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AKNAZAR MEIRAMOV
2nd year

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FEMALE IMAGE IN RUSSIAN AND SOVIET CINEMA

MASTER'S THESIS

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MASTER‘S THESIS FLYLEAF

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Summary: This thesis examines the image of women in Russian cinema across three historical periods: the Soviet, post-Soviet, and contemporary eras. The object of the study is the shifting social, political, and cultural gender roles as reflected in cinematic discourses. The research applies content and visual analysis, evaluating nine films according to eight coding categories. The main findings indicate a transition from the ideologically driven, collective heroine to a marginalised and symbolically distanced female figure. The study highlights the role of cinema in constructing the status of women in society. This work is relevant within the context of gender studies and cultural analysis.

Confirmation

I confirm that I am the author of the submitted Master's Thesis: "The Transformation of the Female Image in Russian and Soviet Cinema", which has been prepared independently and has never been presented for any other course or used in another educational institution, neither in Lithuania nor abroad. I also provide a full bibliographical list, which indicates all the sources that were used to prepare this assignment and contains no unused sources.

Aknazar Meiramov

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Introduction

According to Sara Ashwin, the Soviet model of gender relations today sparks considerable debate. In contemporary Russia, the aforementioned author believes that there is a redefinition of gender roles[1]. This can be noticed by anyone who lived in or visited Russia during the Soviet period[2]. While many countries experience a high level of gender equality in individual-oriented areas such as education and the labour market, equality between women and men still remains low[3]. Similarly, in the Soviet Union, although gender equality was officially proclaimed and promoted in all areas, multiple asymmetries were still observed[4]. In the transitional period from the Soviet era to modern Russia, the status of women in the political, social, and economic spheres has changed along with the newly formed institutions, policies, and perceptions. In this changing system, women play a crucial role in the social and political spheres, despite discrimination and restrictions against them, and they also have a presence in the economic sphere, despite unequal working conditions. Like women in other countries experiencing a transition from autocracy to democracy or a liberal market system, Russian women also face gender issues in all areas of everyday life. Women find it difficult to reject the gender roles defined by state policy, society, or culture. In post-Soviet Russia, there are also some Soviet traces in women's political, economic, and social lives. Thus, in the transitional period, women have also found themselves trapped between the Soviet legacy and the recently established Russian system[5].

Ambivalence and duality regarding the role of women are manifested when it comes to women's participation in economic life, the expansion of political rights, and even the distribution of unpaid domestic responsibilities. Russian women and men often see themselves as equally capable of performing various jobs, being leaders, and sharing household and childcare responsibilities. At the same time, during times of economic upheaval and uncertainty, women, very traditionally, are still willing to yield to men if jobs become scarce. Support for the idea that both partners should contribute equally to the family budget may be weakening, indicating a recent shift towards a more

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[1] Sara Ashwin, Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia (London: Routledge, 2000), 55-71.

[2] Anne White, "Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia: Attitudes and Expectations among Women Students", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57 no 3, (2005): 429-455.

[3] McDonald, Peter. "Low Fertility and the State: The Efficacy of Policy." Population and Development Review 32, no. 3 (2006): 485–510.

[4] Ekaterina Skoglund, "Evolution of Gender Role Attitudes and Gender Equality in Russia". In: Karabchuk et al. (eds) *Gendering Post-Soviet Space*. (Singapore: Springer, 2021), 3-26.

[5] Ecem Seckin, *Women in Post-Soviet Russia* (2014); Skoglund, *Evolution of Gender Role Attitudes*, 3-26.

traditional division of financial responsibilities. In both the labour market and politics, female leadership is acceptable if it is associated with traditionally female-dominated spheres such as culture, education, and healthcare. There is widespread support for the idea that women should participate in politics on an equal footing with men, yet the actual representation of women in the political arena is low (for example, women occupy less than 16% of seats in parliament). At the same time, a significant portion of the population believes that the number of women politicians is already sufficient[6]. In such a patriarchal country as Russia, women's power is often met with suspicion and distrust, even by those who support a gender perspective on history[7].

Research Problem. The role of women in Russian society has constantly evolved from the declarative equality of the Soviet era to the political and cultural constraints of today. In the Soviet Union, the image of the "new socialist woman" was constructed as a working woman responsible for the well-being of her family and loyal to the ideology. After 1991, as Russia turned toward a market economy and political pluralism, this image began to shift, though not unequivocally: breakthroughs in emancipation emerged alongside a revival of traditional gender norms.

One of the most prominent cultural fields in which these changes are reflected is cinema. In Russia, cinema has always been not only an artistic medium but also an ideological platform that shapes societal identity and value orientations. Therefore, the depiction of women in film is not accidental, it reflects the prevailing social, political, and cultural discourses of the time.

Research Questions:

1. How has the portrayal of women in Soviet, post-Soviet, and contemporary Russian cinema evolved?

2. What gender stereotypes dominate in Russian cinema, and have they changed across different historical periods?

3. How does cinema reflect the social, economic, and political changes in women's status in Russia?

4. Does contemporary Russian cinema support the traditional patriarchal image of women, or does it promote gender equality?

Research Object: the representation of women in Russian cinema.

The selected chronological scope covers the post-Soviet transformation period and allows for an exploration of how both cinema and the portrayal of women within it have changed over the

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[6] Skoglund, *Evolution of Gender Role Attitudes*, 3-26; Lyudmila Rzhanitsyna, "Working Women in Russia at the End of the 1990s", *Problems of Economic Transition*, 43 no 7 (2000): 56-67.

[7] Igor' N Ionov, "Women and Power in Russia: History and Prospects", *Russian Studies in History*, 40 no 3 (2001): 15-34.

past three decades. However, in order to analyse the current image of women, it is essential to also revisit the Soviet era. The gender role models formed during the Soviet period remain deeply rooted cultural archetypes that continue to influence today's visual productions, either directly or as a counterpoint. Therefore, the first part of this thesis discusses Soviet gender policies, while the second examines the social and political changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These contextual frameworks are necessary to ensure that the cinematic analysis is not detached from reality; after all, films do not emerge in a vacuum; they are products of a particular society, ideology, and era.

Research Aim: to analyse how the image of women in Russian cinema has evolved since the collapse of the Soviet Union and how cinema reflects (or shapes) societal gender norms.

The empirical part of the thesis analyses selected films produced between 1970 and 2025. The films were chosen based on thematic relevance, genre representation, and popularity (as reflected in critics' and audiences' evaluations). The analysis is grounded in methods of content and visual deconstruction, focusing on character motivations, their interactions with their environment, and the ideological backdrop of their representation.

Thesis Structure:

- Chapter I explores the status of women in the Soviet Union, how ideology shaped gender norms.

- Chapter II discusses the social, political, and economic shifts after 1991 that influenced the status of women in society.

- Chapter III presents an analysis of specific cinematic works, evaluating how the image of women has transformed within this visual domain.

Research Hypothesis: Although the portrayal of women in cinema initially shifted in a progressive direction after the collapse of the Soviet Union, recent years have witnessed a conservative backlash, a return to traditional gender models and a subordinate role for women.

The research is based on an analysis of selected films (1945–2025), taking into account their plots, the roles of female characters, and the broader context of the film industry. The films were selected based on their popularity, representativeness, and thematic diversity, covering various genres and ideological perspectives.

1. Transformation of Women's Status in Russia After the Collapse of the Soviet Union

The collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 triggered significant political, economic, and social changes, which particularly affected the status of women in Russia. During the transitional period, women faced new challenges and opportunities that shaped their role in society. This section examines the role of women in Russian society from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the present day. It analyses the social, political, and economic changes that influenced women's status and discusses the development of feminist movements in Russia, highlighting their key stages and significant transformations.

1.1. The Status of Women in the Soviet Union: The Illusion of Equality

In the Soviet Union, gender equality was officially promoted, but in reality, women often faced discrimination and stereotypes. Although women had the right to work and participate in public life, they were also responsible for household chores and child-rearing, leading to a "double burden"[8]. Strong gender roles were always distinct in Russian society, and they were further reinforced by the conservative policies of Vladimir Putin, especially after his second term as president. During the Soviet era, gender norms were used to defend Russian nationalism, with ideals of femininity and masculinity[9]. One reason for the strong rejection of feminism in Russia is the resistance to the communist past, as true gender equality was never achieved in the Soviet Union. The October Revolution of 1917 in Russia brought the first socialist government in modern history to power. The Bolshevik program for building a socialist society included essential institutional changes, such as the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, replacing the capitalist market with a planned economy, and establishing new political institutions based on the principles of "Soviet democracy". The Bolsheviks declared their aim to create a fully egalitarian[10] society in which all citizens would have social, political, and economic equality. An important part of this moral commitment to egalitarianism was the Bolshevik program for the emancipation of women and gender equality in the new socialist society. At the time, theorists viewed the Bolshevik revolution as an opportunity to liberate women. Thus, the 1917 revolution eliminated all legal restrictions that had placed women in an inferior position compared to men, recognized their equality with men, and

[8] Virginija Jurėnienė, "Sovietinės moters „kūrimas" Sovietų Lietuvoje ir Sovietų Sąjungoje, 7 (2009): 36–45.

[9] Valerie Sperling, "Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia". Oxford Studies in Culture and Politics, 20 (2014), 117.

[10] "Egalitarianism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified September 28, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/egalitarianism

promised them equal employment opportunities. Article 22 of the first Soviet Constitution of 1918 proclaimed the equality of all citizens of the Union, regardless of gender, race, or nationality, while Article 64 guaranteed women the right to vote and be elected to the Council on equal terms with men[11]. However, in the early period after the revolution, the status of Russian women could not be regulated solely by legal and administrative measures. The Bolsheviks recognised that women's oppression was deeply rooted, especially in social relations such as marriage and family[12].

During the early period of socialism in Russia, the government officially announced for the first time in history its intention to carry out a comprehensive women's emancipation program. It is important to note that at a time when women's movements in Western countries were limited to demanding greater political rights, the Soviet government declared its commitment to granting women full and equal participation at all levels of governance. Additionally, the Soviet regime expressed its intentions to fundamentally transform the daily living conditions of women by establishing an extensive network of social services aimed at "socialising" domestic work. This also included the liberalisation of marriage and divorce laws and implementing "affirmative action" programs to integrate women into government, political organisations, trade unions, factory management, and to encourage them to acquire professional skills or learn a trade[13]. Thus, the women's equality program at the beginning of the Soviet era encompassed all areas of women's lives and can be considered the most radical among the programs developed in other countries at the time. It is relevant to explore how this program was implemented in practice and how it altered women's position in the then-existing gender hierarchy in Russia. The Bolsheviks' women's department ("Zhenotdel"), which was established to implement the gender equality program, was the only large party organisation that primarily addressed everyday living conditions. The creation of "Zhenotdel" reveals a less-explored aspect of the history of the Bolshevik regime, the socialist government's efforts to create "socialist" relationships in people's daily lives[14]. According to Soviet regime ideologists, the ideas promoted by "Zhenotdel" were fully realised, and the goal of elevating women to the status of men in Russia was achieved. However, Carroll Hayden's 1979 study on "Zhenotdel's" activities in Russia indicates that the Soviet government, during its existence, focused on reducing

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[11] Alice Schuster, "Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality." *The Russian Review* 30, no. 3 (1971): 260–67.

[12] Carol Eubanks Hayden, *Feminism and Bolshevism: The Zhenotdel and the Politics of Women's Emancipation in Russia, 1917–1930, 1-58* (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1979), available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I (302905326) http://ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/feminism-bolshevism-zhenotdel-politics-womens/docview/302905326/se-2.

[13] Carol Eubanks Hayden, "The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party." *Russian History* 3, no. 2 (1976), 150–73.

[14] Hayden, *Feminism and Bolshevism*: (1979), 1-58.

the problem of male resistance to the implementation of women's rights. Official sources emphasised "women's backwardness" as the main obstacle to achieving gender equality[15].

Despite some progress in the role of women in Russia during the 1920s, the conditions provided by Marxism-Leninism to achieve equality were insufficient[16]. This issue can be explained by analysing Soviet gender roles and their inequalities through the lens of social reproduction theory[17]. From the 1960s, when feminists first expanded Karl Marx's superficial reflections on this concept, social reproduction took centre stage in the theoretical arsenal. This concept allowed for a better understanding of how to address the relationship between gender, sexuality, race, and class; to better grasp the sources of women's oppression; to acknowledge capitalism's reliance on unpaid domestic labour; to emphasise the diversity of class struggle, and many other issues. Unfortunately, regarding the dominant narratives of capitalism, the insights of social reproduction theory only added layers to the existing model rather than fundamentally transforming it[18].

