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Evolution of Family Images in Russian Soviet and Post-Soviet Feature Films

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Abstract

The research investigates the evolution of screen family images in Russian feature films of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods and the use of the hermeneutic analysis of audiovisual media texts in studying films by university students. Hermeneutic analysis allows students to consider this evolution through the interpretation of symbols, signs and images that appear in films, as well as through the historical and cultural contexts. Moreover, the hermeneutic approach applied in media studies enables students to consider screen family images not only as a result of cultural and historical changes, but also as a way of interpreting social and family values. The family portrayal in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian feature films has evolved in response to the political, social, and economic changes. Soviet films often depicted the family as part of a broader socialist or patriotic project, while post-Soviet films reflect the complexity and crisis of family relationships. The family in contemporary Russian feature films serves both as a symbol of national ideals and a site of personal struggle, with films increasingly exploring the emotional and psychological complexities of family life. In both Soviet and post-Soviet films, gender roles within the family have evolved in complex ways. In the Soviet period, women were often depicted as the moral backbone of the family, while men were protectors or workers. In post-Soviet films, these roles began to shift, with more emphasis on individual autonomy and gender equality. As for the evolution of the child film image, in Soviet films, the child used to be a symbol of future socialism, embodying ideals of duty, discipline, and progress. In contrast, post-Soviet children's films portray a more complex view of childhood, where children are depicted as vulnerable victims of social transformations, symbols of personal freedom and self-expression, or a voice for social change.

Keywords: family, family upbringing, media education, feature film, Soviet and past-Soviet films, hermeneutic analysis.

1. Introduction

Media education based on analysing feature films about family and family education can be a valuable experience for university students for several reasons. To begin with, films often depict a variety of family models, offering students deep insight into different ways families can function. This helps them to challenge stereotypes and broaden their understanding of family life. Besides, analysing different screen family experiences allows students to empathize with characters' emotions and inner struggles. Thus, students begin to understand the complexities of family relationships and the challenges faced by others in their own lives: media education based on Russian feature films has significant educational and developmental potential in the context of creating a "family-centric" culture of youth and the enhancement of the social status of the family

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and the image of the family, if it is based on the development of critical thinking in the youth audience (Mikhaleva, 2024).

On the other hand, analysing feature films requires students to think critically about the narrative, characters, themes, and visual storytelling. Students can explore how families are portrayed and how these representations might shape societal views on family. Since family is a central theme in many feature films, and examining how different families are faced with challenges can teach students to explore such social and emotional concepts as conflict resolution, communication, loyalty, affection, and generational differences. Moreover, analysing family-oriented films provides a natural opportunity for classroom discussion: students get involved in debating how different families are represented, compare them to their own family experiences, and explore themes like family roles, values, and expectations. Finally, in today's world, students are constantly exposed to media, and media studies should teach them to read and deconstruct media messages critically, thus helping them become more aware of how family life is often idealized, simplified, or dramatized in popular culture.

2. Materials and methods

The material of our research is audiovisual media texts on the topic of family and family education of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The main method is a comparative-hermeneutic analysis of Soviet and Russian feature films (1920–2020) devoted to family issues.

In our study, we analysed Russian and foreign scientific findings (Albada, 2000; Allen, 1999; Antunes, 2017; Bitney, 2022; Brown, 2013; Bruzzi, 2005; Callister et al., 2007; Mikhaleva, Lozovitskaya, 2024; Chopra-Gant, 2006; Douglas, Olson, 1995; Fedorov, 2014; Fulmer, 2017; Garlen, Sandlin, 2017; Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2013; Levy, 1991; Lloyd, 2014; Potter, 2022; Tanner et al., 2003; Zurcher et al., 2018, 2020) devoted to family and family education in the mirror of Soviet and post-Soviet Russian feature films.

