

7 Gendered citizenship in Soviet and post-Soviet societies

Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina

Introduction

In this article we analyse the category of Soviet and post-Soviet gendered citizenship, which is a collection of structural conditions (constraints) and everyday actions determining the relationship between the state and individuals categorised by sex. We use the concept of gendered citizenship to analyse the gender order, which we understand as the social organisation of sex differentiation within a nation-state. The gender order is seen as a way of ordering civil status, one which is characterised by an unequal distribution of prestige and benefits on the basis of sex.

Citizenship is understood as (1) a system of economic, political and social rights and duties which define the interrelationship between the state and the individual; (2) the stable social practices of individuals belonging to the community; (3) a moral-symbolic category, containing normative rules of correct behaviour.¹ Thus the category of 'citizenship' describes a non-economic (political and ideological) measure of inequality in status. It is anchored in a legal and moral-symbolic order and has economic consequences. Everyday practices, distinguishing between people on the basis of sex, correspond to this measure of status.

As feminist researchers have shown, the category of 'citizenship' is marked by gender.² Women's position in society as 'citizens', their rights and duties, are determined by family and social policies, dominant and competing gender ideologies and the imperatives of political and social participation. In different historical contexts women and men may have (or not have) equal civil, political and social rights. Women may be put into a special category of citizens and granted 'positive' or 'negative' privileges, particularly social ones aimed at supporting motherhood. Women and men may act (or not act) in different ways to transform or to conserve society as a whole and gender relations in particular.

The Soviet citizenship system was oriented towards creating and maintaining a unified, centralised state. It granted rights and duties to different categories of citizens according to their rank. However, in essence, citizenship meant the mobilisation of citizens to build socialism in an isolated country and the reinforcement of their loyalty to the party-state. The goal of constructing a socialist society was, on the one hand, obligatory for all citizens, who, formally, had equal rights and duties. On the other hand, civil status differed, both formally and informally, according to one's social origin, age, sex, ethnicity and so on. During the Soviet period, the state successfully claimed the dominant role in determining gendered citizenship, firmly

controlling the social practice and official discourses of masculinity and femininity. State ideology set out ideal model types of masculinity and femininity.

Men and women, allotted certain rights and obligations in given socio-historical contexts, devise strategies for adapting to (and resisting) their officially prescribed civil status. For example, public institutions only partially supported the fulfilment of the duties – the normative roles – of the 'emancipated' female Soviet citizen as a mother, a worker and a socially active individual. This structural tension made it necessary to devise specific everyday practices so that Soviet women could perform all these different roles.

In the post-Soviet period the state is losing its dominant role in determining gendered citizenship. Gender policy has different effects on different social strata, and the new structural conditions (market demands, the commercialisation of daily life, and so on) are giving rise to new practices for fulfilling gender roles. At the present time gendered practices are the unintended consequences of the operation of various social forces – politicians, the market, the media, the church and traditions.

As citizens, men and women are subordinate to a moral and symbolic order which prescribes 'correct' behaviour on the basis of sex, age, social status and so forth. We are therefore interested in the ideological normative prescriptions which determine models of masculinity and femininity in the concrete historical periods of the development of Soviet and post-Soviet society. In the transition period competing gender ideologies arise, based on 'invented traditions', which set out normative notions of masculinity and femininity. As we shall show, the basic ideology of gendered citizenship is neo-traditionalism in various forms.

In this article we are mainly concerned with an analysis of women's citizenship, since the gender sensitivity of the authorities expressed itself in a detailed elaboration of normative acts and measures for regulating the position of female Soviet citizens as mothers and workers.³ The article is structured as follows. The first part reconstructs Soviet gendered (female) citizenship from a historical and sociological perspective. The second part considers the ideological transformation of gendered citizenship in the post-Soviet period.

