Domestication is accompanied by the disruption of women's professional selves and can lead to a painful identity crisis, while career orientation is often detrimental to personal life, and a 'golden mean' presupposes concessions in both spheres. Building on this typology, we ask, what WFB strategies do Russian-speaking women adopt and how are these strategies realized in different institutional and cultural environments? We address these questions by conducting a comparative analysis of WFB strategies among Russian-speaking female academics across British and German contexts. In contrast to existing WFB studies, attributing more value to women's employment and professional engagement, while labelling domestic responsibilities and childcare as an impediment and burdensome activities, we do not prioritize any sphere and give voice to female respondents themselves, who often view family and children as a valuable and necessary part of a happy and full life. Instead, we distance ourselves from the discourse of WFB as a personal achievement and a matter of individual effort only, which encourages an image of a superwoman who is able to 'have it all'¹. In contrast, we explore women's agency as tied to the actions of their family members

¹ Slaughter A.-M. (2012) Why Women Still Can't Have It All. *The Atlantic*. July—August. URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/> (accessed: 14.02.2020).

and other people in their social networks, as taking place within wider institutional and cultural contexts and being shaped by them.

Towards an interactional and contextual notion of work-family balance

In this paper, we outpace the individual-centered concepts of WFB prevalent in the literature. These are typically based on satisfaction as a personal psychological state, in which WFB is represented as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home” [Clark, 2000: 751] or “achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains” [Kirchmeyer, 2000: 81]. Some authors emphasize personal perceptions and values, viewing WFB as an “individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual’s current life priorities” [Kalliath, Brough, 2008: 326]. Others concentrate on role engagement as a basis of WFB, defining it as “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in — and equally satisfied with — his or her work role and family role” [Greenhaus, Collins, Shaw, 2003: 513].

Drawing on Grzywacz and Carlson’s work [Grzywacz, Carlson, 2007] we argue that individual-centered notions of WFB are insufficient and unsatisfactory. When WFB is an “individual-level problem” [ibid: 458] and a “personal management task” [Prozesky, 2018: 499], women are required to “maintain exceptionally high standards of self-discipline and organization” or are blamed “as failing to manage this balance” [Toffoletti, Starr, 2016: 489]. Failure to achieve WFB may lead to identity crisis, low self-esteem and a feeling of guilt [Grant-Vallone, Ensher, 2011], while challenges and negative emotions associated with work-family disbalance tend to be silenced [Toffoletti, Starr, 2016].

Therefore, we adopt instead a role-based definition of WFB, which captures its fundamentally social and contextual character: “the accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains” [Grzywacz, Carlson, 2007: 458]. This definition underlines the notion that role expectations are established in interaction, and that as a result they are flexible and changeable. It also pays attention to ‘role-related partners’, linking expectations and obligations of the interconnected roles (for example, wife and husband, father and mother). However, placing role expectations in the wider context of household economy and organizational structures in which family and working activities are performed, this definition still lacks a proper consideration of the macro-social level. Compensating for this lack, we combine capabilities and agency framework in WFB [Hobson, Fahlén, 2009] and life course institutionalization theory [Krüger, Levy, 2001], and argue that role accomplishment is shaped by cultural norms and institutional conditions, which are interconnected and nationally specific. As a result, we define WFB as the accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains in a particular cultural and institutional context.

Based on this definition, we formulate several hypotheses. First, clashes between home and host country’s cultural norms will lead to conflicting role expectations associated with women’s family and career roles, undermining their ability to successfully fulfill these roles and achieve a satisfying balance. Second, women’s WFB will be substantially affected by their role-related partners in both private (husbands/partners, extended family, etc.) and professional spheres (colleagues, managers, etc.).

Third, different institutional conditions in the UK and Germany, i. e. specific academic settings and welfare systems, will considerably influence the WFB strategies of female scholars. Cross-national analysis of WFB-related cultural norms is particularly lacking in the contemporary scholarship [Kravchenko, Motiejunaite, 2008; Lewis, Beauregard, 2018; Gewinner, 2019], and this constitutes one of the major novelties of our study.

Normative expectations of the post-Soviet 'working mother' gender contract

During the Soviet period a peculiar gender contract of 'working mother' was formed [Temkina, Rotkirch, 2002; Zdravomyslova, Temkina, 2003; Attwood, Schimpfössl, Yusupova, 2018]. At its core, women were seen as being 'married' to the state, which supported them in fulfilling two equally important duties—economic production (paid employment) and reproduction (child bearing, childcare, household and family duties). Various arrangements enabled women to perform multiple roles simultaneously, including an extensive childcare system and ideology of early socialization, reliance on extended family's assistance and help of older children, pro forma jobs with limited responsibilities and lower standards of childcare. However, as public and professional responsibilities increased, WFB was disrupted and demanded a great deal of self-discipline and management from highly-skilled women [Pushkareva, 2011], who also experienced discrimination in the workplace as mothers [Gritsay, 2011; Pushkareva, 2014].