3. Discussion

The evolution of family images in Russian feature films of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods is a multi-layered process reflecting changes in the socio-cultural, political and economic situation of the country. The hermeneutic approach to analysing audiovisual media texts may allow students to consider this evolution through the prism of interpreting relevant symbols, signs and images that appear in films, as well as through the historical and cultural contexts: feature films about family life are powerful cultural artifacts that shape the upbringing of youth by modelling behaviour, reinforcing values, and addressing moral and ethical dilemmas. They provide young people with tools to navigate their own family relationships, foster empathy, and influence their aspirations for future family life. By portraying a range of family experiences, films help youth understand the complexity of relationships and the importance of communication, compassion, and responsibility in a family setting (Mikhaleva, 2024).

University students begin to understand how each generation and historical period conveyed its ideals and concerns in family images and family models. For instance, in the Soviet period, collectivism and socialist values dominated, while in the post-Soviet period, the emphasis shifted to individualized images, the restoration of traditional values, and social adaptation.

Let us consider the main stages of the evolution of family and education images in Russian feature films based on the hermeneutic approach.

In the first decades of Soviet film production, the family was presented as an element of collective consciousness and socialism construction. The screen family image was interpreted as part of the working class, in which it was important to unite efforts to achieve a common goal: the family could be completely replaced by a collective, which, under the leadership of the state, could educate, teach and form the necessary qualities. That is why, the feature films of that time actively dealt with the theme of revolution, the destruction of old foundations and the construction of a new life, often through the family image. Such family models can be found in the following Soviet dramas: *Mother* (1926), *Two Days* (1927), *Earth* (1930), *In Search of Joy* (1940). These films emphasize the importance of unity, overcoming difficulties, and raising children in the spirit of the new era.

During the Great Patriotic War and in the post-war years, the family image in Soviet feature films was interpreted through the prism of patriotism and spiritual strength. The family became a symbol of overcoming unimaginable hardships, the basis of moral and physical survival. These films tended to portray national unity, cohesion and support, as well as the importance of raising children

in the spirit of Soviet ideals: hard work, patriotism, perseverance and collectivism. For instance, the war dramas *She Defends Her Motherland* (1943) and *Sons* (1946) are devoted to this theme.

In the late Soviet period, the ideology of the family somewhat changed: the emphasis shifted from the collective to personal family relationships: the family became a microcosm for examining issues of identity, personal struggle, and societal expectations. Soviet feature films of the Thaw era offer a rich tapestry of family images that reflect a complex interplay between personal and societal changes during that period. By focusing on individual experiences and emotional depth, these films provide a critical lens through which to understand the evolving of Soviet family life and the broader cultural transformations of the era.

Family values still remained an important element of screen family models, and raising children became a topic for reflection. Moreover, feature films began to touch upon more individual aspects of family relationships, including the difficulties of raising children in the context of rapid urbanization and social changes. For example, students could analyse the Soviet feature film *We'll Live Until Monday* (1971). This film addresses the issues of adolescence and family problems, focusing on the interactions between children and parents, as well as the relationships with teachers and educators. During the “stagnation” period despite the official positive narratives, the films increasingly raised issues of the crisis of family relations, the conflict of generations and moral dilemmas, which spoke of the real problems of society. The worldview of the film characters of the “stagnation” period is characterized by a combination of conformism, the desire for stability and an internal search for the meaning of life against the background of general social stagnation. The characters are torn between traditional family values and a feeling of internal dissatisfaction, which creates tension and forces them to solve personal and moral dilemmas.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian film production experienced a significant transformation in depicting family and family upbringing. This period was characterized by profound changes in the social and economic structure, and a desire to restore traditional values, which was reflected in films. In the 1990s, Russian feature films often portrayed the family as broken or in crisis, which was associated with the general instability in the country. The family became extremely vulnerable, thus reflecting the general reformation of the socio-cultural landscape. Many films during the period presented the family as a field of struggle for survival, where children and parents faced severe living conditions, crime, corruption, and social instability: perestroika-era feature films explored such themes as emotional alienation, marital breakdowns, and the pressure of social expectations on individuals. Film characters, particularly children and teenagers, were often depicted as questioning authority, whether that of parents, teachers, or the state itself. On the other hand, this theme emphasized the idea that, in times of political or economic turmoil, a supportive family could be the key to personal and collective survival.