Soviet gendered citizenship: a state-determined order

Soviet citizenship was coercive. Its rights, in essence, had the character of duties, and failure to observe them meant strict sanctions from the authorities. The social practices of citizenship entailed mobilising Soviet people for socialist construction and reaffirming political loyalty ('the fulfilment of social duties'). The state distinguished between citizens on the basis of sex. Moreover, this state construction of gendered citizenship set the parameters for specific female strategies. It was the Soviet context which made them possible, but they have become established practices which have remained to the present day.

Throughout the entire Soviet period the state claimed the major role in regulating work, the family and social policies towards women. It produced the official

discourses for interpreting femininity and masculinity. For this reason we describe this gender order as state-determined.⁴ However, policies underwent changes, and along with this the aspects of masculinity and femininity stressed in normative models also changed. The adaptation strategies employed by women (and men) towards state-led gendered coercion changed as well.

The Russian sociologist Igor Kon and the American scholar Gail Lapidus have proposed a periodisation of the Soviet gender order, based on party and state policies towards sexuality and women.⁵ Their approaches contain a *de facto* recognition that the Soviet gender order was state-determined, that is, that relationships between the sexes were determined first and foremost by the firm parameters of state regulation. A somewhat different periodisation, based on distinguishing different generations of Soviet people with different socialisation and day-to-day experiences, has been proposed by the Finnish scholar Anna Rotkirch.⁶

All these researchers distinguish three periods in Soviet gender relations. The first phase dates from 1918 to the beginning of the 1930s. Kon defines it as the period of Bolshevik experimentation in the sphere of sexuality, family and marital relations. Lapidus calls it the period of political mobilisation of women. Overall, the early Bolshevik period is represented as one of a gender policy aimed at resolving the 'woman question' (*zhenskii vopros*). In this period women were to be defined as categories of Soviet citizens through their 'emancipation from the family' and political mobilisation.

The second phase, from the 1930s until the mid-1950s, has been described as totalitarian androgyny, a period of economic mobilisation of women in the sphere of production and reproduction. As Nicholas Timasheff observed, in this period there was a traditionalist recoil in policies on the family and marriage as well as in the social and cultural spheres in general.⁷ The beginning of this period coincides with the first five-year plan for industrialisation and collectivisation, followed by the official declaration that the 'woman question' had been solved in the Soviet Union. The symbolic boundaries of this period in gender policies are the criminalisation of abortion in 1936 and its re-legalisation in 1955. During the Stalinist period, repression and strict control, combined with social security guarantees for motherhood, were used to stabilise the patrimonial, state-determined contract of the 'working mother'. The right to socially useful labour and Soviet motherhood became obligatory duties.

The third phase – from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1980s, began during the political thaw, dating from the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party (1956), campaigns of mass housing construction and a new 'soft' approach to the 'woman question'. This was linked to a programme for resolving the country's demographic crisis. The liberalisation of the regime after the Party Congress led to a weakening of state domination. Family life was partially freed from firm state control. Women remained involved in social labour. At the same time the importance of 'voluntary' motherhood, supported by an active social policy, was strengthened in the gendered definition of citizenship. Yet, motherhood remained a component part of women's civil status.

In reconstructing the gendered discourses which were involved in producing the category of 'women', we shall analyse official gender policies, drawing on examples from the media, social scientific literature and fiction of the periods concerned.

The formation of gendered citizenship: the 'new woman' (from 1918 to the early 1930s)

Let us look more closely at how the state created new gender-marked categories of citizen – above all, the 'new woman' – in the early Bolshevik period, and at the consequences of these policies. At that time, according to the official discourse, the 'woman question' was to be solved politically. The constitution granted women basic political rights: the right to vote and to be elected, the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to education and to divorce. At the same time, women were distinguished as a specific category of citizen, with distinct differences from the other category, men. Women as a sex were differentiated in official Bolshevik discourse in biological-reproductive and socio-political terms. On the one hand, women were regarded as a 'backward element', requiring purposeful state and political emancipation. On the other hand, they were seen as potential mothers and builders of socialist society, in which capacity they were mobilised by the proletarian state.