In summary, it can be argued that the gender equality declared in the Soviet Union remained more of an ideological slogan than a reality. Although women were officially granted the right to participate in the labour market and politics, they still bore a significant burden of household and family care. The women's emancipation programs initiated by the Bolsheviks, such as Zhenotdel's activities, aimed to change traditional gender roles, but the patriarchal system and social stereotypes remained strong. Ultimately, the Soviet model of gender equality failed to fundamentally transform the structures of society, and women's status often remained dependent on the ideological and economic needs of the state.

1.2. The Development of Feminist Movements in Russia

Feminist movements in Russia have a long and complex history, influenced by political, social, and economic changes in the country. Although feminism in Russia has never been as widespread as in Western countries, it has taken various forms at different times and achieved significant results. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, various feminist movements emerged in Russia, aiming to fight for women's rights. However, public attitudes toward feminism are often negative, making

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[15] Hayden, *Feminism and Bolshevism*, 1-58.

[16] Hilda Scott, "Why the revolution doesn't solve everything: What we can learn from the economics of 'real' socialism". *Women's Studies International Forum*, 5(5) (1982): 451–462.

[17] Tithi Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (Pluto Press, 2017), 192–196.

[18] Salar Mohandesi, Emma Teitelman, and Lise Vogel. "Without Reserves" In *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class*, Recentering Oppression (Pluto Press, 2017), 37–67.

it challenging for these movements to operate. Feminism, or more precisely, anti-feminism, is a popular topic in Russian media and politics. The feminist movement is often described as a "war against men" and even a threat to Russian national values[19].

XIX Century: The First Feminist Movements. The evolution of feminism in Russia began as early as the 1860s, with the so-called "woman question" driven by the liberalisation of Russian society at that time. This liberalisation was prompted by a crisis in traditional Russian society, which developed within a specific social and economic context[20]. The growing interest in women's education and social reforms during the 19th century gave rise to the first women's rights activists. One of the most prominent figures of this period was Anna Filosofova, who, along with other women, sought to improve educational opportunities for women and encouraged their participation in public life. During this time, the first women's organisations emerged, focusing primarily on charity and education[21].

Early XX Century: Revolutionary Changes. In examining the origins of feminism in Russia, it is also important to consider the role of women in the Russian Revolution and highlight the contributions of social activists like Alexandra Kollontai, Nadezhda Krupskaya, and Inessa Armand. Their efforts in advocating for women's rights in the aftermath of the revolution and during the 1920s were significant, along with the key ideas of that time, which recognised that women's liberation could not be achieved merely by their participation in the workforce[22]. A crucial element in the development of Russian feminism was the role of the earlier mentioned "Zhenotdel" (Women's Department) and its influence on the emancipation of Soviet women[23]. Unfortunately, these initiatives were quickly neglected, and many of the rights gained by women after the revolution were revoked during Stalin's era when collectivisation became the primary goal, and women's issues were removed from the political agenda[24]. During the early 20th century, feminist movements in Russia became more active and politically engaged. The 1905 revolution and subsequent events encouraged discussions

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[19] Olga Voronina, "Has Feminist Philosophy a Future in Russia?" *Signs* 34, no. 2 (2009): 252–57.

[20] Irina Iukina. *Russkii feminizm kak vyzov sovremennosti* (Russian Feminism as a Contemporary Challenge). (Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteia, 2007).

[21] Natalia Pushkareva, *Women in Russian history: From the tenth to the twentieth century*. (New York: M. E. Sharpe,1997), 336.

[22] Mary Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union." *Feminist Review*, no. 8 (1981), 79–106.

[23] Hayden, *Feminism and Bolshevism*, 1-58; Rochelle Ruthchild, "Sisterhood and Socialism: The Soviet Feminist Movement." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7, no. 2 (1983): 4–12.

[24] Buckley, 79–106.

on women's rights[25], and the 1917 February Revolution granted women the right to vote and participate in political life. The Bolshevik government, which came to power after the October Revolution, officially declared gender equality[26]. Women gained the right to work, receive education, and benefit from social guarantees, but many gender equality issues remained unresolved in practice.

Soviet Period: Official Feminism and Its Limitations. In the Soviet Union, feminism was officially integrated into state policy, but it was tightly controlled. Soviet ideology proclaimed that gender equality had already been achieved, and therefore, independent feminist movements were suppressed[27]. Women were active participants in the labour market and politics, but they still bore the primary responsibility for household chores and child-rearing. Despite this, the Soviet period provided women with education and a certain degree of economic independence, which later became the foundation for new feminist initiatives[28]. In the late 1970s, the feminist movement revived with the creation of a "samizdat" (self-published) journal by a group of young feminists from Leningrad. Although their views differed significantly from those of their Western counterparts, they had some influence on other Russian dissidents of the time and continued their work even after being expelled from the USSR[29].

Post-Soviet Era: The Emergence of New Movements. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, feminist movements in Russia experienced a revival but faced new challenges. The transition to capitalism and political changes increased social inequality, and conservative values regained popularity[30]. Although the post-Soviet period was a traumatic time for both men and women in Russia and other post-Soviet states, many of the social divisions disproportionately affected women (a fact often unrecognised within these societies)[31]. Nevertheless, new women's rights organisations emerged, such as "Ženskaja Set" and "Sisters", which fought against violence towards women, sought equal opportunities in the labour market, and highlighted issues of discrimination.

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[25] Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 148.

[26] Barbara Evans Clements, *Daughters of revolution: A history of women in the USSR*. (Arlington: Harlan Davidson, 1994), 121.

[27] Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 286.

[28] Susan Bridger, *Women in the Soviet Countryside: Women's Roles in Rural Development in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[29] Barbara Holland, *Soviet sisterhood. British feminists on women in the USSR* (Fourth Estate, London, 1985), 272.

[30] Nanette Funk & Magda Mueller, *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[31] Rosalind Marsh, „Women in contemporary Russia and the former Soviet Union". In: *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism*. (London: Routledge, 1998), 29.

XXI Century Challenges and Achievements. In contemporary Russia, feminist movements face increasing pressure from the government and conservative social attitudes. Despite this, social media and international organizations have helped spread feminist ideas, and initiatives such as "#ЯНеБоюсьСказать" ("I Am Not Afraid to Speak") and "FemFest" have united women in the fight for their rights. However, state policies often oppose feminist goals, and some feminist activists have faced persecution.

To summarise, the development of feminist movements in Russia reflects the country's political and social changes. From 19th-century charitable initiatives to revolutionary changes in the 20th century and the challenges of the 21st century, feminist ideas have undergone various transformations. Despite government resistance and conservative societal attitudes, feminist movements remain an important element in the pursuit of social justice in Russia.

1.3. The Collapse of the Soviet Union and Its Impact on Women

As previously mentioned in this work, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to significant political, social, and economic changes in Russia, which had notable consequences in the field under discussion. Although gender equality was officially promoted in the Soviet Union, in reality, women faced discrimination, a double burden of work, and limited career opportunities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation became even more complicated: market economy reforms, unemployment, shrinking social protections, and cultural shifts had both positive and negative effects on women. During the transition period, women faced new challenges such as unemployment, a reduction in social benefits, and the resurgence of traditional gender roles. This period, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism, and the troubling transition to a pluralist political system and a market economy similar to early capitalism, was described as the "second Russian revolution"[32] The new state, known as the Russian Federation, moved towards democracy and a market economy without a clear concept of how to complete such a transformation. Like many other former Soviet republics, it regained independence amid significant disorder and economic chaos. As Russia transitioned from a planned economy to a market economy, many state-owned enterprises were privatised or closed, leading to mass unemployment[33]. During the Soviet era, women made up a significant portion of the workforce, but their career opportunities were limited, as they often worked in less prestigious or lower-level positions. After 1991, many women lost their jobs due to industrial

[32] Marsh, 29.

[33] Alan G. Hosking, et al. "Russia." (2025) *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia.

decline and the privatisation of the public sector[34]. In some post-Soviet countries, such as Russia and Ukraine, female unemployment rates rose faster than those of men[35]. Additionally, women were often forced to work in the informal economy, where they faced unstable working conditions and fewer social protections. As a result, women, who made up a large portion of workers in certain sectors, particularly in education, healthcare, and light industry, became especially vulnerable. The rise in unemployment among women forced many to seek alternative sources of income, work in less qualified positions, or take jobs with lower pay. The collapse of the Soviet Union also led to the breakdown of social protection systems, which particularly affected women, who had traditionally been more dependent on state benefits[36]. Many maternity benefits, subsidies, and social services were reduced or eliminated. This worsened the situation for single mothers and large families, increasing women's poverty and economic dependence on men. In the Soviet Union, the state provided extensive social services, such as childcare, healthcare, and education. After the regime's collapse, many of these services were reduced or privatised, placing greater responsibility for family care on women. This made it harder for them to balance work and family responsibilities, and in some cases, forced women to leave the labour market altogether[37].

During the period of economic and social instability following the collapse of the Soviet Union, traditional gender stereotypes gained strength in society. Although gender equality was officially proclaimed in the Soviet Union, after its fall, many countries saw the resurgence of conservative social norms. Traditional roles for women and men were rehabilitated both in political discourse and in society[38]. For example, in Russia during the 1990s, the idea that women should return to their roles as housewives while men assumed primary financial responsibility gained popularity[39]. As a result, women were more often assigned the roles of household caretakers and child-rearers, which restricted their participation in public life and politics. Furthermore, the media and popular culture frequently idealise the traditional image of women as mothers and homemakers, reinforcing these stereotypes. This had long-term negative consequences on women's opportunities to engage in public life and the economy.

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[34] Elisabeth Brainerd, "Women in Transition: Changes in Gender Wage Differentials in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union". *ILR Review*, 54 no 1 (2000), 138-162.

[35] Farideh Heyat, *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (Routledge, 2002), 240.

[36] Sue Bridger, Rebecca Kay & Kathryn Pinnick, *No More Heroines? Russia, Women and the Market*. (London: Routledge, 1996), 240.

[37] Gur Ofer and Aaron Vinokur. "Work and Family Roles of Soviet Women: Historical Trends and Cross-Section Analysis." *Journal of Labor Economics* 3, no. 1 (1985), 54.

[38] Ashwin, *Gender, State and Society*, 55-71.

[39] Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 312.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, women's participation in politics sharply declined. During Soviet times, women held certain positions in the Communist Party and the state apparatus, but after 1991, their representation in governments and parliaments drastically decreased[40]. Although some countries, such as the Baltic states, implemented gender equality policies, in other regions, women's rights experienced a regression. Additionally, after the Soviet Union's dissolution, the incidence of violence against women increased. Economic insecurity, social stress, and the weakness of law enforcement institutions contributed to the rise of domestic violence and other forms of violence. Although non-governmental organisations were established to provide support to victims, the state response to this issue was often insufficient[41].

Despite these difficulties, the transition period also opened new opportunities for women. There were chances to start their own businesses, participate in non-governmental organisations, and engage in international projects. However, these opportunities were often accessible only to women who had the necessary resources and education, thus increasing social inequality among different groups of women[42].

In summary, the collapse of the Soviet Union had a multifaceted impact on women in Russia: on the one hand, they gained more personal and economic freedom, but on the other hand, they faced economic challenges, a reduction in social guarantees, and a reinforcement of traditional gender norms. Although some post-Soviet countries eventually managed to implement effective gender equality reforms, in Russia, the collapse of the Soviet Union left women in a vulnerable social group, likely experiencing greater economic and political insecurity than men.

[40] Peggy Watson, "The Rise of Masculinism in Eastern Europe." *New Left Review*, 198 (1993), 71–82.

[41] Brainerd, 138-162.; Ashwin, *Gender, State and Society*, 55-71.

[42] Ashwin, *Gender, State and Society* 55-71; Bridger, Kay, & Pinnick, *No More Heroines?*, 240.