In this respect, for classroom hermeneutic analysis one can take the drama *Brother* (1997). Although the film is primarily about growing up and finding one's place in the world, it also touches upon the theme of a broken family, where the main character faces the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet family.

The 2000s brought rehabilitation of the family image in cinema. Since the beginning of the 2000s, a new family model has begun to form in Russian film industry – a return to traditional values and social stability. In these feature films, the family became a symbol of hope, and upbringing children was emphasized as the most important goal for restoring the moral and spiritual foundations of society. At the same time, there appeared Russian dramas and melodramas that exposed the problem of domestic violence, infidelity, alcoholism and other vexed social problems: *The Road* (2002), *Another Woman, Another Man* (2003), *Bury Me Behind the Baseboard* (2008), *Goodbye, Mom* (2014), *Not Together* (2017), *Loveless* (2017), *Nearest and Dearest* (2017) and others.

Generally speaking, family images in Russian feature films have become more diverse in recent years. Along with the traditional family images, other models are also shown, since the family is no longer seen solely as an instrument of education, but as a space for self-realization, the search for identity, and the fight against internal conflicts.

4. Results

When working on Russian feature films about family and family upbringing, we suggest using the hermeneutic analysis of audiovisual media texts: “Hermeneutic analysis involves understanding the media text through comparison with cultural tradition and reality; penetration

into the logic of the media text; analysis of the media text through comparison of artistic images in the historical and cultural context. Thus, the subject of analysis is the media system and its functioning in society, interaction with a person, the language of the media and its use” (Fedorov, 2014: 8).

In this regard, when discussing the topic “The sociocultural, political, ideological, and gender contexts of creating and functioning of audiovisual media texts about family and family education” in the classroom after studying the main learning material for the lesson, university students are asked to compile a comparative characteristic of the sociocultural, political, ideological, gender aspects of the audiovisual media texts under analysis based on comparing Soviet and post-Soviet feature films of different historical periods. In Table 1 below there is an example of such a task for film studies.

Table 1. Sociocultural, political, ideological, and gender contexts of creating and functioning of Soviet and post-Soviet feature films about family and family education

Time period	Sociocultural context	Political and ideological contexts	Gender context
Films of the silent film period: 1920–1930	Films were created to educate the masses, promote socialist values, and document the struggles and triumphs of the Soviet people.	The era of “war communism”. Cinema was seen as a tool for mass education and propaganda and an important means of shaping the collective consciousness of people.	Gender differences are insignificant. Filmmakers promoted gender equality and sought to represent the new Soviet man and woman, dedicated to socialism and collective work.
Films of the Stalin era and the first post-Stalin years: 1931–1955	Strengthening the state’s totalitarian control over society. Socialist realism in art and cinema. The Great Patriotic War led to the production of many war dramas, where the heroism of common Soviet people, and the victory over the enemy became core themes.	Cinema became a tool for shaping the public opinion. Films portrayed the working class, peasants, and Soviet leaders as heroes who contributed to socialism construction.	The dominant idea of family ties between all Soviet people living by common ideals and values. Labour exploits of men and women
Films of the Thaw period: 1956–1968	Soviet filmmakers began to explore the complexities of family life, reflecting the social and political changes. The family became a microcosm for examining issues of identity, personal struggle, and societal expectations	De-Stalinization, openness in public discourse and artistic expression. The general easing of censorship. Reawakening of intellectual and cultural life.	Emerging gender roles, evolving relationships between men and women. Conflicts arising from traditional and modern gender roles and values.
Films of the “stagnation” period: 1969–1985	Political, economic, and social stagnation in the country. Strict censorship from the state. Many filmmakers turned to “aesthetic escapism” to avoid direct confrontation	Soviet government maintains stability and order through the propaganda of a strong and stable family	The crisis of family relations, the conflict of generations and moral dilemmas are presented in media texts. Women’s emancipation versus women as keepers of the hearth.