In advancing the thesis that women were 'politically backward', 'enslaved' and 'unenlightened', the Bolsheviks claimed that women were unready for Soviet transformation. Women represented a politically dangerous force for the Bolsheviks.⁸ The struggle against the backwardness of women workers constituted the essence of the policy for solving the 'woman question'. Women were considered to be a 'backward element' not only because of their low level of literacy, but also because they were the bastion of the traditional family, the bastion of the conservative, private sphere of life. It was necessary to conduct purposeful agitation and propaganda work 'among women workers' in order to overcome 'that accursed unenlightened legacy bequeathed to us by the capitalist system'.⁹

The politics of creating the new woman were expressed in a series of normative acts and political campaigns, intended to involve women in the Soviet public sphere and turn them into citizens of a communist society as workers, publicly active people and mothers. In the sphere of family and marriage, that is, in the 'private sphere', radical measures were taken, aimed at changing relations between the sexes to a substantial extent. The first decrees of Soviet power recognised civil marriage registered at offices of the local administration, the ZAGS. The traditional church and religious legitimisation of marriage was abolished. Civil marriage, no longer sacred or economically based on private property, became a fragile social institution. If we look at the legal basis for divorce, this tells us about the position of marriage and the family in official discourse, and shows how far this particular state valued the family. A decree of 1918 simplified the procedure for divorce, and, according to the marriage laws of 1926, marriage could be dissolved unilaterally. The practice of divorce by post became widespread, and at the same time *de facto* and *de jure* marriages were put on an equal legal footing. It has been observed that

it was easier to get divorced in Bolshevik Russia than to get removed from a house register. The average duration of newly contracted marriages was eight months, and many marriages were dissolved the day after they had been registered.¹⁰

It is necessary to draw attention to a further aspect of Soviet gender policy – the policy of inculcating a new culture of intimate and marital relations. Alexandra Kollontai, the only female people's commissar in the early Bolshevik government, wrote in 1922 on this revolution in morality: 'In the Soviet period the old family is abolished, and this is a natural process. A new family arises, in which not blood relationships, but common work, a unity of interests, goals and tasks will join people together and make them true brothers in spirit.'¹¹

One of the first decrees of Soviet power equalised the rights of children born within marriage and outside it. The category of illegitimate child was removed from the statute book, and the attitude to 'unmarried mothers' changed. Women were working units, marriage became a personal matter, but motherhood was regarded as an independent social duty. The Bolshevik gender contract presupposed that to a large extent the parental task of child-rearing would be taken on by Soviet communal institutions. At the same time children had the right to maintenance payments from the father if the mother applied to the courts. It was difficult to establish real paternity. A mother's declaration was sufficient for a man to be deemed a father. The presumption that the mother was right was thus guaranteed by law.

Another measure of Bolshevik gender policy was unprecedented for that time: the legalisation of medical abortion in 1920. In order to have an abortion in a state medical institution, women had to be assessed by a commission, which would examine her material position, state of health, and social status, and would make an appropriate decision. This measure could be interpreted as an important step in affirming the reproductive rights of women. However, in the writings of Bolshevik ideologists of the time it was stressed that this law was forced upon them by the growth in the number of criminal abortions during the period of post-war chaos and the general crisis of morality. From the very outset, the Bolshevik government did not regard motherhood as an individual right and the private business of Soviet female citizens. Motherhood was declared to be a social civic duty. In the official discourse, the new woman was a citizen whose duty was not only to produce, but also to reproduce the population.¹² The reproductive obligation of women was presented not as the reproduction of the line or the family, but as the reproduction of Soviet citizens – members of the collective or the great labouring family of the Soviet people, building communism in conditions of hostile encirclement. In the second half of the 1920s, social and ideological policies of a new way of life were put forward, aimed at 'freeing women from the slavery of the kitchen' and collectivising daily life. The 'woman question' was seen by the Bolsheviks in terms of struggling against the patriarchal bourgeois family which oppressed women, and for the 'new way of life'.