Soviet men, on the contrary, "had an at once more limited and higher status role to play" [Ashwin, 2000: 1], withdrawing themselves from the private sphere as fathers and being confined to the realization as workers, soldiers and leaders in the public sphere [id., 2006]. Such "domestic marginalization" [Ashwin, Lytkina, 2004: 189] and "detached fatherhood" [Utrata, Ispa, Ispa-Landa, 2013: 288] were partly a product of the state, latently promoting the gender ideology of biological determinism, when household duties and child rearing continued to be imagined as an essential part of femininity despite women's economic emancipation [Temkina, Rotkirch, 2002: 6—7]. Moreover, as a source of social protection for women and children, the state appropriated the role of a 'universal patriarch' undermining men's authority as fathers and heads of the household [Ashwin, 2000: 1]. As a result, it was women who routinely managed household, family and professional affairs under conditions of financial shortage and deficit of basic goods and services. Such an arrangement had ambivalent consequences for women's as well as men's well-being and life satisfaction. Although experiencing the double or even triple burden, women gained more authority in the family, developed a variety of competencies and grew self-confident. This triggered a culturally specific "ideal of the Soviet superwoman" who was expected to combine employment with running the household and bearing children and who took pride and strength in the "ability to do so" [ibid.: 20]. On the contrary, limited opportunities for the fulfillment of the traditional masculine roles of father and head of the family led to a crisis of masculinity in the late Soviet period, rendering men "ineffective" and "derogated" in the private domain [Zdravomyslova, Temkina, 2012: 26].

Changes in state ideology and the introduction of the market economy in 1991 led to the transformation of the notions of masculinity and femininity as well as diversification of the Soviet gender contract [Zdravomyslova, Temkina, 2003; Issoupova, 2000]. Although the 'working mother' contract is still dominant in post-Soviet space,

new contracts of housewife, often implying the professionalization of motherhood, and the professional woman contract, accompanied by privatization of care, acquired legitimacy [Temkina, Rotkirch, 2002; Savinskaya, 2015]. This diversification has largely been driven by pressing demands of the market, imposing new challenges on women's ability to achieve satisfactory WFB, especially when curtailment of childcare state services is coupled with the spread of standards of intensive mothering². As for men, they gained more opportunities for their realization as breadwinners and heads of the family, but their involvement in domestic affairs changed only slightly, indicating a path dependency in the private norms of masculinity [Ashwin, 2006].

Viewing 'working mother' gender contract as specific post-Soviet cultural model, in this paper we explore how it shapes WFB of Russian-speaking women after migration and, in particular, whether the ideal of a strong superwoman who takes care of everything is reproduced in a different national context.

Data and methods

Our research is based on 22 semi-structured interviews with Russian-speaking female academics conducted in 2017—2019 (11 in the United Kingdom, 11 in Germany) via Skype (8 in the UK), face-to-face (3 in the UK) or telephone (11 in Germany). In both countries, target sampling technique was used: Russian-speaking respondents were identified and then contacted through social media (Germany), or through email and academic social media (UK). Interviews lasted 90 minutes on average, ran in Russian to fully capture the meanings and subjectivities of the respondents and followed the topics to which women gave most of their attention. We deployed a thematic coding technique initially separately for British and German contexts, but using the same analytical procedure and major topics. All names of respondents were changed for confidentiality reasons according to the guidelines of 'Ethics in Social Science and Humanities' [European Commission, 2018]. Academic positions, either at the moment of data collection or latest positions while residing in the country, and countries are also stated in brackets.

Women in the sample were on average 40 (UK) and 37.5 (Germany) years old³ and originated from Russia (17 respondents), Ukraine (3), Belarus (1), and Moldova (1) (see Table 1). They migrated at a rather young age (average of 28 in the UK, 26 in Germany), mostly for education (6 in the UK, 6 in Germany) or employment purposes (3 in the UK, 3 in Germany). For the majority of Germany-based respondents (8), it was their first and only destination country, while UK-based respondents showed greater mobility, with only three women having had no prior or subsequent moves. The majority of respondents already had a rich migration history with the typical age of the first migration episode around 25 (taking place in the years 1993—2014). For seven of the interviewed respondents, the UK was the first country of destination, whereas others had already worked in Japan, Germany or Italy prior to their second migration episode within the remit of educational migration. Most of the female scholars located

² Issoupova O. (2014) You are Mother: Forced Heroism and Forced Guilt of Motherhood. *Polit.ru*. February, 1st. URL: <https://polit.ru/article/2014/02/01/issoupova/> (accessed: 14.02.2020). (In Russ.)

³ Sample characteristics valid for the time of data collection.

in Germany moved only once, and only three academics had migrated for the second time, already having gathered migration experience in France, Hungary or Italy.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents⁴

Category	Sub-category	Number of cases	
		UK	Germany
Birth cohort	1960s	1	1
	1970s	6	4
	1980s	4	6
Country of origin	Russia	9	8
	Ukraine	1	2
	Belarus	1	
	Moldova		1
Academic position	PhD student	3	2
	Postdoc		5
	Lecturer/Teaching fellow	2	
	Researcher	2	1
	Reader	2	
	Assistant professor		2
	Associate professor	2	
Marital status	Full professor		1
	Married/ In stable partnership	7	10
	Single	3	1
Children	Divorced	1	
	Yes	8	5
	No	3	6

All interviewees were engaged in academic activities except for three women in the UK (2 who had gone on to work in industry in the UK, 1 who had left academia). Women located in the UK had a fair distribution of temporary (4) and permanent (4) positions, while their German counterparts were employed mostly on temporary contracts (9), with only two scholars having a permanent contract. Women in the sample were mostly married or in a stable partnership (7 in the UK, 10 in Germany), few participants were single (3 in the UK, 1 in Germany) or divorced (1 in the UK). Curiously, the majority of female scholars in the UK had children irrespective of their marital family status (8), while academics in Germany were often childless (6). For respondents in Germany (DE) who had borne children, their number of children was lower (1.4 compared to 1.87 for the UK).