Time period	Sociocultural context	Political and ideological contexts	Gender context
	with the state.		
Films of the Perestroika period: 1986–1991	Relaxed censorship allowed Soviet filmmakers to tackle more controversial and sensitive issues. Greater artistic freedom. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.	Political and social reforms (glasnost and perestroika). Cultural openness and Western influence.	Filmmakers engaged with gender roles and social issues in Soviet society. Feature films reflected concerns about the role of women and family structure.
Contemporary Russian films: 1992–2020	Post-Soviet transformation and identity crisis. Economic challenges and the rise of commercial cinema. Emphasis on patriotic heroism and family ties.	The collapse of state socialism and the transition to a market economy left many people feeling disillusioned and isolated. Later filmmakers focused on national unity, historical pride, family honour, patriotism and heroism.	Changing gender roles and women's representation: complex female characters. Sacrifices made for family and the nation. Exploring new family challenges (emotional isolation, personal identity crisis, marital breakdown, and the generation gap).

It should also be understood that the evolution of family models in Soviet and post-Soviet feature films is deeply intertwined with the social, political, and economic changes that occurred in Russia from the early 20th century through the post-Soviet era. As the country transitioned from revolutionary ideologies to Soviet socialism and later into the market-driven society of contemporary Russia, these shifts were reflected in the screen portrayal of family models. The family, both as an idealized model and a site of social critique, has been a central theme throughout Russian cinematography, with its depiction evolving in response to political and ideological priorities, economic conditions, and social transformations. In this context we suggest that students should trace this evolution in Soviet and post-Soviet films about family and family upbringing (Table 2).

Table 2. The evolution of family models in Soviet and post-Soviet feature films

Time period	Family models
1. The Soviet era (1920s–1980s)	The Soviet state played a major role in shaping the idealized family model in feature films, which was often used as a tool for ideological propaganda. The portrayal of family life in Soviet films was heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist principles and the government agenda to create a new, collective, and progressive society.
The formation of the Soviet family model: 1920–1930s	In the early Soviet period, filmmakers were supposed to portray the family as part of the broader revolutionary project, involving the creation of a new socialist citizen. The family was often shown as a revolutionary collective, and feature films explored themes of social transformation and the breaking down of the old bourgeois family model. The traditional patriarchal family was shown as oppressive, while the new Soviet family was presented as more egalitarian and collectively oriented (V. Pudovkin's <i>Mother</i> , 1926).
Stalinist family ideals: 1940–1950s	Under I. Stalin, the ideal family model became more traditional in line with the state's desire for stability and power consolidation. The family was depicted as a moral pillar of Soviet society, reinforcing ideals of patriarchy and the nuclear family. Soviet cinema, particularly during and after World War II, portrayed families as both a site of personal sacrifice and a symbol of national strength. Family members, particularly mothers and wives,