2. The Current Social and Political Role of Women in Russia

In modern Russia, the social and political role of women is complex and multifaceted, reflecting both historical traditions and contemporary challenges. While there is a legal framework in place aimed at ensuring gender equality, these laws are often not effectively enforced in practice. This leads to violations of women's rights and the persistence of gender inequality across various fields. Despite some progress, women in Russia continue to face discrimination in the labour market, wage disparities, and limited opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. However, in recent years, more women have been getting involved in business, non-governmental organisations, and other initiatives, striving to change the current situation and strengthen women's rights and opportunities.

2.1. Challenges of Gender Equality in Modern Russia

Despite numerous challenges, many women in Russia have successfully established businesses and led companies. Their contribution to the economy is significant, but they often face additional difficulties due to gender stereotypes and discrimination. As mentioned earlier in this work, although there was some progress in women's rights during the Soviet era, there are still substantial challenges to gender equality today. These challenges result from the complex legacy of the Soviet period and current social and political trends.

One of the main challenges that Russian women face is the "**double burden**". During the Soviet period, women were encouraged to participate actively in the labour market, while also being responsible for household duties and child-rearing[43]. This trend has persisted in modern society, where women are often forced to balance their professional careers with traditional family obligations. Additionally, **occupational segregation** remains prevalent in Russia's labour market. Although efforts were made during the Soviet era to integrate women into various sectors of the economy, certain fields became "feminised", while others continued to be male-dominated[44]. This limits women's career opportunities and contributes to the wage gap between genders[45].

Political representation is another problematic area concerning gender equality. While women were formally allowed to participate in politics in the Soviet Union, their real involvement in

[43] Scott, 451–462; Martine Mespoulet, "Women in Soviet society". *Communism from the viewpoint of societies*, 30, (2006), 7.

[44] Mespoulet, 7.

[45] Eka Darbaidze and Tamila Niparishvili. "The Status of Women in the Soviet Union" *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, 13 no 1 (2023), 1–10.

the highest levels of power was limited[46]. Today, the participation of Russian women in politics remains insufficient, and men dominate the top government positions[47].

Another gender equality challenge is **violence against women**. Although this issue was rarely discussed publicly during the Soviet era, it is becoming increasingly visible today. However, legal regulations and public attitudes toward this problem are still inadequate[48].

The strengthening of traditional gender roles also poses challenges to gender equality. In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift toward more conservative values, which often emphasise the traditional role of women in the family and society[49]. It is said that traditional views on gender roles are deeply rooted in contemporary Russia. This affects women's opportunities and expectations both within the family and in the professional sphere[50].

Since the onset of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the government's rhetoric has become more conservative and nationalistic. Between 2022 and 2023, many laws were passed in Russia that directly violated human rights. Given Putin's focus on fighting "enemies" and Russia's isolation due to the "struggle for a just cause", women have once again become the target of regulation, with consistent and ongoing encroachments on their human rights, especially reproductive rights. Moreover, as women actively participate in anti-war protests, authorities have been harsher in arrests, trials, and sentencing of women. Despite this, women continue to fight for their rights and freedoms in courts and on the streets, hoping for change[51]. There is also a noticeable rise in women's activism. **Feminism** and women's rights are becoming increasingly visible in Russian civil society[52]. Today, the feminist movement in Russia is growing. Hundreds of women are participating in marches and

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[46] Schuster, 260–67.

[47] Aref Bijan, "Examining the role and presence of women in the Russian legislative process after the collapse of the Soviet Union" (Case study: Duma). Conference: *International Conference of Women's Studies Committee of IPSA*. (2021). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356187800_Examining_the_role_and_presence_of_women_in_the_Russian_legislative_process_after_the_collapse_of_the_Soviet_Union_Case_study_Duma

[48] Marianna Muravyeva, "Women's Rights and the Russian Constitution. 30 years of Failure". (2024) https://verfassungsblog.de/womens-rights-and-the-russian-constitution/

[49] Darbaidze, Niparishvili, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.26881/jpgs.2023.1.01; Muravyeva, https://verfassungsblog.de/womens-rights-and-the-russian-constitution/

[50] Iu Lezhnina, (2014). "The Transformation of Gender Roles in Today's Russia". *Sociological Research*, 53. (2014), 13-31.

[51] Serafima Karkkila, "Gender aspects of violations of the right to freedom of assembly in Russia: first observations and quantitative data (2021). https://blogs.helsinki.fi/developmentofrussianlaw/2021/04/20/gender-aspects-of-violations-of-the-right-to-freedom-of-assembly-in-russia-first-observations-and-quantitative-data/; Muravyeva, https://verfassungsblog.de/womens-rights-and-the-russian-constitution/

[52] Nina Rozhanovskaya and Victoria Pardini. "The Status of Women in Russian Society". *Conference Report*. (2020). https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/status-women-russian-society-conference-report

protests, and social media has made information more accessible to the public, helping to shift the perception of feminism from a potentially negative Western construct to a beneficial force for Russian society. However, it is important to note that Russian society is multicultural, and women's experiences and perceptions vary depending on ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds[53]. In modern Russia, feminist activism differs depending on the type of organisation and how various organizations use technology to achieve their goals. Newer forms of activism are more adaptable and make full use of social media, while some long-established organisations are fading due to the country's conservative turn and the loss of international funding. The trend toward less formal feminist organisations is, at least in part, a result of shrinking public spaces for political engagement, but many organisations have adopted creative fundraising and outreach methods, helping to promote cultural change and greater recognition of feminist ideas on a broader scale[54].

In conclusion, women in Russia continue to face challenges related to gender stereotypes and discrimination. While some progress was made during the Soviet Union, women today still encounter significant issues in achieving gender equality. One of the main challenges is the "double burden", where women must balance professional careers with family responsibilities. Occupational segregation persists, and women's participation in political life is limited. Violence against women remains a serious problem, and the strengthening of traditional gender roles further complicates efforts toward gender equality. Nonetheless, women are actively striving for change, participating in civil initiatives, and seeking greater representation in various spheres of life, but the path to equality requires both legal and social reforms.

2.2. Women in Politics: From Marginalisation to Growing Influence

Although women's participation in Russian politics remains limited, recent years have seen some progress. More women leaders are emerging, but they often face gender stereotypes and **discrimination**[55]. While there are women holding high positions at both the federal and regional levels, an analysis of publicly available information[56] shows that their share in power structures is smaller than that of men. This is influenced not only by societal stereotypes but also by the peculiarities of

[53] Oban International "International Women's Day 2022: Spotlight on women in Russia" https://obaninternational.com/blog/international-womens-day-2022-spotlight-on-women-in-russia/

[54] Rozhanovskaya and Pardini, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/status-women-russian-society-conference-report

[55] Darbaidze, Niparishvili, 1–10.

[56] Государственная Дума Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации. (2021). http://duma.gov.ru/duma/deputies/

the political system, which does not always encourage gender equality. Although women's political activism in Russia has grown over the past few decades, it remains constrained, and they face deep-rooted social and political obstacles. In the literature on women's participation in politics, several important aspects often stand out, which can be categorised into the interaction of political, cultural, and social structures.

During the Soviet era, women's participation in politics was defined by ideological goals, but their real influence was minimal. Although the Soviet Union was one of the first countries to grant women the right to vote and participate in politics, their actual role was limited by both patriarchal structures and political restrictions. This reflected the broader Soviet regime, which formally recognised women's rights, but truly ensuring equal opportunities was challenging[57].

After the fall of the Soviet Union, women's political participation in Russia somewhat increased, but their representation in the highest levels of government remains very limited. Women's presence in politics is often confined to secondary roles, while political power, as before, remains "male-dominated". This indicates that patriarchal values and societal attitudes remain strong, preventing women from achieving true political influence[58].

Despite these changes, the literature emphasises that the gender gap in Russian politics remains significant[59]. It is important to note that women's political influence often does not reflect in real political life, and their ability to impact important decisions remains minimal[60]. For example, as mentioned earlier in this paper, the number of women in the State Duma (and likely in other top government bodies) is significantly lower than that of men (as of February 2024, only 16.4% of parliament members were women)[61], indicating that there is still a lack of a political infrastructure conducive to women's participation. Thus, women's participation in the decision-making process at the highest level remains limited, their position is still weak, and they are often marginalised[62] in political decision-making processes. Two main strategies of women's political participation are identified: the

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[57] Scott, 451–462; Darbaidze, Niparishvili, 1–10; Sarah Ashwin, *The Post-Soviet Gender Order: Imperatives and Implications.* (2006). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312473554_The_Post-Soviet_Gender_Order_Imperatives_and_Implications

[58] Ashwin, *Gender, State and Society* 55-71.

[59] Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, "Gender studies in post-soviet society: Western frames and cultural differences". *Studies in East European Thought* 55 no 1 (2003), 51-61; Ashwin, *Gender, State and Society*, 55-71; Darbaidze, Niparishvili, 1–10.

[60] Temkina and Zdravomyslova, 51-61.

[61] Государственная Дума Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации. (2021). http://duma.gov.ru/duma/deputies/; Russian Federation. (2025) https://data.unwomen.org/country/russian-federation

[62] Karkkila, (2021). https://blogs.helsinki.fi/developmentofrussianlaw/2021/04/20/gender-aspects-of-violations-of-the-right-to-freedom-of-assembly-in-russia-first-observations-and-quantitative-data/

“professional” strategy, in which women's rights are considered secondary to the democratic agenda, and the “maternalistic” strategy, which emphasises women's natural role in caring for social and family policies. These discourses reveal that women's political power is often restricted by traditional perceptions of gender roles[63]. This can also be linked to deep social and cultural barriers that affect women's opportunities to pursue high political positions. At the same time, women's activism in civil society and non-governmental organisations indicates a shift, as more women seek political and social inclusion.

In summary, women's participation in Russian politics remains limited, despite some progress in recent years. While more women hold high positions, their numbers in power structures are still significantly lower than that of men. This is influenced not only by entrenched societal stereotypes but also by the characteristics of the political system, which does not always promote gender equality. Historically, in the Soviet Union, women's political involvement was more formal than real, although women had the right to participate in politics, their actual influence was minimal. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, women's representation in government increased, but they still often occupy secondary roles, and political power remains in the “hands of men”. This situation is shaped by deep social and cultural barriers that prevent women from competing equally for the highest political positions. Despite these challenges, women's activism in civil society and non-governmental organisations signals positive changes. However, the gender gap in politics remains evident, and women's ability to influence decision-making is limited. Their small numbers in the highest government bodies, including the State Duma, show that the political infrastructure remains unfavourable for women's participation.

2.4. Role of Women in the Economy and Labour Market

In modern Russia, the role of women in the economy and the labour market is complex and multifaceted, reflecting both historical and contemporary social and economic changes. Women make up a significant portion of the Russian population and are actively involved in the labour market, yet traditional gender roles remain deeply ingrained in society, often leading to gender inequality, occupational segregation, and wage gaps. As mentioned earlier in this work, many Russian women face discrimination in the labour market and bear a double burden, balancing professional duties with household chores and child-rearing. This situation often hinders their ability to pursue career advancement or engage in public life. While women's employment was encouraged during the Soviet

[63] Ludmila Popkova “Moterų politinės Galios raiška Rusijos visuomenėje: Diskursai Ir Strategijos”. *Sociologija. Mintis Ir Veiksmas* 15 (2005), 96-109.

era, the transitional period following the collapse of the Soviet Union saw a decline in women's economic roles. This was likely due not only to economic reforms but also to the resurgence of traditional gender stereotypes, which limit women's opportunities to advance in their careers and receive equal pay with men.

2.4.1. Women's Participation in the Labour Market: Sectors, Employment, and Wages

Women's participation in the Russian labour market remains high[64], but they often work in lower-paid sectors and occupy lower positions than men[65]. Gender wage gaps also remain a persistent issue[66]. A decrease in the number of women is also observed in the fields of science and academia. After an increase in women's participation in science during the Soviet era, their numbers have now started to decline again, particularly at higher levels of academic careers[67]. As mentioned in the first chapter of this work, during the Soviet Union, women were actively integrated into the labour market, but at the same time, they were expected to maintain traditional household and childcare roles. This "double burden" has persisted since the collapse of the Soviet Union, shaping the current situation of women in the labour market.