Findings

In this section, we first look at the gender contract, identifying persistent patterns of ‘working mother’ contracts inherited from the post-socialist past, but adjusted to the institutional contexts of host countries. Although the value of paid employment and motherhood continue to shape women’s lives after migration, we identify diversification of trajectories to motherhood as a result of demanding working conditions. We then describe the strategies women scholars elaborate to fulfill the ‘working mother’ gender

⁴ We cannot list detailed information about each respondent, since it contradicts the guidelines of ‘Ethics in Social Science and Humanities’ [European Commission, 2018: 15]. Instead, we provide aggregated information.

contract, provide a typology of possible WFB scenarios and their effects on women's well-being and personal satisfaction. Lastly, we discuss the resources women use to achieve WFB, revealing two main patterns of arrangements with role-related partners and tracing the reproduction of a culturally specific post-Soviet ideal of a superwoman.

Gender contract of 'working mother' on the move

We found no cases of housewife contract in which "service, motherhood and care form the core of female identity", and a few cases of a female-professional contract, in which "interests of professional self-realization" prevail [Temkina, Rotkirch, 2002: 12—13]. Russian-speaking migrant women value and devote themselves to both their families and professions, demonstrating neither home-centered nor distinct work-centered life preferences but rather adaptive life choices seeking "to combine employment with family work" [Hakim, 2000: 7]. Thus, in contrast to the cultural pattern common for European women referred to above, for post-Soviet women in both the UK and Germany, the norms of the 'working mother' gender contract, in which "women are expected to combine productive activities with motherhood and care for the family" [Temkina, Rotkirch, 2002: 8], retain their power despite being transplanted to a different context. They continue to shape women's life choices and work-family balance strategies, making it natural for women to invest in both spheres of activity, without expecting irreconcilable conflicts between the two spheres. However, the underlying ideology behind these notions has changed: while having children and employment were considered civic duties in the Soviet period [ibid.], now women regard these as individual life values and matters of private choice. Women consider both spheres as integral to their lives, indispensable for personal well-being and self-fulfillment and are not ready to sacrifice one for the other.

Within this gender contract, the mother is a central family role for Russian-speaking women, far surpassing the role of wife in meaning and importance. First, this represents a path-dependency effect from the Soviet period, when women's roles "were defined according to the perceived needs of the communist state" [Ashwin, 2002: 119], therefore the role of worker and mother were more honored and celebrated. The role of wife, with which the Soviet State was less concerned, was largely confined to the housewife, whose primary responsibility was to "care for husband" by cooking and creating at home a "cozy atmosphere and exemplary tidiness" [Khasbulatova, 2018: 53]. Second, the role of mother has more importance [Kuperberg, Stone, 2008] as a result of the spread of intensive mothering ideology [Hays, 1998]. Third, the role of wife is less prominent in our respondents' narratives because it is less problematic in terms of WFB. In comparison to having children, having a partner/husband does not force women to reduce their working hours or curtail their professional activities, although being in stable partnerships does mean that women are more likely to want to stay geographically close to their partners.

Marriage constitutes an important stage in women's life courses, but in comparison to children, it is not perceived as an ultimate life value. Having a husband is perceived as a necessary condition for having children, although marrying is not equated with bearing children soon. In addition, women, especially younger ones, often feel themselves to be independent professionals with decent earnings, capable of providing

for themselves and their children, therefore the husband is not regarded as a primary breadwinner, but as a partner in childcare and a source of emotional support.

Children continue to be a source of personal happiness even when women are ambitiously pursuing their careers: Russian-speaking female respondents, particularly in the UK, could hardly imagine a full-fledged family life without children:

"...Without the third child it would be more freedom. Older children would live on their own, and I would be busy with my work. But on the other hand, is it a family?" (Anna, Teaching Fellow, UK).

"Everything came in its place (in Russian — 'все встало на свои места'). I just could not sleep from happiness for the first two weeks of pregnancy" (Daria, Group Coordinator, UK).

On the other hand, a social pressure to bear children before the age of 35, often imposed by women's parents and justified by reasons of physiological 'best age' for childbirth, sometimes make women feel anxious or deficient if they fail to fulfill this expectation:

"After 35 there are hormonal changes and giving birth is more difficult. So do not make my mistakes, bear children earlier" (Nina, Associate Professor, UK).

While in the former Soviet Union, childbirth was not supposed to interfere much with women's employment, now women scholars encounter more pressure in both professional and private spheres and are increasingly conscious of the growing tension between the two. Thus, standards of intensive mothering set high demands on women's time, psychological and intellectual involvement. For instance, 'good mothers' are expected to be inseparable from their children in the first years of their lives, tying women to their homes and making them anxious about losing their professional identity and being disconnected from academic work:

"If I become a mother, the childcare responsibility will lie on me just because of time resources. This would mean a downshifting of my academic work. And I will die from housekeeping" (Elena, Postdoc, DE).

Progressive neoliberalization in British academic life and the structural organization of German academia require not only intensive working regimes but also demand undivided commitment to professional goals and tasks to secure tenure. Academic work is guided by increasingly family-unfriendly normative expectations that leave less space for parental duties, making women feel uncomfortable and unwelcome about having children:

"We work in a lab, we all must be there, if someone gets pregnant, this is a tragedy. I remember one case, one colleague of mine got pregnant and her boss told her directly: 'What a pity, you could have had such a nice career!'" (Larissa, Researcher, DE).