Recognising the political importance of the 'woman question', the Bolshevik authorities used the categories of sex and gender (in this case, the category of women) in order to legitimise party and state control over the private lives of

citizens. The declared aim of liberating and enlightening women required that the practices of private life to which people had been accustomed be rooted out. This was the main strategic approach of the new Soviet state: to destroy the boundary between the private and public lives of individuals, to construct a collectivised Soviet citizen who would reject the values and habits of individualism for the sake of building the radiant communist future.

How did the state set about creating the new Soviet female citizen? In the new civil contract, the state organised political and social-educational institutions to involve the female proletariat (workers and peasants) in building communism. Political mobilisation was undertaken by departments for work among women (*zhenotdely*) organised by the Communist Party Central Committee and by party committees at various levels. The social policy was supported by *Okhranmatmlad* (a sub-department of the party Central Committee and of the Commissariat for protecting motherhood and children) which was in charge of gynaecological centres, nurseries, kindergartens and maternity benefits.

Gradually, this breaking up of structures, together with deliberate policy, changed ideas about and practices within family life. In theory, the family became the cohabitation of two economically independent subjects, united by feelings of love, comradeship and parental obligations, the fulfilment of which was supported by educational and social institutions. Such a union is easily dissolved. In practice, however, Soviet male workers could be mobilised by the state to fulfil urgent tasks in building communism, while the raising of the child was shouldered by the working mother, older family members and Soviet educational institutions. Overall, the Bolshevik policy of 'emancipation from the family' led to the weakening of marital ties and the creation of 'a new working woman', integrated into the Soviet labour collective.

The creation of gendered citizenship was an important part of these revolutionary transformations. Women were mobilised by the state into a system of social communist production. At the same time motherhood was supported by social policy, and the state constructed a contract between Soviet women workers and the new authorities. Official normative judgements defined parenthood primarily as a function of the mother and the state. Fatherhood was regarded as an economic duty. The tradition of alienating fatherhood, supported by state policy, dated from this period.¹³ Despite the declared political equality of the sexes, a citizenship polarised by gender was developing.

In Soviet historiography the mobilisation of women by the state to serve Soviet construction was presented as their emancipation and as the solution of the 'woman question'. New rights guaranteed by law, the growth in literacy among women, liberation from economic dependency upon the family – these were important (but not the only) results of the development of a gendered citizenship aimed essentially at the political mobilisation of women, underpinned by a gendered social contract between working mothers and the state.

Official action did not translate directly into everyday practice. Various gendered ways of life came into being as society adapted to state-determined policies. Categories of citizens defined as 'alien class' and 'exploiting' non-labouring elements

(kulaks, nepmen, traders, clerics, former employees and agents of the Tsarist police, former landowners and others) were restricted in their political and social rights. These outcasts had no voting rights, could not join trade unions, work for Soviet institutions or factories, and their children could not study at universities or serve in the army. They did not receive food ration cards and could not expect state support.¹⁴ The new citizenship, including the policy of mobilising and providing social support to women, was not extended to these strata. In order to attain full citizenship status, people from these strata used such strategies as disguising their social origins, as well as fictitious marriages and divorces. Their strategies of adaptation were based on the resources of (traditional) gender-marked upbringing of the pre-revolutionary period. The overall level of culture and education typical for these 'former' men and women (*byvshe liudi*) ensured that they were able to adapt.¹⁵

The effectiveness of state gender construction varied between different age groups among the first generation of Soviet citizens. The new tendencies in marital and sexual life spread first of all among proletarian youth. The state mobilisation of the population led to compulsory nomadism among Soviet citizens and broke down the traditional features of family and married life. The young urbanised population to a large extent gave rise to new forms of gender relations, but even here there were noticeable patriarchal survivals. The older generation, those deprived of their rights, peasants and certain categories of Soviet employees were the social groups among whom the traditional family and gender order predominated, and marriages were more stable. In everyday life this period was characterised by the intermingling of old and new ways of life, traditional and new modes of behaviour, a split between the generations and their respective moralities. Thus, during the first phase of Soviet gender policy, which had raised and, in its own fashion, resolved the 'woman question', women were to a large extent removed from the control of the traditional family and were ascribed the civil duties of working women and mothers. However, this new gendered citizenship policy, to be implemented by changing the law, by campaigns for the 'new way of life', and by debates in women's organisations, was never carried out in full. During the 1920s, in the daily life of many strata, especially in the countryside, the traditional gender structure was preserved, with its corresponding religious practices and patriarchal foundations. The forced Soviet emancipation was partial and fragmentary.