Gender inequality and wage gaps. Gender inequality and wage gaps are pressing issues in contemporary Russia, with deep historical, social, and economic roots. The transition from a planned economy to a market economy began in the early 1990s, at a time of political instability and a deep economic crisis, which peaked in 1998 when Russia's real GDP had fallen by 30% from its 1992 level, and the government failed to meet its obligations. The labour market adjusted to these shocks by reducing real wages, which halved by 1998, while the overall employment response was relatively modest, decreasing by only 18% by 1998. The rise in unemployment was also minimal, with the unemployment rate at 13.3% in 1998, and it steadily declined. The 2000s in Russia were marked by political stabilisation under the second (and current) president, Vladimir Putin, along with a strong economic recovery starting in 1999, when the economy grew by around 6.3%. Economic growth

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[64] Sofia M. Rebrey, "Gender inequality in Russia: Axial institutions and agency". *Russian Journal of Economics* 9 no 1 (2023), 71-92; Oban International, https://obaninternational.com/blog/international-womens-day-2022-spotlight-on-women-in-russia/

[65] Rebrey, 71-92.

[66] Andrea Atencio and Josefina Posadas, "Gender gap in pay in the Russian Federation : twenty years later, still a concern". *Policy Research working paper* no. WPS 7407 Washington, D. C.: World Bank Group http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/838301468185384790

[67] Rozhanovskaya and Pardini, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/status-women-russian-society-conference-report

continued at a rate of 5–10% annually until the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. This growth in real GDP was accompanied by real wage growth, which averaged about 15% annually. The employment response was modest, with an increase of 1–2% annually. The economic boom ended in 2009 when real GDP fell by 7.8%. The third decade was marked by slowing economic growth. Although real GDP grew by 4.5% in 2010, by 2014, the growth rate had fallen to nearly zero. The slowdown culminated in a 2.3% economic contraction in 2015 due to falling oil prices, the devaluation of the ruble, and sanctions (and countersanctions) imposed after the annexation of Crimea. Similar to 2008–2009, the Russian labour market adjusted to these shocks primarily through real wage reductions, which fell by 9% in 2015, while employment and unemployment levels remained fairly stable. This decade has been characterised by weak economic and real wage growth, as well as stable employment[68]. Women in today's Russian labour market face a contradictory situation. Despite their active participation, including in traditionally "male" fields such as healthcare and science, significant gender inequality remains[69]. Although Russia has one of the smallest gender gaps in employment globally, with less than a 4 percentage-point difference between men's and women's labour force participation in the 30–55 age group, the wage gap remains substantial, significantly exceeding the OECD average and the gap in most developed countries, including Israel, the USA, and any Western European country[70]. In 2021, the gender wage gap was about 29%. However, the gap varies depending on the region and type of work, for example, it is one of the lowest in Moscow (12%) and 23% in St. Petersburg[71]. This highlights the systemic discrimination women face in the labour market, as neither human capital theory[72] nor economic theory[73] can fully explain these disparities.

Occupational segregation. During the Soviet Union era, women were actively integrated into the workforce, but they often worked in sectors considered "feminine", such as education, healthcare, and light industry. This occupational segregation has persisted after the collapse of the Soviet Union, shaping the current position of women in the labour market[74]. Despite women's high

[68] Aleksey Oshchepkov, "Gender Pay Gap in Russia: Literature Review and New Decomposition Results". In: Karabchuk et al.. (eds) *Gendering Post-Soviet Space*. (Springer, Singapore, 2021), 211-233.

[69] Rebrey, 71-92.

[70] Atencio and Posadas, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/838301468185384790; Oshchepkov, 211-233.

[71] Oban International, https://obaninternational.com/blog/international-womens-day-2022-spotlight-on-women-in-russia/

[72] Josephine E. Olson, "Human Capital Models and the Gender Pay Gap". *Sex Roles* 68, (2013), 186–197.

[73] Oshchepkov, 211-233.

[74] Atencio and Posadas, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/838301468185384790; Rebrey, 71-92.

level of education, their participation in certain professional fields remains limited, leading to both horizontal and vertical forms of segregation.

Horizontal segregation refers to the concentration of men and women in different economic sectors or professions. Research shows that in Russia, women are more likely to work in lower-paid sectors such as education, healthcare, or social services, while men dominate better-paid sectors like technology, finance, or engineering[75]. Russia also maintains a list of professions (referred to as the "List of Prohibited Jobs")[76] that are legally banned for women in more hazardous or intensive industries, including some jobs in chemical production, mining, and shipbuilding[77]. This list, which dates back to Soviet times, was created to protect women from jobs considered harmful to their reproductive health. At its peak, the list contained 456 banned jobs, but recently, Putin's government reduced it to 100. It is believed that this list perpetuates the stereotypical role of women as mothers and undervalues other significant aspects of their lives and careers[78]. The "List of Prohibited Jobs" is a legislative document that demonstrates how government paternalism supports deeply entrenched sexism and gender stereotypes in Russia, legalising the notion that women are homemakers and men are breadwinners. This trend undoubtedly contributes to gender wage gaps and limits women's economic opportunities[79].

Vertical segregation describes the situation where women are less likely to hold higher positions within organisations, even in sectors where they make up the majority of workers. Although women in Russia often have higher education levels than men, their representation in leadership positions remains inadequate[80]. For example, 68.9% of Russian women participate in the labour market

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[75] Atencio and Posadas, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/838301468185384790; Anastasia Klimova and Russell Ross, (2012), "Gender-based occupational segregation in Russia: an empirical study", *International Journal of Social Economics* 39 no. 7 (2012), 474-489; Rozhanovskaya and Pardini, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/status-women-russian-society-conference-report; Rebrey, 71-92; Yuliya Kosyakova, Dmitry Kurakin and Hans-Peter Blossfeld. "Horizontal and Vertical Gender Segregation in Russia—Changes upon Labour Market Entry before and after the Collapse of the Soviet Regime." *European Sociological Review* 31, no. 5 (2015), 573–590; Marina Pisklakova-Parker and Olga Efanova "The Influence of Gender Stereotypes on the Growth of Gender Inequality and Domestic Violence in Russia in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic". *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22 no 11, (2021), 31-41.

[76] Правительство Российской Федерации, *Постановление от 25 февраля 2000 г. N 162 г. Москва „Об утверждении перечня тяжелых работ и работ с вредными или опасными условиями труда, при выполнении которых запрещается применение труда женщин*, Accessed June 19, (2024) https://perma.cc/4SVX-2Q7K

[77] Rozhanovskaya and Pardini, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/status-women-russian-society-conference-report; Klimova and Ross, 474-489.

[78] Oban International, https://obaninternational.com/blog/international-womens-day-2022-spotlight-on-women-in-russia/

[79] Atencio and Posadas, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/838301468185384790

[80] Kosyakova et al., 573–90.

and often in higher-skilled positions than men[81]. However, women frequently work in unstable jobs with non-standard employment contracts, often due to their responsibilities in caring for the family[82]. Employers' attitudes and societal expectations often push women to choose "traditional" professions that are less well-paid and have limited career prospects[83]. This can be linked to deep-rooted social norms and stereotypes that restrict women's career opportunities. Therefore, occupational segregation in Russia is linked to labour market discrimination and traditional gender norms. These structural barriers likely not only reduce women's economic independence but also hinder the country's overall economic growth, as the full potential of talent is not being utilised.

In conclusion, women's participation in the Russian labour market remains high, but their professional opportunities are still constrained by both horizontal and vertical segregation, wage gaps, and legal restrictions. Although the employment gap between men and women is one of the smallest globally, income inequality remains significant, indicating structural problems that cannot be explained solely by economic theories. Historical factors, such as Soviet-era policies, promoted women's integration into the workforce but also left behind the phenomenon of the double burden, balancing professional commitments with household and childcare responsibilities. Today's economic situation and legal restrictions further contribute to occupational segregation, with women primarily working in lower-paid sectors and their representation in leadership positions remaining insufficient. The high level of women's education is not reflected in their career prospects, and legal constraints, such as the list of prohibited professions, further narrow their economic opportunities. These barriers not only reduce women's economic independence but also slow down Russia's overall economic growth by not fully utilising all available talent. To address these issues, it is essential to promote policy measures that reduce segregation and increase women's participation in higher economic positions and better-paying sectors.

2.4.2. Women's Leadership and Gender Discrimination

The Soviet Union was a pioneer in integrating women into the labour market, but the Soviet state did not allow women to challenge two elements: inequality of distribution or gender-based division of labour and the associated inequality of status or the devaluation of work, with some work

[81] Oban International, https://obaninternational.com/blog/international-womens-day-2022-spotlight-on-women-in-russia/

[82] Rozhanovskaya and Pardini, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/status-women-russian-society-conference-report

[83] Aleksandr Panov, "Gender analysis of the Russian labor market. Economic and social changes: facts, trends, forecast / Экономические и социальные перемены: факты, тенденции, прогноз". 3 (2014).

considered “feminine”. The key insight from the Soviet experience is that to promote equality, employment must be combined with a gender-based ideology[84]. While women in Russia today have the opportunity to pursue careers, they often encounter the “glass ceiling” effect and other forms of discrimination[85]. The “glass ceiling” concept describes an invisible but real barrier that limits women’s opportunities to rise to higher positions in organisations and institutions, regardless of their qualifications and abilities. In Russia, the “glass ceiling” is deeply entrenched in both professional and political spheres, and as a result, women often face indirect discrimination. This gap is often explained not only by gender stereotypes but also by the structure of the labour market, where a certain “strong roof”, the so-called “glass ceiling”, structure, prevents women from rising to higher leadership positions. In Russia, inequality is widespread as a norm, and women may not even notice discrimination. Those who do and refuse to play their expected roles often pay a price, facing additional pressure at work as male colleagues view them as “bad team players”. However, international experience shows that solidarity among women in leadership and lower-ranking positions helps prevent discrimination and harassment[86].

Although there are examples of women holding high positions, such as Valentina Matviyenko, the first woman to become Chairwoman of the Federation Council[87], the overall proportion of women in top leadership roles is small. For instance, as previously mentioned in this paper, as of February 2024, only 16.4% of parliament members were women[88]. The business sector is similar; in 2017, 53% of Russians believed that men were better business leaders than women, highlighting the prevalence of negative stereotypes about women’s leadership abilities[89].

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[84] Rozhanovskaya and Pardini, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/status-women-russian-society-conference-report

[85] Chiara Sarnelli, *The Gender Pay Gap and the Glass Ceiling Phenomena: a Comparative Analysis of the Legislations of Iceland, Italy and the Russian Federation*. (2022). http://hdl.handle.net/10579/21497

[86] Rozhanovskaya and Pardini, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/status-women-russian-society-conference-report

[87] Federation Council of The Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. *Valentina Matvienko*. (2025). http://council.gov.ru/en/structure/persons/257/

[88] Государственная Дума Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации. (2021). http://duma.gov.ru/duma/deputies/; Russian Federation. (2025). https://data.unwomen.org/country/russian-federation; Union of Women of Russia. 2018. “Ensuring gender equality in the Russian Federation for 2017-2025” https://www.osce.org/odihr/396434

[89] Margarita Zavadskaya, “Here’s What Russians Really Think About Gender (In)equality”. (2018) https://ridl.io/here-s-what-russians-really-think-about-gender-in-equality/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

The "glass ceiling" effect manifests in various areas of the labour market in Russia. First, it is linked to deeply rooted gender stereotypes that view women as less competent, while male authority, especially of older men, and decision-making power are still highly valued. For example, social norms and traditions often dictate that men are more suitable for leadership roles, especially in strategic management positions such as directors, top executives, or politicians[90]. As a result, women find it difficult to occupy these positions, even if they have the appropriate education and professional experience. There are relatively few companies where women hold top executive positions (24.3%), and despite recent progress, women are still rare in leadership roles or on the boards of publicly listed companies (10.6%)[91].

The fact that women often dominate lower organisational levels but rarely hold top positions is a clear example of the "glass ceiling" effect. As mentioned earlier in this paper, vertical segregation, where women occupy lower positions despite having qualifications and work experience that meet top-level requirements, is a significant challenge. For example, studies show that women are more likely to work on short-term contracts or non-standard work schedules to balance work with family responsibilities. As a result, they not only lose opportunities for advancement but also face lower earning potential[92]. The "glass ceiling" effect is even more pronounced in the business sector. While women make up a large portion of the workforce in Russia's business sector, their representation in top leadership positions remains insufficient[93]. In Russia, anti-discrimination laws are not always sufficient to combat this phenomenon. Research shows that women lack the opportunities to pursue top leadership roles, as dominance in the business and industry sectors often belongs to men, while women occupy secondary, less important positions[94]. Despite efforts to close the gender gap and ensure equal opportunities, the inclusion of women in high-level business positions remains limited.