“In England and other Western countries, things can be called nicely, and certain programmes [in organizations] are created <...>, but no one is happy about a female genius in science because woman will take maternity leave anyway. No one likes it. <...> My previous boss even used to say ‘Can’t you work at 2—3 o’clock at night? It is the most productive time, you should sit and work’. And I had an infant at that time, and I slept in any position, while sitting or standing, at any time of the day. But he says: ‘If you want, you sit and write at 2—3 a. m.’” (Angelina, Reader, UK).

Under these conditions, women demonstrate three types of transition to motherhood, with the pronounced difference between women who migrated independently (educational or labour migration) and women who moved as dependents following their husbands. The latter, representing the UK case, typically had children in their 20s, when motherhood coincided with migration, PhD studies and the early stages of their scientific career (1st trajectory to motherhood or ‘early transition’). Such a combination had a detrimental effect on women’s academic advancement, which was substantially compromised. For instance, Ulyana (Lecturer, UK) was able to achieve her PhD degree only in her late 30s, when her children had started school. Despite teaching and research experience accumulated in these years, she encountered significant difficulties in obtaining a position at this age and had to accept a not particularly attractive offer from one Middle Eastern university.

In contrast, female scholars who migrated independently preferred to postpone childbearing to settle professional matters first. However, they faced high competition for academic jobs, requiring massive investments of time and energy, and uncertain professional prospects. A long route to a stable position and financial security, coupled with the difficulty of finding a partner or husband due to spatial mobility, led to women having their first children in their middle or late 30s (2nd trajectory to motherhood or ‘postponed transition’).

“Concerning children, everything is terrible. I do not know how other people manage to do it earlier. All these moves meant that I had to arrange my private life from scratch, when I moved to England” (Angelina, Reader, UK).

“I feel more Western European. I am more concerned about my own ability to cater for my children rather than about finding a man for that. Eastern European women usually use forced employment interruptions to become a mother; I am not morally ready for that yet” (Elena, Postdoc, DE).

In Germany, where academic competition is fierce and working conditions are especially demanding, women find themselves in an extremely unfavourable situation. Due to the institutional peculiarity known as the ‘chair system’, tenured positions can be found mostly on the professorial level, which causes extremely high competition among researchers. Having only vague chances to attain a permanent position in the university, women postpone childbearing again and again until they start losing hope of ever having children if they wish to keep employment in academia (3rd trajectory to motherhood or ‘uncertain transition’). The alternative option is dropping out of academic structures and finding a job outside academia:

Question: "If you decide to have children, will you continue working in academia?"

Nadia (Postdoc, DE): "This is hardly possible in Germany. The academic culture in my field of study is 'dry', non-human, people lack social skills. Gender equality is hypocrisy. <...> I need a permanent position, which is apparently impossible in Germany... In France, I would already have had three children apart from my job, but not in Germany".

Thus, the decision to have children is substantially influenced by national institutional context. While in the UK, post-Soviet women tend to demonstrate postponed transition to motherhood, in Germany women more often adhere to the uncertain transition trajectory. This partially explains why respondents from Germany are more often childless, whereas respondents from the UK mostly have children despite being roughly the same age. It means that the more competitive academic context, in which permanent positions are barely accessible and normative demands to scholars are growing, imposes substantial constraints on women's reproductive plans. As children constitute a principal life value for Russian-speaking female scholars, a forced decision to postpone childbearing to an indefinite future or abandon family extension plans altogether can have a detrimental effect on women's well-being and risks becoming a serious identity issue. Growing demands on both roles, mother and scholar, create a dramatic tension between professional and family domains that may lead to endangering or complete renunciation of one of them, in the case of female scholars, the role of mother. This case also demonstrates that although seemingly similar, childless women, who wish to have children, but cannot realize this wish due to external circumstances, should be differentiated from women with "childfree ideology", for whom children do not represent a principal value and a source of personal happiness.

Realization of 'working mother' gender contract: typical strategies and their shortcomings

When women choose to have children alongside a professional career, we explored how they manage to combine the two in the conditions of the extensive role expectations in both spheres and in a different national context. Based on how women balance normative expectations pertaining to the roles of mother and scholar, we identify three main strategies of reconciliation of private and professional life similar to the typology we devised from literature analysis and somewhat echoing the preference theory put forward by Hakim [Hakim, 2000]: family-oriented, compromise and career-oriented (see Figure 1). All strategies manifest themselves on the level of decision-making and life choices as well as everyday routine.

The family-oriented strategy is the rarest among post-Soviet women scholars. We found only two women adhering to such a strategy in the UK and not a single case in Germany. This strategy is demonstrated by women who migrated as dependents and bore children in their 20s (the 'early transition' to motherhood). This implies that women lower their standards of academic work to fulfill the norms of their family roles of wife and mother. As a result, women reconcile professional and private spheres by adapting their employment and professional aspirations to their family's needs, husbands' plans and children's interests. Although these women can hardly imagine their

life without paid work, they show readiness to prioritize their husband's employment, postpone their professional plans and lower their own career ambitions, when family circumstances interfere. For instance, Anna (Teaching Fellow, UK) gave up her PhD studies in Leningrad Electrotechnical Institute to give birth to her child and follow her husband abroad. Ulyana (Lecturer, UK) left her position in Cyprus despite promising prospects there because her husband was dissatisfied with a long-distance relationship and wanted her to live in the UK.

"If I stayed there I would get a deanship, but my husband, my family — it is most important for me" (Ulyana, Lecturer, UK).