The consequences of Bolshevik policies for solving the 'woman question' were contradictory. The state, in creating a 'new Soviet female citizen' and in destroying the traditional family, risked losing control over the private sphere and citizens' reproductive behaviour. The state's gender policies were tightened up and re-examined in the context of the socialist modernisation of the 1930s.

The stabilisation of state-determined gendered citizenship: the 'working mother' (the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s)

We shall examine the next phase of state-gendered citizenship policy, which led to the stabilisation of a state-determined patrimonial contract of the 'working

mother'.¹⁶ Growing political repression impelled citizens to adapt in 'active' and 'passive' ways to the rights and duties strictly regulated by the state. Within the confines of their polarised citizenship, women and men developed new strategies for adapting to changing gender policies.

The processes of industrialisation and collectivisation, and the migrations and 'obligation to work' (*trudovaya povinnost'*) which accompanied them, substantially changed the nature of the family. Soviet citizens – men and women – were in many respects freed from traditional patriarchal family obligations and dependences. These were replaced by dependence upon the party-state and obligations towards it. Although the 1930s have been presented as a period of 'great retreat' from revolutionary family policies we do not think the case is so clear-cut.¹⁷ Firstly, state policies supported the new family as the primary unit of Soviet society. Secondly, in the countryside the policy of emancipating women continued: peasant women were encouraged to free themselves from the tyranny of their husbands and fathers and insist on their status as independent collective farmers, equal to the men.

At the same time, the gender policies and ideology determining the position of women as mothers and workers underwent significant changes. The traditionalism of gender ideology during this period was expressed in a growing polarisation between male and female citizenship. Purposeful support for motherhood, tightening of marriage laws and strict regulation of reproductive behaviour made citizens accountable to the state and to Soviet public opinion not only in the state-dominated public sphere, but also in the family and marital sphere.

Industrialisation was accompanied by new housing policies, which influenced models of marriage. The solution to the housing question in the period of wholesale peasant migration into the towns and shifting urban populations took the form of mass communalisation of housing and the construction of barrack-type accommodation.¹⁸ The communalisation of life reflected the fact that the private lives of citizens were becoming an object of day-to-day supervision and surveillance. To a considerable extent, the family ceased to exist as a private domain.¹⁹ Family life went on in full view of neighbours, communal society became a model of an extended quasi-family, in which the women performed traditional roles. The theme of sexuality was gradually squeezed out of public debate. A generation grew up which was characterised by hypocritical silence about its intimate experience, and this was seen as a social virtue. Sexuality had fewer and fewer chances of being a pleasurable practice.²⁰ The condemnation of free love was supplemented by state measures to control fertility and the legal conversion of motherhood into a compulsory civic duty for women. Abortion was banned in 1936 by a resolution of the USSR Council of People's Commissars and Central Executive Committee. At the same time, benefits were offered to single mothers and mothers of many children, the network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens was extended, and the penalties for non-payment of child maintenance were made tougher. A decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet delegitimised *de facto* marriages, made divorce procedures more complicated and prohibited determining the paternity of children born outside wedlock.²¹ These measures were intended to

strengthen marriage, support motherhood and a new Soviet womanhood, combining both traditional and emancipated aspects.

Since there was no contraceptives industry nor any professional sex education, women could be mobilised as a reproductive force, supplying the state with citizens. At the same time they were mobilised as workers: during the period of forced industrialisation, given the low labour productivity, the state used women as a labour resource. In the 1930s many aspects of social policy were turned around. Demographic and economic problems were tackled using proscriptive and mobilising measures. Many of the privileges enjoyed by women in industry – bans on night shift work and hard working conditions – were abolished.