In conclusion, despite the Soviet Union's historical efforts to integrate women into the workforce, gender equality in leadership positions in Russia remains unmet. The "glass ceiling" effect, which limits women's ability to rise to top leadership roles, is deeply rooted in both professional and political spheres. Gender stereotypes, social norms, and labour market structures result in women primarily occupying lower-level positions, with limited opportunities for career advancement. Although there are isolated cases of women reaching high positions, their overall share in leadership roles is small, and societal beliefs that men are better leaders remain widespread. Legal measures

[90] Rebrey, 71-92.

[91] Oban International, https://obaninternational.com/blog/international-womens-day-2022-spotlight-on-women-in-russia/

[92] Oshchepkov, 211-233; Rebrey, 71-92.

[93] Oshchepkov, 211-233.

[94] Rebrey, 71-92.

aimed at combating discrimination are not always effective, and structural problems such as wage inequality or non-standard working conditions further limit women's opportunities for career advancement. Despite these obstacles, women's solidarity and international experience suggest that active support and the implementation of appropriate policies can contribute to increased gender equality. Therefore, further reforms and awareness-raising initiatives are necessary to achieve real change and ensure that women have equal opportunities to pursue leadership roles in both business and politics.

3. Analysis of The Evolution of Women's Portrayal in Russian Cinema

In Russian media, cinema, and popular culture, women are often portrayed through traditional gender roles, which perpetuate stereotypes about femininity. The image of women is frequently shaped by societal expectations, portraying them as caregivers, homemakers, or secondary figures to men. This not only reinforces traditional views but also limits the representation of women in leadership or independent roles. However, in recent years, there have been emerging initiatives aimed at offering more diverse and realistic portrayals of women in media. These efforts seek to challenge the established norms and provide more nuanced, multifaceted depictions of women that reflect the complexities of their lives and contributions to society.

Currently, films make up a significant portion of the media consumed by people. Cinema in Russia is viewed as a tool for individual and social transformation, shaping the attitudes of Russian audiences. The importance of cinema in Russia is evident from the country's focus on developing its film industry: key themes for state funding are outlined, and the opening of new cinemas in smaller towns is encouraged through government programs. In Russia, cinema is rightfully considered a means of transmitting state ideology to the masses, as well as a tool for both individual and social transformation[95]. Media and popular culture in Russia often perpetuate traditional female roles and stereotypes, but initiatives are also emerging that aim to portray women more diversely and realistically. Research shows that women's magazines are dominated by topics related to beauty, fashion, and household affairs, with women often depicted as homemakers or fashion followers[96]. This portrayal shapes societal expectations and influences women's self-perception and their social roles.

3.1. Research methodology

Research Objectives:

1. Analyse the portrayal of women in Soviet cinema (1945-1990) – to determine the main gender roles in Soviet films and how they were constructed according to official ideology.

2. Examine the depiction of women in post-Soviet cinema (1991–2005) – to explore how the transition from the Soviet regime to a market economy was reflected in film narratives and its impact on the representation of women.

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[95] Tina Kubrak, "Impact of Films: Changes in Young People's Attitudes after Watching a Movie" *Behavioral Sciences* 10, no. 5 (2020), 86.

[96] Daiva Siudikienė and Lijana Stundžė, "Moterų vaidmenų reprezentavimo ypatumai ir jų kaita moterims skirtuose žurnaluose: žurnalo „Moteris" atvejo analizė". *Informacijos mokslai*, 92 (2021), 65–89.

3. Evaluate the portrayal of women in contemporary Russian cinema (2006–2025) – to identify the prevailing trends in current films and assess whether they contribute to promoting gender equality or perpetuating stereotypes.

4. Identify key gender stereotypes in Russian cinema across different periods, to determine how the social, political, and economic roles of women have changed in film narratives.

5. Analyse the influence of the film industry (ideology, censorship, economy) on the formation of women's images – to assess the role of government, market conditions, and cultural attitudes in shaping the portrayal of women in cinema.

This research will provide a deeper understanding of whether Russian cinema has contributed to the consolidation of women's emancipation or, conversely, reinforced the traditional patriarchal image of women. Additionally, it will explore whether new, feminist, or alternative forms of female representation are emerging in contemporary Russian cinema.

3.1.1. Selection and Justification of Films for Analysis

In order to systematically analyse the transformation of the female image in Russian cinema from the Soviet era to the present day, 9 films were selected and divided into three historical periods: the Soviet period (1945–1990), the early post-Soviet period (1991–2005), and the contemporary period (2006–2025). This structure allows for an observation of how the representation of women has changed in response to political, economic, and cultural shifts.

Research sample: 9 films grouped by historical period.

The films were selected based on the following criteria:

- **Thematic relevance:** films in which the female role is central or particularly significant were chosen.
- **Representativeness of the era:** the films reflect the socio-political climate and cinematic trends of their respective periods.
- **Directorial value:** works recognised by critics or widely discussed in public discourse were included.
- **Diversity:** the selection includes artistic dramas, documentaries, and visually experimental films.

Below is a list of the selected films, with a brief description of the representation of women and the significance of each film for the research.

Soviet cinema (1945–1990) (see Table 1):

1. “Moscow does not believe in tears” (rus. “Москва слезам не верит”), 1979, dir. Menshov – a classic work of Soviet cinema portraying women's lives and independence in industrialised Moscow (see fig. 1).

1 fig. Image from the movie “Moscow does not believe in tears”, 1979[97]

2. “Office Romance” (rus. “Служебный Роман”), 1977, dir. E. Riazanov – Effectively reveals the image of a woman within bureaucratic life, along with issues related to relationships and social status (see fig. 2).

2 fig. Image from the movie “Office Romance”, 1977[98]

[97] IMDb.“*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*” (2025). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079579/

[98] IMDb.“ *Office Romance*” (2025). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0076727/

3. “The Dawns Here Are Quiet” (rus. “А зори здесь тихие”), 1972, dir. V. Rostockyi – the film is based on Boris Vasilyev’s novella of the same name and tells a story set during the Second World War, in which women play the central roles. It is one of the most renowned Soviet films depicting women's involvement in the war. (see fig. 3).

3 fig. Image from the movie “The Dawns Here Are Quiet”, 1972[99]

Table 1. Justification for the Selection of Soviet-Era Films

Film	**The image of a woman**	**Analytical highlights**	**Significance for the research**
“Moscow does not believe in tears” (1998)	Ambitious, independent, emotionally complex	From factory worker to director, balancing career and motherhood	Reflects late-Soviet attempts to present the "ideal woman" balancing public success and femininity
“Office Romance” (1977)	Cold and strict at work, but vulnerable inside	Transformation of the “iron lady” stereotype through romantic plot	Illustrates gendered expectations in bureaucratic environments and femininity as social acceptance
“The Dawns Here Are Quiet” (1972)	Brave, self-sacrificing, patriotic	Female soldiers in WWII; focus on emotional strength and duty	Challenges traditional gender roles by placing women in active combat and heroic contexts

[99] IMDb.“*The Dawns Here Are Quiet*” (2025). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4629032/

Early Post-Soviet Cinema (1991–2005) (see Table 2):

1. “Lilya 4-ever”, (rus. “Лиля навсегда”), 2002, dir. L. Moodysson – an exceptionally important film about the vulnerability of women (girls) and the realities of human trafficking during the transitional period. (see fig. 4).

4 fig. Image from the movie “Lilya 4-ever”, 2002[100]

2. “The Stroll”, (rus. “Прогулка”), 2003, dir. A. Uchitel – female freedom is portrayed as a temporary and superficial phenomenon (see fig. 5).

5 fig. Image from the movie “The Stroll”, 2003[101]

[100] IMDb. “Lilya 4-ever” (2025). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0300140/?ref_=mv_close

[101] IMDb.“The Stroll” (2025). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0372478/?ref_=mv_close

3. “Country of the Deaf” (rus. “Страна глухих”), 1998, dir. V. Todorovsky – A woman’s survival story portrayed through the lens of criminal and social marginalisation. (see fig. 6).

6 fig. Image from the movie “Country of the Deaf”, 1998[102]

Table 2. Justification for the Selection of Early Post-Soviet Period Films

Film	**The image of a woman**	**Analytical highlights**	**Significance for the research**
“Lilya 4-ever” (2002)	Vulnerable, abandoned, exploited	Social disintegration, human trafficking	A critique of post-Soviet reality and the vulnerability of women
“The Stroll” (2003)	Spontaneous, independent, provocative	The limits of a young woman's freedom	A woman's freedom in urban space as a temporary illusion
“Country of the Deaf” (1998)	Marginalized, resourceful, protective	Criminal underworld, female friendship, survival strategies	Highlights women's resilience in marginal spaces and critiques societal exclusion

[102] IMDb.“Country of the Deaf ” (2025). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0143907/

Contemporary Cinema (2006–2025) (see Table 3):

1. “Beanpole” (rus. “Дылда“), 2019, directed by K. Balagov – Women's trauma, empathy, and survival strategies in the post-war context (see fig. 7).

7 fig. Image from the movie “Beanpole”, 2019[103]

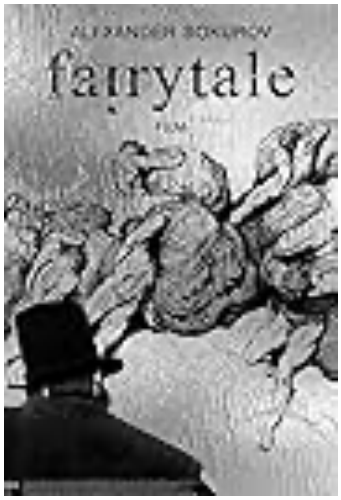
2. “Loveless” (rus. “Нелюбовь“), 2017, directed by A. Zvyagintsev – A woman's detachment and emotional coldness as a critique of modern society (see fig. 8).

8 fig. Image from the movie “Loveless”, 2017[104]

[103] IMDb.“Beanpole ” (2025). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10199640/?ref_=mv_close

[104] IMDb.“Loveless” (2025). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6304162/?ref_=mv_close

3. “Fairytale” (rus. “Сказка”), 2022, directed by A. Sokurov – An experimental yet politically significant film in which the woman’s voice exists in a metaphysical space. An implicit reference to the absence of women in the male-constructed political world. Sokurov deliberately chooses not to depict women directly, but rather to highlight their conscious erasure from the discourse of power. (see fig. 9).



9 fig. Image from the movie “Fairytale”, 2022[105]

Table 3. Justification for the Selection of Films in the Contemporary Cinema Period (2006–2025)

Film	The image of a woman	Analytical highlights	Significance for the research
“Beanpole” (2019)	Psychologically traumatized, but strong	Women's relationship with war trauma, empathy	A deeply humanistic approach to women's survival
“Loveless” (2017)	Emotionally detached, cold, egocentric	Deconstruction of the family, contemporary values	The depiction of the woman's lack of responsibility – social critique
“Fairytale” (2022)	Fragmented, ghostlike, symbolic presence	Disembodied voice, lack of agency, abstract female archetypes	Illustrates the metaphysical marginalization of women in authoritarian discourse

The selected films will reveal the transformations of the female image across different periods, considering their representation, narrative function, and social context. This analysis will help identify whether cinema contributes to the maintenance of gender stereotypes or acts as a critical discourse promoting their reconsideration.

[105] IMDb.“Fairytale” (2025). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21227108/plotsummary/

3.1.2. Film Analysis Criteria (Data Coding System)

To ensure clarity and structure in the study, each film is analysed based on pre-established categorical codes (Table 4).

Table 4. Presentation of the Data Coding System

Category	Code explanation	Examples
1. The social role of women	What kind of woman is depicted in the film?	1) Traditional housewife; 2) Career woman; 3) Political figure; 4) Revolutionary; 5) Victim role
2. The character and dynamics of a woman	Is a woman an active actor or a passive victim?	1) Active protagonist; 2) Passive, responsive to circumstances; 3) Intermediate position
3. Gender relations	How is the relationship between a woman and a man revealed in the film?	1) Equal relationship; 2) Man dominates, woman submits; 3) Woman dominates, man is passive; 4) Conflictual relationship
4. Representation of women in the family	How does the family model affect the position of women?	1) Traditional family; 2) Independent woman; 3) Unmarried woman without children; 4) Single mother
5. Professional activities	What is the role of women at work?	1) Household work; 2) Low-paid profession (teacher, doctor); 3) Management position; 4) Not participating in the labour market
6. The sexualization of Women	Is the woman presented in a sexualized manner?	1) No; 2) Yes, but subtly; 3) Overtly sexualized character
7. Conflicts and crises	In what context does the female character operate?	1) Political crisis; 2) Family drama; 3) Violence against women; 4) History of the struggle for rights
8. Visual and verbal representation	How is a woman presented in cinema?	1) Strong and independent image; 2) Vulnerable and passive image; 3) Emphasis on beauty and attractiveness

Research Process:

1. **Film Selection and Viewing**: Films are selected and viewed to determine the key objects of analysis.