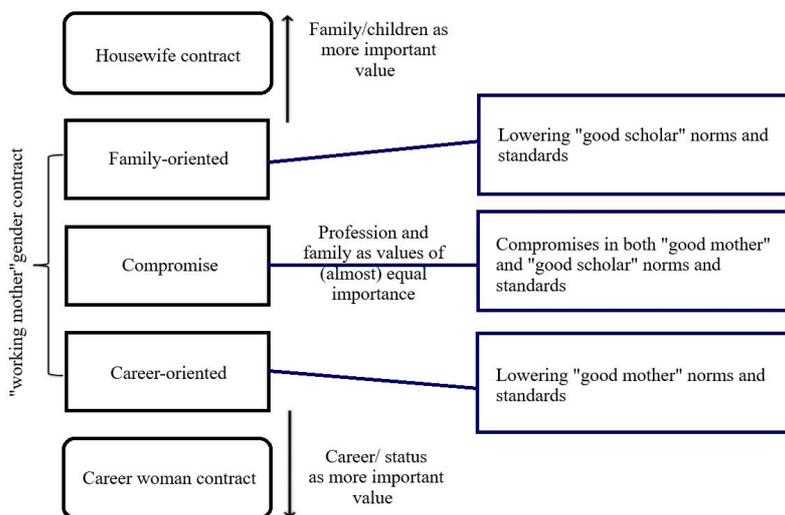


Figure 1. WFB strategies of Russian-speaking female academics⁵

Women who employ this strategy adjust their everyday life routine and temporary regimes to their husband's working activities as well as children's needs and schedules. In the UK they negotiate teaching hours with their department in order to be available to collect children from school or kindergarten. Taking primary responsibility for childcare, they considerably cut down their research activities and conference attendance due to being overloaded with domestic duties, while enabling their husbands to keep busy with their (academic) work. In addition, women are sometimes asked to substitute their husbands in teaching and perform technical or experimental work for their research projects. Nevertheless, women scholars view work in academia as a 'convenient job', with flexibility as a principal value, enabling them to cater for their family's needs, although it also implies working from home and doing irregular hours:

"Here at the university it is good that one can arrange and adjust the schedule, so it is convenient. If one goes into industry, then one should think what to do with children. <...>

⁵ Source: own presentation.

In this respect, I am lucky as I do not have to go to the trouble of seeking nannies. With a flexible schedule I can easily go home, though then I sit at home till 12 o'clock and work" (Anna, Teaching Fellow, UK).

The main shortcoming of the family-oriented strategy is slow professional development and potential stagnation, fragmented or even failed career. Another risk is the continuous dependence of women on their husbands in terms of financial, familial and academic issues. Initial inequality in their professional positions is enhanced by migration and dramatically widens with the years. As a result, woman's status and well-being abroad become greatly affected by their husbands' support. If the husband also works in academia and assists his wife in securing an academic position and attracts her to research projects, the costs of career breaks for the woman is lower as she is able to benefit from the social contacts and experience of her husband. If support is suspended for some reason, the consequences might be unfavourable and jeopardize the woman's career in academia.

The second strategy, *a compromise*, is the most common in the UK as well as in Germany. This is demonstrated by women who migrated independently and bore children in their 30s (the 'postponed transition' trajectory). This strategy implies that women try to attain a 'golden mean' in balancing family life and academic work without prioritizing any sphere. They become skillful and careful managers, adjusting their private life to professional activities as well as adapting their academic work to their family's needs. In the efforts to adjust family and professional roles to each other in their daily routine, female academics often develop two sets of flexibilization practices [Isupova, 2019]. They saturate the domestic sphere with working duties and responsibilities while incorporating family and children into their professional schedule and activities, which mixes these spheres and erodes the boundaries between them. However, contrary to Isupova's observations that the "sphere of work <...> turns out to be more elastic" [ibid.: 106], this research found that professional activities tend to resist pressure from the private domain and keep their boundaries firm, while the private space is more compliant and more easily colonized by professional tasks. Working commitments are increasingly incorporated into the private life: it is common to work from home two or three times per week⁶, while looking after children, or in the evening/at night.

"They [children] could just crawl to me for an hour, being distracted by toys and something they find on the floor, licking the floor, chairs. But I was able to do some science (in Russian — 'что-то поделать по науке') in this hour" (Alena, PhD student, UK).

"My husband and I usually plan a week in such a way that one of us is always in the city and available for our son. We both work in different universities and can arrange to be in the home office on certain weekdays" (Oxana, Postdoc, DE).

In contrast, the privatizing of the professional domain, i. e. taking children to work or using working hours for domestic chores, is a rare practice among Russian-speaking

⁶ However, the opportunity to arrange such a schedule depends on the discipline. For instance, women in STEM involved in experimental work are expected to be present in a laboratory during all working days.

female scholars. This is partially because the academic setting is not seen as a place for children and partially motivated by a wish to avoid public shaming at the university, even in childcare facilities, specifically designed to support working mothers:

"I have to take my daughter with me sometimes. She has not attended my lectures yet but she was at the Open Doors Day for potential candidates at the university, I brought her to such events..." (Kristina, Associate Professor, UK).

"There is a MiniCampus at our university where I leave my son about 15 times a year. The lady who organises it spreads rumours saying what a bad mother I am, constantly leaving my child all day with strangers" (Isolda, Assistant Professor, DE).