Alex Dallin has written that the attitude of Soviet officialdom towards women in that period seemed to be somewhere between generators and milk cows. On the one hand, a woman was supposed to work in industry like a machine, and on the other, she was supposed to give birth like a cow.²² It was precisely at this time that the official discourse of the Soviet superwoman and its symbolic representations were developing. The formula of the double burden became part of the stereotype of women officially presented as 'normal', and internalised by succeeding generations of Soviet female citizens.²³

The ways in which this policy was carried out included women's movements initiated and controlled by the authorities. They were aimed, on the one hand, at getting women to master male professions, and on the other, at carrying out the functions of social motherhood. This dual mobilisation of women was legitimised through notions of civic duty and women's destiny. It should be recalled that we see citizenship not solely in terms of the actions of the authorities, but also in terms of the practices and strategies of the citizens who possessed these rights and obligations. In assessing citizenship in daily life, sociologists have distinguished between passive and active attitudes on the part of individuals towards the rights and duties laid down by the state. Whereas passive citizenship involves taking advantage of rights, benefits and privileges, active citizenship means initiative in taking part in administration, the political process and social movements.²⁴ Given the strict regulation of all spheres of Soviet life, and the bans on any form of open protest, we can speak of 'quasi-active' strategies and actions on the part of citizens. They involve 'the ploys by which weak people try to protect or assert themselves against each other, as well as against the strong. They involve projects of individual advancement as well as collective protest. In sum, they are the ways in which a person who is supposed to take orders rather than give them tries to get what he wants.'²⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, following James C. Scott, calls such behaviour 'subaltern strategies'. In a state-determined gendered order, gender-marked strategies of 'subaltern women' develop, using both formal opportunities and informal channels to attain their goals. Following Fitzpatrick, we can identify strategies of active and passive adaptation to changing gender policies. None of these strategies presupposed protest against state policies. On the contrary, Soviet female citizens pursued their aims using the rules of the game determined by the state. We shall examine these strategies more closely.

The strategy of active adaptation was connected, first and foremost, with the involvement of women in social movements initiated by the party and the state. These included the movement for women to master male professions (such as tractor drivers, pilots), the *Obshchestvennitsa* movement of socially active women and so forth.²⁶ Participation in these movements changed the horizons of many women, contributed to their social mobility and secured them new resources.

Obshchestvennitsa, a movement of wives of leading workers organised in the mid-1930s, embodied a traditionalist component of gender politics. In keeping with the new policies, the status of wives was exalted and raised. The ideology which regarded the housewife as an unorganised section of the population was replaced by the ideology of the Soviet wife as a support for the husband and family. Women were organised according to their husbands' place of work, which meant that they could be under the control of Soviet collectives. The movement was aimed at carrying out the policies of cultural revolution and transformation of daily life, but later on, in the immediate pre-war period, the priority changed to helping women master male professions. Participation in this movement raised the social status and competence of women.

Fitzpatrick has drawn attention to the fact that subaltern strategies were conflicting. In particular, the Stakhanovites incurred the hatred of most workers in so far as their productive achievements led to increased output norms. The position of the activist women met with even less approval. Women's strategies of active adaptation clashed with traditional stereotypes, which limited their spread. Another strategy of adaptation, which was very widespread, was the individual manipulation of gender-marked rights and privileges. Thus, for example, in the 1930s women began appealing to the authorities on a mass scale concerning family conflicts. This strategy rested on the traditionalist views which had been incorporated into Soviet ideology. The official interpretation positioned women as the bastion of the Soviet family, and offered opportunities to defend their interests through the state. In cases of family conflict, women were regarded as victims and the state rallied to their defence. The problem of polygamy received a great deal of attention in the mid-1930s, as can be seen from certain landmark legal cases. Appeals were distributed requesting help in tracking down missing husbands who owed maintenance payments. Women appealed to party organisations in cases of infidelity by their husbands, since the party presented itself as the guardian of the morals of Soviet citizens and the defender of women's rights.²⁷