2. **Code Assignment**: Each film is assigned a code based on the coding table.

3. **Identification of Trends**: Identify which female roles dominate in different time periods.

4. **Discourse Analysis**: Examine the narratives that shape or reinforce women's roles in society.

5. **Interpretation of Results**: What do these changes signify in a broader socio-cultural context?

3.2. Analysis Results of the Selected Films and Their Interpretation

To systematically examine how Russian cinema reflects the transformation of the female image across distinct historical periods, this subsection presents empirical findings derived from an analysis of selected films, evaluated according to eight predefined categories. Each period, Soviet, post-Soviet, and contemporary, is represented by three carefully selected films, whose content was systematically coded based on the woman's social role, character development, family structure, professional engagement, degree of sexualisation, nature of conflicts, and visual representation. This analysis enables the identification of dominant features in the portrayal of women within each period and facilitates an understanding of how socio-political shifts have shaped cinematic narratives. The quantitative changes are illustrated through charts and tables, while their interpretation reveals deeper layers of meaning, ranging from ideological imperatives to the symbolic marginalisation of women in contemporary contexts.

Table 5. Codes of Films from the Soviet Cinema Period (1945–1991)

Nr.	Category	"Moscow does not believe in tears" (1998)	"Office Romance" (1977)	"The Dawns Here Are Quiet" (1972)
1.	Social Role of Women	2	2	5
2.	The character and dynamics of a woman	1	3	1
3.	Gender relations	1	2	1
4.	Representation of women in the family	4	2	1
5.	Professional activities	3	2	2
6.	Sexualisation of women	2	2	1
7.	Conflicts and crises	2	2	1
8.	Visual and verbal representation	1	2	1

Table 5 presents the coded data for three selected films: "Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears", "Office Romance", and "The Dawns Here Are Quiet", according to eight content analysis categories. This coding reveals typical patterns of female representation in Soviet cinema:

1. **Social Role of Women.** Two films ("Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears" and "Office Romance") depict women as career-oriented (code 2), while one portrays a female character as a sacrificial figure (code 5), namely a soldier willing to die for the Motherland. This reflects the Soviet aim of portraying women not only as mothers but also as active participants in the workforce and defenders of the state.

2. **The character and dynamics of a woman.** Two protagonists are presented as active agents (code 1), with clear goals and the determination to achieve them. The protagonist in "Office Romance" is portrayed as a transitional figure (code 3) – externally strict, internally vulnerable, and

gradually transformed through emotional development. This aligns with a Soviet narrative convention in which women "soften" through romantic involvement.

3. **Gender Relations.** In two of the films, women are shown in egalitarian relationships with men (code 1), indicating an ideological assertion of gender equality. In "Office Romance", male dominance is initially evident (code 2), though this dynamic is ultimately challenged within the narrative.

4. **Representation of women in the family.** The female characters are depicted in varying family roles: as single mothers ("Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears"), independent women ("Office Romance"), or soldiers who have lost their families ("The Dawns Here Are Quiet"). This suggests that the family model was not uniform in Soviet cinema, although in all cases the woman remains responsible for emotional stability.

5. **Professional Activities.** All three protagonists hold professional roles either in leadership positions or in modest yet socially significant jobs. Soviet cinema emphasised women's participation in the labour force as a demonstration of loyalty to the system.

6. **Sexualization of Women.** In all the analysed Soviet era films, sexualization is either absent (code 1) or presented very subtly (code 2). This reflects the Soviet cultural prohibition against openly addressing sexuality; women's bodies in cinema were symbolic, not eroticized.

7. **Conflicts and Crises.** The nature of conflict is most often linked to family issues or duty to the Motherland, presented not as individual but as collective crises. This illustrates the ideological intent to transform personal pain into civic responsibility.

8. **Visual and verbal representation.** Most female characters are portrayed as strong and independent (code 1), maintaining dignity even in difficult circumstances. This aligns closely with the official ideology, which promoted the image of a woman as strong, productive, and morally upright.

In summary, the woman in Soviet cinema is portrayed as a worker, a mother, and a defender, someone who acts in the service of the state. Although gender equality was officially proclaimed, the role of women was often doubly burdened, both professionally and domestically. Sexuality and individual emotional needs were either silenced or embedded in moralised narrative frameworks. These findings suggest that Soviet cinema did not treat women as individuals, but rather as cogs in the system, expected to function flawlessly and ideologically correctly. The representation of women was primarily linked to duty toward the homeland, the collective, and the family rather than to personal self-realisation or psychological depth.

Table 6 below presents an analysis of three representative films from the early post-Soviet cinema period (1991–2005): "Lilya 4-ever" (2002), "The Stroll" (2003), and "Country of the Deaf" (1998). The coding assigned to each film, based on eight analytical categories, reveals a marked shift in values, cultural narratives, and ideological orientations following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Table 6. Film codes of the early post-Soviet cinema period (1991–2005)

Nr.	Category	„Lilya 4-ever“ (2002)	„The Stroll“ (2003)	„Country of the Deaf“ (1998)
1.	Social Role of Women	5	3	4
2.	The character and dynamics of a woman	2	1	2
3.	Gender relations	2	4	2
4.	Representation of women in the family	3	3	2
5.	Professional activities	2	2	2
6.	Sexualisation of women	3	2	3
7.	Conflicts and crises	3	2	2
8.	Visual and verbal representation	2	2	2

The coding data presented in Table 6 for the films of the early post-Soviet period clearly illustrate the emerging trajectory of the female role in cinema during this time, predominantly marginalised, vulnerable, yet independent women operating within complex social contexts:

1. **Social role of women**. A clear tendency toward portraying women as victims (Code 5) is observed in “Lilya 4-ever”, or as marginalised social figures (Codes 3 or 4), the protagonist of “The Stroll” exists outside official social boundaries, while the women in “Country of the Deaf” inhabit a criminal underworld. This reflects how women's roles in cinema began to mirror social instability, poverty, and vulnerability.

2. **The character and dynamics of a woman.** The only instance of an active female protagonist is in “The Stroll” (Code 1), though even there her “freedom” is merely a temporary illusion. In most cases, women are reactive (Code 2), shaped by circumstances rather than agents of their own fate.

3. **Gender relations.** A dominant male presence (Code 2) or conflictual relationships (Code 4) prevail, especially in “The Stroll”, where male attention is intrusive and sexual propositions are normalised. This signals a gender imbalance in which women are positioned as objects rather than partners.

4. **Representation of women in the family**. Two of the three protagonists are unmarried or estranged from their families (Code 3), and the role of mother has lost its former Soviet prestige. The traditional family is nearly absent, and close relations are depicted as indifferent or even harmful.

5. **Professional activities.** All protagonists engage in work lacking a clear professional identity, often in the informal economy. The absence of formal career representations underscores a diminished perception of women’s social value and reflects a reality in which women frequently face discrimination in the labour market.

6. **Sexualization of women.** A particularly strong trend is open sexualization (Code 3) in “Lilya 4-ever” and “Country of the Deaf”. Female bodies are commodified or serve as a means of survival. This marks a sharp departure from the Soviet culture of visual restraint toward neoliberal aesthetics of sexualization.

7. **Conflicts and crises.** The prevailing themes are social catastrophe, violence, and human rights violations (Code 3). “Lilya 4-ever” vividly portrays an extreme state of female vulnerability. Even “The Stroll”, seemingly playful, generates an atmosphere of threat that the protagonist must wilfully ignore.

8. **Visual and verbal representation.** Across all three films, the dominant image is that of the vulnerable woman (Code 2), portrayed not as a figure of moral strength but as a victim lacking control and power.

In summary, during the early post-Soviet cinema period, the image of the woman undergoes a radical transformation (compared to the Soviet era): from an ideological symbol of morality, she becomes a displaced and unprotected figure, situated in a chaotic, male-dominated environment. Family, work, and a sense of security are all lost, and the woman is portrayed within a context of moral decline. Female identity in the cinema of this period is associated with violence, coercion, the threat of sexual exploitation, and social instability. Cinema no longer serves an educative or didactic function, it becomes a mirror reflecting reality without idealism. The female body is rendered a medium of exchange, and her value becomes temporary and undefined.

Table 7 below examines three films from the contemporary cinematic period (2006–2025): “Beanpole” (2019), “Loveless” (2017), and “Fairytale” (2022). This analysis reveals a fundamental shift in the cinematic portrayal of women, from the social realism and direct depictions of poverty characteristic of the post-Soviet period toward emotional detachment, metaphysical themes, and symbolic marginalisation.

Table 7. Film codes of the contemporary cinema period (2006–2025)

Nr.	Category	“Beanpole” (2019)	“Loveless” (2017)	“Fairytale” (2022)
1.	Social Role of Women	2	3	2
2.	The character and dynamics of a woman	1	2	3
3.	Gender relations	1	2	1
4.	Representation of women in the family	2	1	2
5.	Professional activities	2	1	3
6.	Sexualisation of women	1	1	2
7.	Conflicts and crises	1	2	1
8.	Visual and verbal representation	1	3	3

Table 7 presents the coding of films from the contemporary period (2006–2025), assigning values to each film across eight analytical categories. It becomes evident that contemporary cinema is dominated by psychologically complex, independent, yet often emotionally vulnerable female characters. Visually, emphasis is placed either on their inner world or on metaphysical and ideological meanings.

1. **Social role of women.** The female characters depicted are traumatised, isolated, or symbolically filled with emptiness. Two figures ("Beanpole", "Fairytale") occupy an intermediate social role (code 2), while one ("Loveless") represents emotional egoism (code 3). Their social functions are clearly undefined, they exist not within structures but within a void.

2. **The character and dynamics of a woman.** A clear increase in psychological complexity is observed. In "Beanpole", the protagonist is active but traumatised (code 1); in "Loveless", she is passive and indifferent (code 2); and in "Fairytale", she functions more as a symbolic artefact, beyond action (code 3). This shift reflects the dominance of internal struggle over external narrative.

3. **Gender relations.** Only in "Loveless" is a conflicted and indifferent relationship portrayed (code 2). In the other films, relationships are either absent (code 1) or fragmented. This symbolises the emotional emptiness of contemporary society, where intimacy is perceived as a risk.

4. **Representation of women in the family.** Family structures are either emotionally lifeless (code 1) or completely collapsed, lacking connections with the child or partner (code 2). In "Fairytale", no real family structure exists; the female character is merely a voice. This illustrates the modern detachment of family from meaning.

5. **Professional activities.** Profession plays almost no role. The characters lack a clear professional identity ("Loveless" features a domestic entrepreneur, but this has no narrative significance); in "Fairytale", the level is entirely symbolic. In contemporary cinema, women act not through duties, but within emotional or metaphysical contexts.

6. **Sexualisation of women.** In all three films, sexualisation is either entirely absent (code 1) or subtly encoded (code 2). Sexuality no longer serves as a tool for action or dominance, it is distanced and almost inaccessible. Contemporary cinema has seemingly stripped the female body, leaving only the internal state.

7. **Conflicts and crises.** Existential, psychological, or metaphysical crises dominate (codes 1, 2), military trauma, emotional neglect, and the disappearance of historical identity. This indicates a profound shift: women in cinema are no longer merely victims of social conflict, but carriers of emotional condition.

8. **Visual and verbal representation**. Visually, either an image of inner strength (code 1) or a distant, aestheticised object dominates (code 3), especially in "Fairytale", where the woman becomes a symbolic shadow, without a concrete body. This confirms that the woman in contemporary cinema has transformed from a subject of physical action into a projection of abstract ideas.