Time period	Family models
	were presented as the emotional heart of the Soviet people. The state's emphasis was on patriotism, heroism, and unity of all the family.
The Thaw and the development of new themes: 1960–1980s:	The period of N. Khrushchev's Thaw (1953 – 1964) and the subsequent Brezhnev era (1964 – 1982) brought some liberalization, but Soviet filmmakers still had to work within strict ideological constraints. Films began to explore personal relationships more openly, though within the bounds of socialist realism. The family was still portrayed as the core of the socialist ideal, but films also began to highlight the personal struggles and difficulties of Soviet families. Gender roles within the family were largely traditional. However, there was also growing recognition of the emotional and psychological burdens placed on individuals within the family, especially during difficult times. Sometimes the family was depicted as an institution that might stifle the individual's emotional or intellectual needs (A. German's <i>My Friend Ivan Lapshin</i> , 1984).
2. Post-Soviet Era (1992–2020)	With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian cinematography experienced a dramatic shift in its approach to family models. The chaotic and turbulent 1990s and the more stable 2000s saw films portraying families in more diverse and complex ways, reflecting the considerable changes in Russian society and politics.
The collapse of the Soviet family model and new realities: 1990s	The 1990s were a time of profound economic and social upheaval in Russia, marked by the end of the Soviet system, the rise of capitalism, and widespread poverty. These social and economic shifts significantly influenced how family relationships were portrayed on screen. In the 1990s, families were often depicted as struggling to survive in the midst of economic hardship (Aleksei Balabanov's <i>Brother</i> , 1997). The idea of family as a refuge from societal chaos became more pronounced, with themes of family disintegration or the failure to adapt to post-Soviet realities reflected in feature films: media texts explored the impact of social instability on family life, focusing on themes of betrayal, survival, and the moral compromises that families made in the face of financial distress (P. Chukhrai's <i>The Thief</i> , 1997).
Family as a site of national unity: 2000–2020s	The Russian government sought to reaffirm traditional values, including the nuclear family. This political agenda influenced the screen representation of families, which began to focus on social responsibility, patriotism and national unity. For example, N. Mikhalkov's film <i>Burnt by the Sun 2</i> (2010) and F. Bondarchuk's <i>Stalingrad</i> (2013), though primarily concerned with war and historical events, emphasize family loyalty, sacrifice, and patriotism as key themes. While traditional family models were promoted, some feature films also began to examine the psychological challenges that family members faced: emotional neglect, divorce, or estrangement, such as A. Zvyagintsev's drama <i>Loveless</i> (2017) focused on a divorced couple's neglect of their child, mirroring the breakdown of human connections.

It is worth mentioning that the portrayals of mothers and fathers in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian cinema reflect the changing political and social landscape of Russia that can be thoroughly analysed in film and media studies with university students. In the Soviet era, for instance, film images of parents were largely idealized to fit the needs of the state dominant ideologies, with mothers as self-sacrificing revolutionaries and fathers as strong protectors. In the post-Soviet era, these images became more complex, or even sometimes absent, reflecting the emotional turmoil and instability of a society in transition. While traditional family roles have been reasserted in some respects, contemporary Russian films increasingly depict the emotional and psychological struggles of both fathers and mothers, highlighting the personal crises that often accompany the social changes in contemporary Russia (Table 3).

Table 3. The portrayals of mothers and fathers in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian feature films