Various versions of a passive strategy for adapting to changing gender policies were employed by almost all individuals and families. The kernel of this strategy was the strengthening of family ties and networks of friends and relations in order to survive. As Fitzpatrick has written: 'The uncertain and dangerous conditions of life in the 1930s seemed to make families stronger as their members drew closer together for self-protection.'²⁸ Women of various generations constituted the bulwark of family life. To describe this way of life, Rotkirch has used the concepts of *matrifocality*²⁹ and extended mothering, expressed in the maintenance of family

ties and obligations through inter-generational links between women – grandmothers, mothers and daughters.³⁰

In pre-war and post-war families, given the constant shortages of consumer goods, the traditional division of labour between the sexes was brought into play. Women knitted, sewed, cooked and organised daily life in a shortage economy – they acquired items of consumption through social networks. Men had their own specialisms. There was a need for their skills in traditionally male areas of household work: repairs, crafts and activities requiring physical strength. This meant that women were fulfilling a triple role: beside motherhood and employment they had to service their families in an almost professional manner as a civic duty.

Thus, the 1930s to the 1950s were a period in which women were mobilised to serve the state and party in different ways – as reproductive units and as labour power. This was when a new type of Soviet family was formed and strengthened as the building block of Soviet society, stabilising the state-determined contract of the 'working mother'. At the same time, it was in these conditions of repressive patrimonial politics that women developed 'subaltern strategies', in which both traditional and new gender resources came into play.

The crisis of state-determined gendered citizenship: the problematisation of sex roles from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1980s

In the late Soviet period the gender-marked definition of citizenship included the mass involvement of women in social production, while at the same time the role of 'voluntary' motherhood, supported by social policy, was strengthened. Women's fulfilment of these dual obligations (in the public and private spheres) became more problematic, and this was expressed both in discourse and in daily life.

In this period there was a limited liberalisation of gender policies, a partial restoration of private life in the personal sphere, and the development of a specific informal public sphere, that is, a discourse moderately opposed to the official one. The position of women, the 'role balance' underlying her rights and obligations as a worker and mother, became the subject of public discussion, particularly in the professional discourses of the social sciences.

The liberalisation of gender politics was linked, first and foremost, with the decriminalisation of abortion in 1955 and a strengthening of state support for motherhood. The 1968 family and marital code of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR) simplified divorce procedures and restored the possibility of establishing fatherhood in illegitimate births. In the labour legislation the number and variety of provisions granting privileges to women at work increased.³¹

The new gender policies allowed people to make their own decisions about childbirth. The state delegated control over reproductive behaviour to families (first and foremost women) and medical institutions.³² However, this policy was not reinforced by sex education, or the availability of reliable modern contraception. As a result, there developed a culture of birth control by abortion,

as demographers call it. Medical abortion became a mass experience and was the main mechanism for family planning. The alternatives to terminations were traditional methods of regulating fertility or the use of the contraceptives available, which were reputed to be unreliable and dangerous to women's and men's health.

The state pursued a pronatal social policy and advanced an ideology which equated 'proper femininity' with voluntary motherhood. There were numerous, albeit not very generous, benefits to pregnant women and mothers in the 1970s and 1980s, intended to promote childbirth. Thus an ideology was put forward of parenthood as motherhood and motherhood as the natural destiny of women – in other words, a naturalisation of women's role. However, the social infrastructure (medical and pre-school institutions, household services) did not meet the needs of families, thus obliging them to work out their own strategies for adapting to structural problems. The use of social networks and family links (especially inter-generational ones) became the everyday practice of Russian female citizens in carrying out the imposed contract of 'working mother'.