In summary, contemporary cinema presents the woman as a psychological, symbolic, and at times even metaphysical construct. She is no longer portrayed as an active participant in public life or a figure rooted in clear social structures; rather, she appears as a detached, silenced, yet profoundly emotional individual. The cinematic narrative shifts from depicting "what a woman does" to "what a

woman endures", a period marked by silence, pain, and identity crisis. Visually, women are represented as vulnerable and fragmented, often lacking a defined professional or familial identity. The contemporary female figure in cinema becomes an emotional landscape, external action is replaced by inner trauma, alienation, and absence. These are stories in which the woman no longer exists for others but instead experiences herself as a state of being.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the transformation of the female image in Russian cinema across different historical periods (Soviet, post-Soviet, and contemporary), a systematic comparison of the content codes of nine selected films was conducted using eight analytical categories. These categories include the woman's social role, character type, model of gender relations, depiction of family structure, professional activity, level of sexualization, nature of conflict, and visual and linguistic representation.

The data obtained have been visualised in diagrams that allow for a comparative analysis of dominant trends across different time periods. These visualisations reveal not only thematic, but also ideological and cultural shifts related to the status of women in Russian society.

Social role of women: A comparative overview of the results by period is presented in Figure 10.

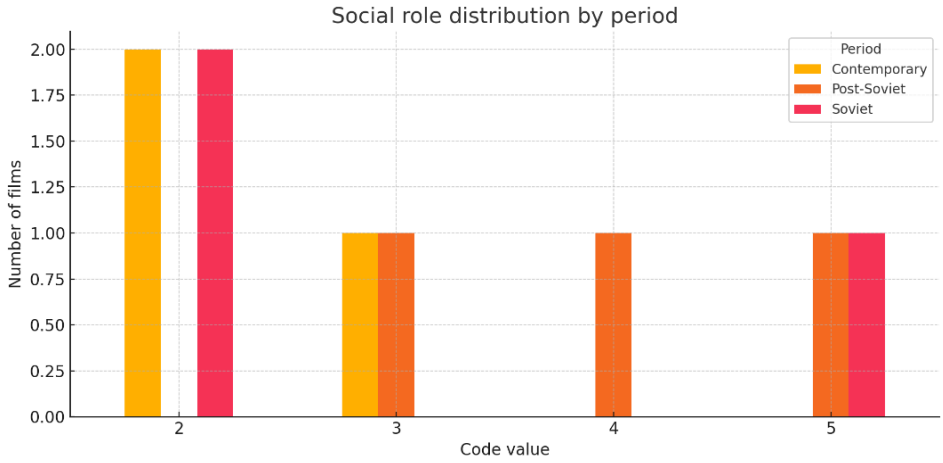


Figure 10. Social role of women

The comparison of research data presented in Figure 10 reveals that Soviet cinema predominantly features women as career-oriented figures (code 2) or as heroines/victims (code 5), particularly in wartime contexts. The post-Soviet period highlights women as vulnerable and socially marginalised. In contemporary cinema, the female role once again becomes multilayered, but remains constrained. Codes 2 and 3 appear repeatedly, indicating a status that is changing but not yet stable.

The woman's character and dynamics: A comparative overview of the results by period is presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11. The character and dynamics of a woman

The comparison of research data presented in Figure 11 reveals that Soviet cinema most frequently portrays women as active protagonists (code 1) or as characters with internal conflict (code 3).

In the post-Soviet period, passivity and cautious action (code 2) became more prominent. In contemporary cinema, two contrasting trends emerge: some women are portrayed as active, while others occupy a position of complete emotional detachment (code 3).

Gender relations: A comparative overview of the results by period is presented in Figure 12.

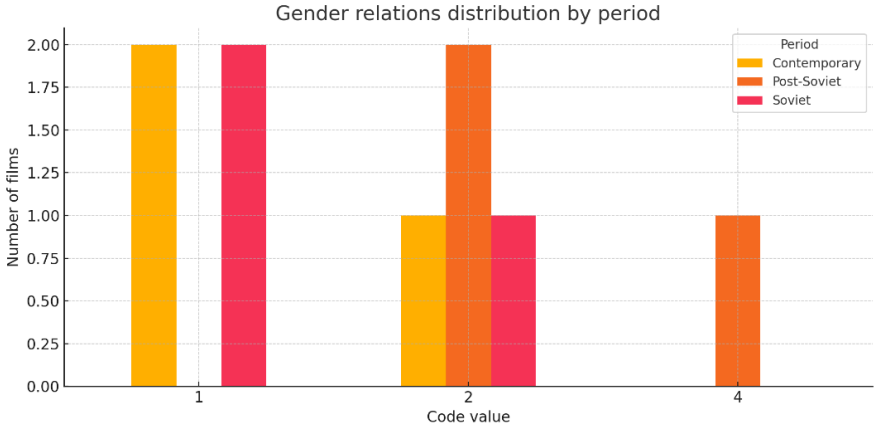


Figure 12. Gender relations

The comparison of research data presented in Figure 12 reveals that during the Soviet era, gender relations were mostly depicted as either equal or traditionally patriarchal.

Post-Soviet cinema brings forward models of conflict (code 4) or dependency (code 2).

In contemporary cinema, subtle forms of dominance prevail, yet there are also instances of symbolic equality (code 1), particularly in narratives where male characters are nearly absent (e.g., “Fairytale”).

Representation of women within the family: A comparison of results across the three periods is presented in Figure 13.

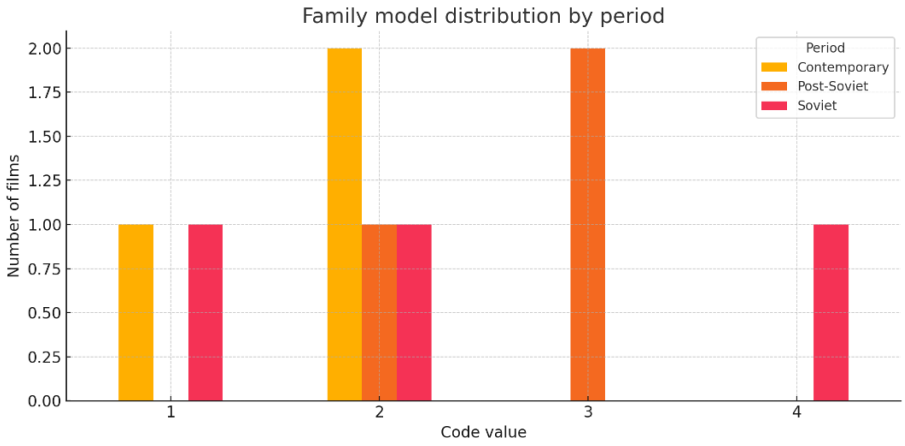


Figure 13. Representation of women in the family

The comparison of research data presented in Figure 13 reveals that Soviet cinema most frequently portrays the traditional family or single mothers. In the post-Soviet period, there is a growing number of unmarried women without children (code 3), reflecting their social and economic marginalisation. In contemporary cinema, women are most often depicted as independent or distanced from the family model, and the family nearly disappears as a value.

Professional activity: A comparison of results across historical periods is presented in Figure 14.

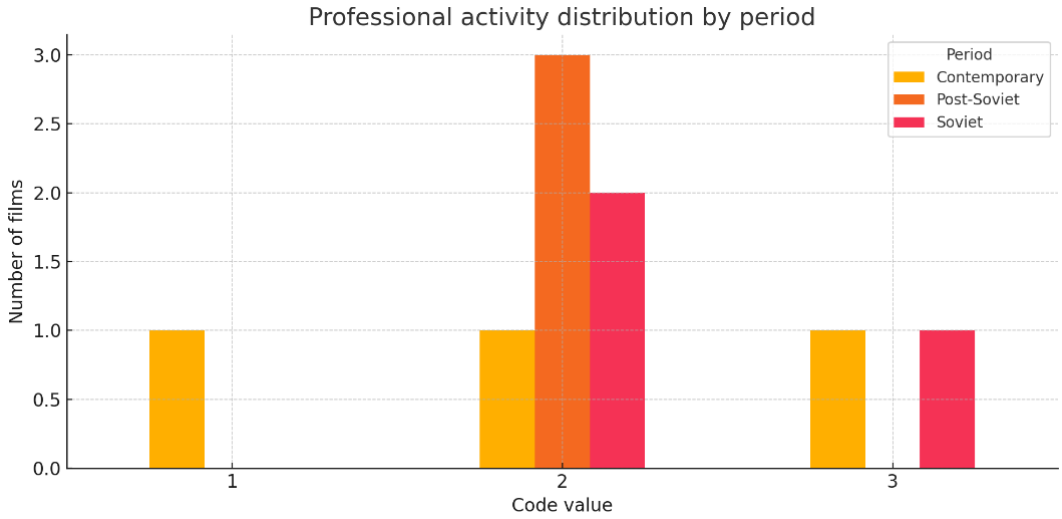


Figure 14. Professional activities

The comparison of research data presented in Figure 14 reveals that Soviet cinema prominently features images of women in leadership positions.

In the post-Soviet period, women are most often depicted in low-paying jobs or not working at all (due to social marginalisation).

In contemporary cinema, professional activity loses its significance, most characters are portrayed without a work context or with very limited professional identity.

Sexualization of women: A comparison of results across historical periods is presented in Figure 15.

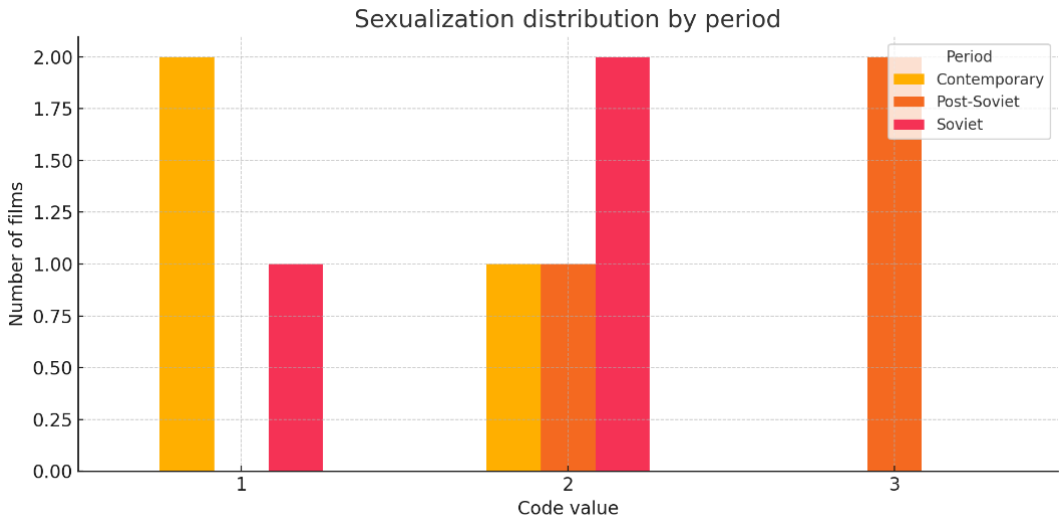


Figure 15. Sexualisation of women

The comparison of research data presented in Figure 15 reveals that in Soviet cinema, sexualization is almost non-existent or portrayed very subtly (codes 1, 2).

In the post-Soviet period, especially in “Lilya 4-ever”, themes of open sexual exploitation emerge (code 3).

In contemporary cinema, sexualization again becomes symbolic, barely expressed, often marked by distance or irony.

Conflicts and crises: A comparison of results across historical periods is presented in Figure 16.

Figure 16. Conflicts and crises

The comparison of research data presented in Figure 16 reveals that during the Soviet era, crises and conflicts were most often depicted as domestic dramas or the consequences of war.

In the post-Soviet period, violence against women and social collapse dominated.

In contemporary cinema, crises become psychological and existential, less social and more internal and symbolic.

Visual and linguistic representation: The comparison of results across historical periods is presented in Figure 17.