The shortcomings of the compromise strategy include overwork and practical absence of personal time, not filled with family duties or working tasks. In addition to never-ending busyness, women may still experience dissatisfaction and guilt for their inability to properly fulfill the role of mother as well as the role of scientist. On one hand, they cannot spend as much time with their children as they wish and provide the level of care they feel children are entitled to. The tension is especially acute when children are sick or when they have holidays and need more parental attention. On the other hand, women cannot find sufficient time for research and some (mostly in the UK) reduce international travelling as well as participation in meetings and events outside of working hours, which has a detrimental effect on their scientific output and career:

"I am deprived of almost any professional interaction outside the university because when I am not working I am with my children. All weekends, all evenings are occupied with children. No business or academic dinners when some interesting people come, it is practically impossible" (Alena, PhD student, UK).

"Having children limits it [scientific activity] very much now as well. I do not often go to conferences just because I have children" (Nina, Associate Professor, UK).

"I don't think I will obtain a professorship. Compared to others, I have not published that much, have not been that productive" (Oxana, Postdoc, DE).

While women located in the UK tend to make concessions in both spheres and lower their standards of both 'good mother' and 'good scholar', their German counterparts seemed more satisfied with their everyday duties in both domains. In this respect, participation of the women's partners plays a significant role: when children are taken care of by their father women can spend more time on work, but without feeling that they are bad mothers. Therefore, the partner's involvement contributes to a proper fulfillment of women's family and professional roles and can raise their satisfaction in both domains:

"When I have to work longer my partner takes care of my son. I seek to work full-time when my child is a bit older. For the moment, I am very satisfied with my work and private life conditions (Judith, PhD Student, DE).

"I feel confirmed through my status as a professor. It opens many doors and makes me regularly travel to conferences and be an active member of professional societies" (Isolda, Assistant Professor, DE).

The career-oriented strategy is demonstrated by women who migrated independently and gave birth to children in their 30s or late 30s (the 'postponed transition' to motherhood) or still postpone childbearing (the 'uncertain transition'). This strategy is more widespread among Russian-speaking academics in Germany while only one woman demonstrated adherence to this pattern in the UK. The strategy implies that women adjust their family's plans to fit in with their working commitments and responsibilities. It means that women are more loyal to the norms of a 'good scholar' standing for intensive research and productivity, but are less sensitive to the norms of intensive mothering, which are substantially dissolved under the pressure of academic working ethics. It is more acutely felt in German academia, with much higher competition and conservative gender culture, making compliance with its values inevitable for stepping up the academic ladder. Prioritization of professional concerns substantially structures family-related decisions, such as whether and when to have children. When women have children they usually have a short maternity leave and in some cases continue working during this break:

"I took three months and then they allowed me to work primarily from home for three months more. Because I fulfilled all my functions while at home. And I had students, I even paid them to come to me" (Angelina, Reader, UK).

"I submitted my master's thesis when I was pregnant, spent half a year at home on parental leave and started working full-time right after that" (Larissa, Researcher, DE).

Interestingly, in the UK early return to work was made possible by private childcare services (a nanny) and a senior and solidly paid academic position, making this option financially feasible. In Germany, early return to work was supported by accessible public childcare facilities and a greater involvement of fathers into childcare. Consequently, these arrangements enabled women to retain the intensive working regime with substantial time for research and regular travelling, even if it also means reducing the amount of time spent with their children and family. Therefore, although this strategy is associated with the smallest detrimental effects on women's career, the most common shortcoming is either a sense of moral guilt of not being able to provide the desired standards of care or persisting uncertainty regarding becoming a mother because these standards of care are increasingly difficult to meet:

"For a woman it is important to bear and raise a child. In German academia, it is difficult but not impossible. I would like to have a child and spend more time with them compared to what I observe in my colleagues' circle" (Inna, Assistant Professor, DE).

"Well, my daughter ceased breast-feeding at six months old only because after three months I started returning to work. For me it turned out to be so quick" (Angelina, Reader, UK).

In summary, no strategy seems to be perfect in achieving the harmonious balance between the spheres of professional and private. Either academic achievements are endangered or family life is compromised, or both spheres, crucial for women's self-realization and personal well-being, are undermined, with common feelings of dissatisfaction and underperformance coupled with frequent overwork and the stress of never-ending busyness. Again, we observe the persistent influence of the institutional context. While in the UK, respondents demonstrate a wider range of strategies, from family to career-oriented, predominantly adhering to the compromise option, German respondents are more inclined towards a career-oriented strategy. This way, the highly competitive environment means that only certain ways of achieving the WFB are feasible, indirectly excluding from academia females prioritizing family concerns. German academia also produces this selectivity effect on partnership: only women whose partners/husbands are actively involved in housework and childcare are able to pursue a scientific career and compete in the academic labour market. In the UK, academia is more inclusive in respect to different partnership relations and family orientation but more exclusive in terms of class status in the early years of motherhood as expensive kindergartens render them affordable only for high-earning female scholars.

Institutional and cultural context shaping WBF strategies:

Self-reliance vs partner's involvement pattern

The realization of WFB strategies relies on women's negotiations and arrangements with their role-related partners. By 'role-related partners' we are referring to those other people and organizations within a social network who share with women their "role-related responsibilities" and therefore contribute to their WFB [Grzywacz, Carlson, 2007: 460]. Concentrating on the compromise strategy as the most common in the UK and Germany, we explore different role-related partners in women's family and academic lives including private (husband/partner, grandparents, etc.), public (childcare/education institutions), market (nannies, domestic workers) and professional domains (colleagues). First, we observe that the lack or absence of conditions, commonly available for Soviet gender contracts (grandparents' assistance, cheap and accessible childcare, convenience job), made the realization of the compromise strategy more challenging and stressful for our respondents in the UK and Germany. Second, role-related partners proved to be interdependent in enabling women achieve a good WFB: if the involvement of one party is limited or insufficient (e.g. extended family), resources for combining motherhood and employment may be compensated by other partner(s) (e.g. husband). Third, differences in institutional contexts, including welfare provisions and academia, affect cultural norms of 'good mother' and 'good scholar' roles and give rise to different, but persistent, patterns of WFB strategies' realization — 'self-reliance' vs 'partner's involvement' pattern.