Time period	Film images of mothers	Film images of fathers
1. The Soviet era (1920–1980s)	In the early Soviet period, the representation of both fathers and mothers in cinema was shaped by the October Revolution and the subsequent plan to create a new socialist citizen. Filmmakers were to promote socialist values, including equality, collectivism, and patriotism. These themes were strongly reflected in the screen portrayal of parents.	
The new Soviet family: 1920–1930s	Mother as a revolutionary symbol. In early Soviet films, mothers were often depicted as symbols of sacrifice and revolutionary idealism. Films portrayed the mother as a patriotic and moral figure, often fighting for the collective good. She was not only a mother to her children but also to the broader working class, embodying the values of selflessness and solidarity in the fight against capitalism.	Father as a revolutionary leader. Fathers were often shown as protectors of the family. They were portrayed as strong, ideological figures who instilled discipline and loyalty to the state in their children. However, in the early Soviet period, the traditional paternal role was sometimes de-emphasized, as the state itself was intended to take on the responsibility of guiding and protecting the people.
Stalinist influence and the rise of the patriarchal family: 1940–1950s	Mother as the heart of the soviet family. Under Stalinism, the mother became a symbol of the traditional family. The Soviet state began to promote the nuclear family as the basis of social stability. Mothers were the emotional and moral centre of the home. This was reflected in films, where mothers played an important role in maintaining family values and patriotism during severe times.	Fathers were shown as protectors and providers for their families, especially in wartime. During World War II, fathers were portrayed as heroes who sacrificed for their country and family. Soviet wartime dramas glorified the father as a symbol of courage, duty, and patriotism. Fathers in feature films were depicted as strong, brave, and self-sacrificing characters.
The Thaw and complex family relationships: 1960s–1980s	Mother as a moral character. Soviet cinema began to explore more nuanced portrayals of family life, though the mother remained unchanged. She was still seen as the moral centre of the family but began to be shown as more complex and emotionally driven. Mothers expressed personal desires and inner conflicts.	Father as moral authority. In the Brezhnev era, fathers were shown as authoritarian characters, upholding traditional Soviet values but also dealing with the contradictions of life in the bureaucratic system. Fathers could be portrayed as stern but loving characters who maintained discipline in the family while also struggling with their own personal moral dilemmas.
2. The post-Soviet era (1992–2020)	With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian film industry entered a new era marked by political instability, economic transformation, and the revival of traditional values. The portrayal of mothers and fathers became diverse, reflecting the complexities of life in the post-Soviet society. The images of the father and mother shifted from idealized models to more complex characters.	
Crisis of family roles: 1990s	Mother as the sole family provider. The mother in post-Soviet feature films was portrayed as a heroic survivor, taking on the role of both	Father as an absent, distant or dysfunctional family member. The 1990s were marked by economic crisis and social change. In this context, fathers were often depicted

Time period	Film images of mothers	Film images of fathers
	mother and father. She was depicted as the moral centre of the family, but also as someone who had to face the harsh realities of the changing society.	as characters who were unable to provide emotional or financial support to their families (P. Chukhrai's <i>The Thief</i> , 1997).
The legacy of the 1990s and new challenges: 1995–2020	Films depicted the rise of the “new Russian” mother – a mother who got adapted to new economic and social realities by becoming more independent and focused on securing a better life for their children. The image of the mother in modern Russian feature films reflects both the traditional values associated with motherhood and the challenges faced by women in contemporary society.	The father as a provider and protector, tried to shield their children from the harsh realities of life. (<i>American Daughter</i> , 1995). The father in modern Russian cinema embodies a blend of traditional and modern ideals, reflecting the complexities of contemporary Russian identity and family life.

Additionally, the evolution of a child film image (a son or a daughter) in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian children's feature films can be analysed in the classroom during film studies as it reflects the changing social values, political ideologies, and cultural shifts within the country. Since children's cinema has historically been a tool for shaping the next generation's worldview and aspirations, it would offer representations of childhood that both aligned with the state ideals and responded to social change (Table 4). For instance, in the Soviet Union, children's cinema was closely tied to the state's ideological goals. The image of the child in Soviet films was constructed to reflect and promote the ideals of socialism, community, and collective progress. Whereas the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 fundamentally changed Russian society and, by extension, the way children were portrayed in feature films. Post-Soviet children's films evolved to reflect a more complex and sometimes fragmented world.

Table 4. The portrayals of children in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian feature films

Time period	Film images of children
Soviet children's cinema: idealized childhood and socialist values	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The pioneer child: idealized and heroic. The child was presented as a model citizen: obedient, hardworking, and loyal to the state (<i>Timur i ego komanda/Timur and His Team</i>, 1940). 2. The heroic child in times of war or crisis: children and youth were depicted as making tremendous sacrifices for the state and their families, both on the home front and in wartime settings (<i>Neulovimye mstiteli/The Elusive Avengers</i>, 1967).
Post-Soviet children's cinema: children as witnesses or victims of social change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The child as a witness to societal dysfunction (1990s). With the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Russian cinematography began to explore social change through the eyes of children, who often served as witnesses to the adult world's problems, conflicts, and moral contradictions (<i>Malen'kaya Vera/The Little Vera</i>, 1988; <i>Brat/Brother</i>, 1997). Films reflected a new cultural reality in which children were exposed to such negative adult challenges as corruption, poverty, and personal crisis, but were shown resilient and resourceful in their attempts to understand the world around them. 2. The child as a victim of society's changes (1990s-2000s). These children were often portrayed as disoriented, abandoned, or traumatized by the changing society, reflecting the instability and uncertainty that many Russian people felt during that period (<i>The Return</i>, 2003).