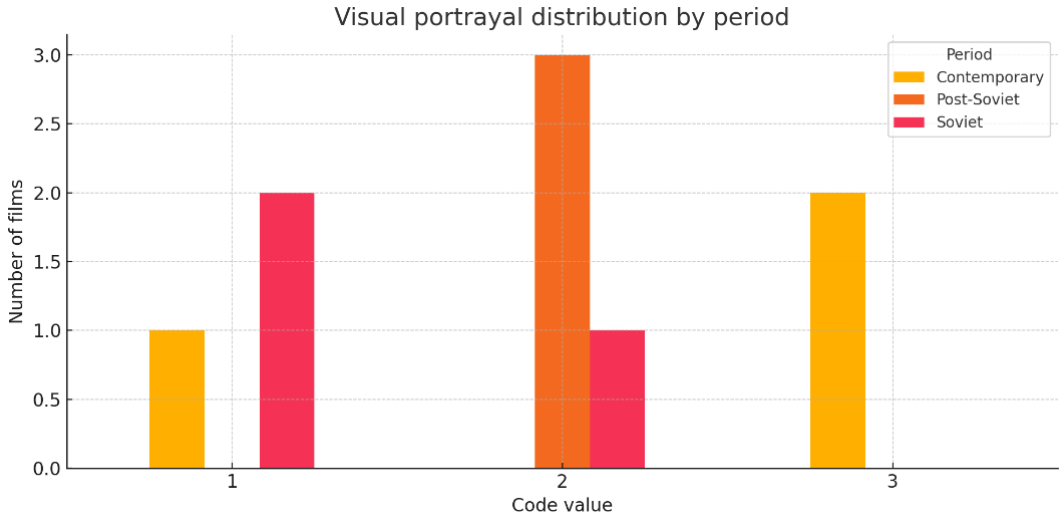


Figure 17. Visual and verbal representation

The comparison of research data presented in Figure 17 reveals that Soviet cinema creates the image of strong and independent women (code 1).

In the post-Soviet period, women are depicted as vulnerable but no longer aligned with traditional roles. In contemporary cinema, beauty emerges as a form of distance, with women often becoming symbolic or aesthetic objects rather than active storytellers.

An analysis of nine selected Russian films, divided into three periods: Soviet, post-Soviet, and contemporary, reveals significant changes in the portrayal of women, reflecting not only the transformations in the film industry but also broader socio-political and cultural trends within Russian society. The Soviet period (1945-1991) is characterised by an ideologised image of women: women are depicted as strong, dutiful, working, and responsible for the welfare of both the collective and the family. Although equality was publicly declared, the narrative in films focuses on duty, while women's emotional or individual expressions remain secondary. A woman is a symbol of the workforce, a moral pillar, and a symbol of state loyalty.

In the early post-Soviet period (1991-2005), the image of women radically changed. Films introduce figures of vulnerable, marginalised, and sexualised women. The film narrative here becomes a social mirror, reflecting economic inequality, social fragility, and physical and emotional violence. Women no longer have state protection or family support. They operate in marginal spaces, often with no prospects or opportunities to change their situation. This is a period when cinema exposes the threats posed by new capitalism to women's identity.

The contemporary period (2006-2025) shows greater psychological depth and symbolic portrayals of women. Women are no longer heroes of the collective or open victims; their figures become fragmented, often metaphysically distant. Emotional detachment, visual emptiness, or even a voice without a body (as in Fairytale) testify to the symbolic marginalisation of women in today's ideological space. While some films (Beanpole) show empathy, trauma, and connections between women, the overall image suggests that women often exist as redundant rather than structurally important elements.

The research hypothesis is that the portrayal of women in film after the fall of the Soviet Union initially evolved in an emancipatory direction, but has recently shown a conservative turn, returning to traditional female roles, which has been partially confirmed:

1. **Post-Soviet period (1991-2005)** - The study clearly supports the first part of the hypothesis: the image of women became much **more diverse**, with a **critical view of patriarchy** emerging. Women were portrayed as **victims of social exclusion**, fighting for dignity (“Lilya 4-ever”, “The Stroll”). This indicates the **establishment of emancipatory themes**, although often through the lens of trauma or marginalisation.

2. **Contemporary period (2006-2025)** - Here, the hypothesis is **partially confirmed**, **but not through strict conservatism**, but rather through a trend of the **symbolic weakening of the female figure:**

- Women are often presented as **emotionally detached** (“Loveless”), **traumatised** (“Beanpole”), or **metaphysically undefined** (“Fairytale”).

- There are no clear feminist narratives actively seeking equality.

- Instead, **distance, helplessness, or aesthetic emptiness** prevail, which can be interpreted as **the establishment of a new type of passivity**.

3. Return of traditional female roles is not direct-women are not depicted as classical housewives, but their agency (the ability to act) is diminished. She often does not react, does not change her surroundings, and becomes a symbol of inner worlds and suffering, which is closely tied to the strengthening of conservative societal values.

In conclusion, the results of the study reveal a consistent transformation of the woman's position from collective duty to symbolic non-existence. Soviet cinema is dominated by the state-formed image of the woman, post-Soviet cinema presents her as a vulnerable and sexualised victim of social crisis, and contemporary cinema portrays her as emotionally distant, a metaphysical being, sometimes even devoid of the ability to act. Visually, women gradually lose their body, their voice, and ultimately their clear role. This trend reflects not only cinematic changes but also an ideological emptiness in the relationship with women's identity, which can be interpreted as a postmodern response to the structure and values of earlier eras.

Conclusions

1. As the content analysis of the selected films demonstrates, during the Soviet era, women were most often portrayed as active, responsible figures who participated in the workforce and frequently held leadership or significant professional positions. The female character was defined by a triad of duty to the state, the collective, and the family. Visually and semantically, the image of the woman was grounded in strength, inner maturity, and loyalty to socialist ideology; however, her emotional world was often left "off-screen". Although gender equality was officially promoted in cinematic narratives, in reality, the woman's role was ideologically framed; she was expected to work, to sacrifice, and to uphold the stability of the family and society.

2. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the cinematic image of the woman changed fundamentally. With the disappearance of ideological protection, a new image emerged: the vulnerable, exploited, socially marginalised woman. Cinema reflected the realities of the transitional period: poverty, violence, and social insecurity. Women were depicted as victims of both economic upheaval and male dominance, often shown as isolated figures without support systems. Their professional activity was frequently portrayed as insignificant or confined to poorly paid sectors. Family structures during this time became unstable: single mothers and unmarried women were common, and gender relations were usually depicted as hierarchical or conflict-ridden.

3. In the contemporary period, the cinematic image of the woman becomes psychologically complex, symbolic, or even metaphysical. Women are often portrayed as emotionally distant, tormented by internal conflicts, and with fragmented relationships with other characters. The visual data analysis revealed that women in film frequently lose a concrete social or professional identity, and their representation increasingly shifts towards a symbolic or aesthetic plane.

4. The comparative film analysis showed that the image of the woman has undergone a transformation from a collective, strong, ideologically-oriented figure (Soviet period), to a victim of social crisis (post-Soviet period), and finally to a psychologically fragmented and symbolically marginalised character (contemporary period). These changes reflect not only the broader transformations of society but also a distancing from a clearly defined female identity. They highlight a shift in societal and cultural values, particularly in the discourses of gender, power, and belonging. This also reveals the changing function of cinema itself: from propaganda to reflective and experimental forms.

5. The study demonstrated that cinematic representations are closely tied to Russian state ideology, social structure, and cultural identity. The portrayal of women in cinema has become a kind of indicator: the less the state invests in strengthening the status of women, the more their image in

film becomes fragmented, unclear, or symbolically weakened. Cinema, as a visual discourse, allows us to identify not only what society thinks about women but also what it chooses to remain silent about.

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Santrauka

Tyrimo objektas: moters įvaizdis Rusijos kine sovietiniu, posovietiniu ir šiuolaikiniu laikotarpiu. **Problematika**: moters statusas Rusijoje kito kartu su politiniais, ekonominiais ir kultūriniais virsmais. Viena iš pagrindinių kultūrinių sričių, kur tai atsispindi – kinas, kuris Rusijoje visada buvo ne tik meninė priemonė, bet ir ideologinė platforma, formuojanti visuomenės tapatybę ir vertybių orientacijas. Todėl moterų vaizdavimas kine nėra atsitiktinis – jis atspindi to meto vyraujančius socialinius, politinius ir kultūrinius diskursus. **Tyrimo tikslas**: išanalizuoti, kaip moters vaizdavimas Rusijos kine kito nuo sovietmečio iki šių dienų.

Tyrimo uždaviniai:

1. Išanalizuoti moterų vaizdavimą sovietiniame kine – nustatyti pagrindinius lyčių vaidmenis sovietiniuose filmuose ir kaip jie buvo konstruojami pagal oficialią ideologiją.

2. Išnagrinėti moterų vaizdavimą posovietiniame kine – ištirti, kaip perėjimas iš sovietinio režimo į rinkos ekonomiką atsispindėjo kino naratyvuose ir kokį poveikį tai turėjo moterų reprezentacijai.

3. Įvertinti moterų vaizdavimą šiuolaikiniame Rusijos kine (2006–2025 m.) – nustatyti vyraujančias dabartinių filmų tendencijas ir įvertinti, ar jos prisideda prie lyčių lygybės skatinimo ar stereotipų įtvirtinimo.

4. Nustatyti pagrindinius lyčių stereotipus Rusijos kine skirtingais laikotarpiais – nustatyti, kaip keitėsi socialiniai, politiniai ir ekonominiai moterų vaidmenys kino naratyvuose.

Tyrimo hipotezė: nors moters vaizdavimas kine po Sovietų Sąjungos žlugimo iš pradžių kito emancipacijos kryptimi, pastaraisiais metais pastebimas konservatyvus posūkis – grįžtama prie tradicinių moters vaidmenų.

Metodologija: atlikta turinio ir vizualinė analizė, 9 atrinkti filmai (po 3 iš kiekvieno laikotarpio) buvo analizuoti pagal 8 kodavimo kategorijas (socialinis vaidmuo, seksualizacija, šeima, profesinė veikla ir kt.).

Pagrindinės išvados: Sovietinis kinas vaizdavo moterį kaip kolektyvinę heroję – dirbančią, atsakingą, ideologiškai lojalią. Posovietiniame kine moterys pasirodo kaip marginalizuotos, seksualizuotos, pažeidžiamos – jos tampa neoliberalios krizės aukomis. Šiuolaikiniame kine dominuoja simboliškai tuščios, traumuotos ar metafiziškai nutolusios figūros – moters agentiškumas blėsta, jos balsas vizualiai ir ideologiškai silpnėja. Kinas tampa visuomenės pokyčių veidrodžiu: kuo mažesnė moters galia realybėje, tuo labiau jos įvaizdis kine nyksta arba virsta abstrakcija.

Darbo reikšmė: tyrimas atskleidžia, kaip kinas ne tik atspindi moters statusą visuomenėje, bet ir aktyviai prisideda prie jos pozicijos normalizavimo ar kvestionavimo. Analizė svarbi tiek lyčių studijų, tiek šiuolaikinės Rusijos politinės kultūros tyrimų kontekste.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Usage

Name: Aknazar Meiramov
Student ID number: S2030254

Please tick 'x' for applicable items:

☐ I have not used any AI tools in this assignment.
X I have used one or more AI tools in this assignment.

If yes, which ones? Chat GPT 4o Plus……

I used AI tools critically, as an additional tool. I take full responsibility for the information, arguments and final results of my work.

(Signature)
……

Please tick 'x' for applicable items and explain how you used AI tools.

I used the AI tool as a(n)/for the purpose of:

1. ☐ **Idea generator** (e.g., generating arguments or counter-arguments, developing a plan for structure, generating potential research questions, etc.)
Please explain: ….....

2. ☐ **Search engine** (e.g., to find additional literature or contextual information on a specific topic, etc.)
Please explain: ….....

3. X **Writing assistant** (e.g., to correct spelling mistakes and/or typos, to rewrite the text in a more formal or academic style, to restructure paragraphs, etc.)
Please explain: correct spelling mistakes, find synonyms of words, phrases for not repeating them in text multiple times.....

4. ☐ **Designer** (e.g., to create a new, unique image or visualization, etc.)

Please explain: ….....

5. ☐ **Study buddy** (e.g., to ask for additional explanations with regard to specific learning contents, to generate self-check exercises, etc.)

Please explain: ….....

6. X **Data analysis tool** (e.g., to perform calculations, coding, create charts, graphs or other quantitative/qualitative data visualizations, etc.)

Please explain: for visualization of quantitative data (creation of graphs).

7. ☐ **For efficiency** (e.g., to summarize existing texts, format references, etc.)

Please explain: ….....

8. ☐ **Other (**I used AI tools in a different way.)

Please explain: ……..

9. **What steps were taken to mitigate errors and minimize the chance of harm or inappropriate use of AI?**

Please explain: I checked the generated graphs.