The 'partner's involvement' pattern is typical for Russian-speaking women in Germany. This pattern is characterized by extensive reliance on childcare and education institutions combined with active participation of the woman's partner in parental and household duties. State childcare facilities, inexpensive and accessible, play a principal role, guaranteeing a smooth course of the working day for highly-skilled migrant female scholars. Involvement of partners/husbands is a critical factor in WFB

as intensive fatherhood substantially reduced women's family and household responsibilities, granting them more time for professional tasks. In this way, women were able to satisfactorily meet the high standards of professional engagement imposed by German academia, which would hardly be possible without their partners' readiness to share unpaid work. Such a pattern is lived by double career couples, when both spouses assume responsibility for childcare and establish a well-organized routine in exercising everyday household duties. Interestingly, this pattern is typically sustained by Russian-speaking women with European-born husbands. It represents a case of discontinuity from the culturally specific norms of post-Soviet gender order:

"Both my husbands, the first and the second one, never tried to thwart me in my work, especially regarding attending conferences and travelling for business, for example, saying 'you have small children, stay at home'. <...> In both my marriages we never had discussions on division of work at home, we just did things simultaneously..." (Inga, Full Professor, DE).

"I get up at 5 a. m. and my working day starts at 6.30 a. m. Every morning my husband is responsible for preparing the children for school and kindergarten, so he always has a morning shift. When I'm back home at about 6 p. m., we have dinner — my husband cooks, always [smiles], and then I take over my evening shift (Larissa, Researcher, DE).

In contrast, the culturally specific norm of a Soviet superwoman is partially reproduced in the 'self-reliance' pattern that is more typical for the UK respondents. In this pattern, women take the majority of care and household responsibilities on themselves and share them only with childcare and education institutions, while the involvement of their partners is minimal. Their husbands' participation remains optional and done by choice or upon request while women are always 'on call' taking the lead in organizing childcare and encouraging their husband's involvement. Women rarely complain or problematize the insufficient participation of their husbands taking it for granted and rarely attempting to achieve more equal distribution of unpaid work:

"If the child is invited to a birthday party then of course I will choose a present, not my husband. So there are lots of such things when everything relies on me" (Kristina, Associate Professor, UK).

This continuity of the post-Soviet gender contract might be partially explained by the impact of the institutional context. More flexible requirements and options of professional engagement in British academia enable women to fulfill their professional obligations and attend to family responsibilities relying primarily on themselves, without necessarily attracting their partner's resources. In contrast, being a superwoman no longer works in a more competitive German context which imposes stricter rules on academic work and therefore requires that the woman either mobilizes maximum resources, including time and efforts of their partners, or quits academia. On the other hand, self-reliance vs. the partner's involvement pattern is partially explained by cultural norms within the relationship of the couple in which the post-Soviet 'working mother' gender contract is better preserved in the families, where both partners come from the

post-Soviet area and share similar cultural backgrounds. In addition, the context of the welfare institution determines access to dominant WFB strategies. Liberal welfare provisions in the UK, i. e. short maternity leave and even shorter period of maternity payments, private and expensive kindergartens, rendered the compromise strategy more exclusive and feasible only for middle-class women with solid financial resources, usually for women in tenured or senior academic positions. Welfare provisions in Germany with longer maternity leave, decent compensation and more affordable kindergartens renders the compromise strategy more inclusive and feasible for early career women and women in temporary positions.

We also found common arrangements with role-related partners in both patterns, some of them representing continuities of the post-Soviet 'working mother' gender contract. First, *extended family* (grandparents) retain symbolic significance as role-related partners for the mother's role despite their potential geographical remoteness and inability to provide regular assistance. Thus, almost all respondents complained about the unavailability of grandparents as a much valued source of support. On the other hand, women neither try to bring them to the host country on a long-term basis [Fernando, Cohen, 2016], nor are ready to leave the child with grandparents in the home country which is a common practice for Chinese migrants [Salaff, Greve, 2004; Man, 2007]. Second, *friends* are generally not regarded as role-related partners for childcare. Although mothers turn to friends in some urgent cases, such assistance is usually not a part of the friendship relationship ("*It is difficult to find friends who would agree to do that at all*") (Alena, PhD student, UK). This contrasts with the case of Irish skilled women who routinely receive considerable help from "close female friends" [Ryan, 2007: 305]. *Hiring nannies* also remains unconventional for the majority of female scholars in Germany and the UK, and appears to be seen to be better avoided if possible. A nanny's services might be used on an irregular basis to cover short-term needs but employing a full-time nanny is generally not a suitable option financially as well as morally. Other types of *domestic help* (e. g. private cleaning services) are more acceptable by migrant women enabling them to reduce time on routine housework activities. *Colleagues* within the workplace currently play a minor role in assisting migrant women to achieve WFB. There are rare cases, however, in which colleagues do support women in their professional roles once they become mothers, which proves that working place arrangements possess considerable potential in this respect. Family-friendly arrangements in universities, such as adjustment of the curriculum to the needs of working mothers, stimulate women's productivity and female faculty retention but remain unsystematic and rather a personal favour than an institutional rule.