Time period	Film images of children
Modern children's cinema: children as symbols of freedom and self-expression or voices for social change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The child as an individual: autonomy and personal growth. The image of the child became more focused on personal development and self-discovery, rather than on fulfilling societal or state-imposed roles (<i>The Irony of Fate. The Sequel, 2007</i>). These children might rebel, question authority, or take their destiny into their own hands, showcasing the shift from the Soviet emphasis on collective identity to the post-Soviet focus on personal freedom and self-expression. 2. The child in a new Russia: adapting to capitalism, consumerism, and individual success (2000–2010s). Children who, though still innocent, were growing up in a world defined by economic inequality and a new set of moral dilemmas (<i>The Edge, 2010</i>). 3. The child as a voice for social change (2010–2020s). Russian children's films depicted children as agents of change – characters who challenged the status quo and fought for social justice or a better future. Children embarked on adventures that tested their moral beliefs, challenged societal norms, and gave them the opportunity to reshape their environment. Films reflected a more modern, post-Soviet focus on individualism and the empowerment of youth to influence the world around them (<i>The Last Warrior, 2017</i>).

5. Conclusion

The evolution of screen images of family and upbringing in Russian cinematography reflects a wide range of changes in the social and cultural life of Russia. If in Soviet times the emphasis was on collectivism and the upbringing of a citizen oriented towards public interests, then in the post-Soviet period cinema focuses on personal problems and the search for a balance between traditional and modern values. The hermeneutic analysis has allowed us to identify how these changes occurring in society are expressed in cinema, emphasizing the importance of the family as a key unit of society in any historical period. Thus, the hermeneutic approach applied in media studies will enable university students to consider these family images not only as a result of cultural and historical changes, but also as a way of interpreting social and family values.

The portrayal of family in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian cinema has evolved in response to the political, social, and economic alterations. Soviet feature films often depicted the family as part of a broader socialist or patriotic project, while post-Soviet films reflected the complexity and crisis of family relationships in the period of rapid transformation. The family in contemporary Russian feature films serves both as a symbol of national ideals and a site of personal struggle, with films increasingly exploring the emotional and psychological aspects of family life.

In both Soviet and post-Soviet films, gender roles within the family evolved in various ways. As for the Soviet period, women were depicted as the moral backbone of the family, while men were protectors or workers. Later, in post-Soviet feature films these roles began to shift, with more emphasis on individual autonomy and gender equality, particularly in the context of divorce, family breakdown, or economic survival. However, despite the portrayal of more independent women, traditional gender expectations persisted, with films exploring the tensions between women's emancipation and their family obligations.

As a rule, the parental characters were symbolic representations of large cultural and ideological concepts, including state control, gender roles, and family values. As Russian cinematography evolved from the Soviet era to the post-Soviet period, so did the screen representations of fathers and mothers, reflecting transformations in political ideologies, sociocultural conditions and family models.

Speaking of children's images in Soviet and post-Soviet children's feature films, they also reflected the changing political, cultural, and social landscape of Russia: in Soviet films, the child was a symbol of the collective and the future of socialism, embodying ideals of duty, discipline, and progress. In contrast, post-Soviet children's films portray a more complex and multifaceted view of childhood, where children are depicted as vulnerable victims of social change, individuals in search of personal meaning, or witnesses to the transforming world around them.

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