Conclusion

Exploring post-migration experiences of highly-skilled women from the former Soviet Union in the UK and Germany, our paper provides a better understanding of WFB (work-family balance) and its effects on subjective well-being under the conditions of transnational mobility in contemporary academia. We explore how highly-skilled migrant women reconcile professional and private lives when they find themselves in a different institutional and cultural context, encountering difficulties

of adjustment but lacking habitual sources of support. We apply an interactional and contextual notion of WFB which connects successful balance and life satisfaction with role-related expectations and role-related partners, instead of viewing it as matter of individual effort and achievement. We analyze WFB strategies and practices as a system of social arrangements having direct effects on highly-skilled migrants' personal well-being and their integration into the host country. In this way, we trace the transformation of individual practices under the influence of institutional constraints in receiving countries by looking at the (re)production of post-Soviet cultural patterns in Western Europe. Thus, our paper also contributes to highly-skilled migration research and post-Soviet studies.

One of the major findings of our study is that the (post)-Soviet gender contract of the 'working mother' is still a model for the construction of WFB of Russian-speaking female scholars abroad. It has proven to be rather persistent and culture-specific but flexible and adaptive. Retaining the core, the expectation of obligatory fulfillment of the role of worker and mother, it has adjusted its normative content and the strategies of realization to different cultural contexts and institutional settings. We identify several major transformation trends: a shift from the rhetoric of honorable civil duty towards family and profession as individual life values; matters of personal happiness and private choice; a change from equally positioned employment and family domains to unquestionable predominance of professional demands over private concerns; and rising role-related expectations in both spheres. The last issue in particular makes fulfillment of the 'working mother' contract increasingly difficult and jeopardizes personal spare time.

How do women reconcile the roles of an academic and a mother under these pressing circumstances? First, similarly to transformations on post-Soviet space [Savinskaya, 2015], they tend to postpone motherhood until their 30s and late 30s, whereas bearing children in their 20s during studies or the start of a career is no longer common. Second, women tend to take shorter maternity leaves and send children to daycare facilities earlier than the post-Soviet contract presupposes, although this incurs emotional costs. This readiness to subordinate the standards of childcare contradicts the experience of middle-class Russian-speaking women who are more willing to lower their professional than their 'good mother' expectations [Chernova, 2012: 305]. Third, women develop a compromise strategy avoiding the prioritization of any sphere and seeking to realize themselves equally in scholarship and family.

However, we observe unique features shaped by the institutional contexts of Germany and the UK. The demanding environment of German academia induces women to concentrate on work and more often adhere to a career-oriented strategy, thus significantly constraining their reproductive plans as far as even renouncing them altogether. In the UK, women have more chances for a permanent position, therefore they prefer to fulfill their childbearing plans anyway and choose the compromise strategy. Lacking help from grandparents, available in home countries, women make arrangements with other role-related partners to compensate. Kindergartens and schools continue to play a crucial role in women's WFB in both countries but in Germany women routinely share a substantial part of child-rearing and household chores with their partners (the 'partner's involvement pattern'), while in the UK they

take more childcare and household responsibilities on themselves (the 'self-reliance pattern') partially reproducing the post-Soviet norm of a superwoman. The partner's social background (post-Soviet or European) was found to affect these strategies in combination with the institutional context: a gender disbalanced post-Soviet gender contract is more pronounced in Russian-speaking couples, whereas Russian-European couples demonstrate a more egalitarian role model. This is consistent with Vohlídalová's [Vohlídalová, 2014] statement on the importance of shared gender norms and cultural values in a couple as a whole. Friends, nannies and colleagues play a minor role as role-related partners in women's private and professional roles, therefore we conclude that women's household and family bear the major burden for achieving WFB. As a result, the private sphere has to be flexible and adaptive to women's working regimes and demands. Despite amortizing and accommodating the increasing pressures of contemporary academia, enabling women to fulfill themselves as scholars and mothers, these private arrangements are increasingly costly and difficult to sustain.

Moreover, WFB remains a tense construction, since it requires a lot of women's effort, energy and organization to make it function but still neither strategy is optimal in producing harmony in women's life. Women either focus on family and accept career stagnation, make concessions in both spheres, which sometimes results in dissatisfaction and guilt, or jeopardize their private lives when their dreams of becoming a mother are ruined by a long chase for high academic status. Thus, growing pressures of academia as a professional domain seem to impose a heavy burden and require much sacrifice from women's private life. Higher education institutions should take this into account in practices of hiring and promotion, e. g. time spent for care work, or actively motivate men taking parental leaves.

Although our study is limited by the sample size itself implying a potential loss of respondents with more diversified WFB patterns, we believe that we have provided a general picture of the post-socialist gender contract and its implementation under diverging conditions of two host countries. This piece of research also seeks to facilitate a perspective change, since it contests work centrality as a masculine work ethic, in which childcare responsibilities and family duties should be effectively managed so as not to undermine personal well-being and life satisfaction. Instead, we suggest a feminist perspective, which valorises women's point of view, emphasizing motherhood, children and family relations as an essential personal and social value, a matter of individual happiness and self-fulfillment. The study aims to overcome an individualistic approach to WFB, revealing the influence of internalized cultural norms and institutional environment on women's choices and preferences, and showing the necessity to devise various institutional mechanisms of support for satisfactory role fulfillment in both private and professional spheres. Our study seeks to stimulate discussion on the variation and transformation of cultural norms pertaining to family and professional roles, cultural and structural factors that drive formation of role-related partners' constellations, and migrants' socialization in the nationally-specific system of WFB strategies and arrangements, which could serve as directions of future research.

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