This limited liberalisation of gender policies was underpinned by a partial rehabilitation of the private sphere. This was linked in particular to the mass housing construction policies of the 1960s. Types of accommodation to a considerable extent determined the way people organised their daily lives, including the gender structure of their families. The new type of mass urban housing – the individual apartment – created new possibilities for organising one's personal life. In spatial terms, the family became an autonomous unit. Everyday intimate relations, child rearing and the organisation of the household were removed from the constant scrutiny of others and became a 'private matter', requiring the input of resources. Control over the 'correct' exercise of masculine and feminine roles was, to a far greater extent than before, delegated to the family and its immediate social circle. The family became a kind of 'competitor' with the state, leading to the problematisation of gender roles in public discourse.

The public discussion in the media in the late Soviet period concerning Soviet practices of masculinity and femininity turned out, in fact, to be a debate on the relationship between the public and the private in overcoming the non-antagonistic contradictions of socialism and in solving demographic problems.³³ In late Soviet discourse the inequality of men and women 'in daily life' was recognised, as was the need to overcome it.³⁴ In this period the type of urban family which had developed, in which the woman generally combined work with the duties of mother and wife, restricted childbirth. The fulfilment of the civic duties of motherhood became problematic.

The predominant interpretation of the family in official discourse was that of the 'basic unit' of society, in which there was a sexual division of labour. The woman had the main responsibility for bringing up the children and servicing the family. At the same time, in critical liberal discourse (in the social sciences and the press), problems were raised about this combination of the roles of mother and worker, the situation of single mothers and families with many children. The masculine

role also became an object of criticism. The impossibility of fulfilling the part of single breadwinner and protector was leading to a 'crisis of masculinity'.³⁵

Our research has shown that the late Soviet 'liberal' criticism of gendered citizenship was, in fact, patriarchal and reflected essentialist conceptions of masculinity and femininity to a greater extent than the official Soviet discourse.³⁶ This criticism was a camouflaged protest against the Soviet version of equal rights for the sexes, and a defence of a certain tradition which was perceived to have been destroyed by force. This tradition was presented as a practice of marked gender differences which had been 'wiped away' by socialism in order to mobilise 'human resources'.

Post-Soviet gendered citizenship: the appeals of neotraditionalism

We have been looking at the transformation of gendered citizenship as an aspect of ongoing processes of stratification. It is not only processes of class stratification which characterise Russian society today. Other social differences and inequalities are coming about, conditioned by non-economic factors, such as ethnicity, sex, age and civil status. The post-Soviet transformation has challenged the structural foundations of the Soviet emancipation of women, which had been supported by ideology and social policy. At the same time the practice of combining women's roles, which is rooted in everyday life and dictated by market conditions, has remained.

Citizenship is undergoing change, and the system of gender-marked rights, duties and practices is being transformed. The legal framework is being partially altered. In accordance with the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation and international law, a gender-balanced redistribution of parental duties is taking place in the system of family law. Institutions implementing social policies are experiencing the consequences of the budget deficit and market reforms. This means that their contribution to the welfare of Russian citizens is declining. At the present time new social forces are becoming involved in discussing gendered citizenship: political figures, social movements, the media, the church and educational institutions. Given the uncertainty of the state's gender policies, the system of gender-marked prescriptions is being determined by competing ideologies, struggling for moral dominance in articulating 'correct' masculinity and femininity. All kinds of gendered representations explicitly or implicitly hark back to some notion of 'tradition' which needs to be revived and to a 'natural' destiny of men and women. Various types of gender neotraditionalism, correlated with Soviet emancipation discourse, are vying for discursive hegemony. Moreover, there are different interpretations of tradition and of women's nature, which vary in accordance with their systems of reference (i.e., with what is regarded as tradition in public discourse). Within each discourse there are representations of masculinity and femininity with a moral and normative character. Henceforth, we shall refer to them as gender projects.

Let us give an example. In feminist discourse the model of woman as housewife, whose world is centred around being a dutiful wife, mother and housekeeper,

is regarded as traditional. This gender project is the ideal type for a normative bourgeois family structure with its characteristic division of sexual roles. However, it should be recognised that in the Russian context it is difficult to find empirical examples of this type of gender traditionalism. The mass experience of Russian women, both in the pre-Soviet and the Soviet periods was one of working, making a substantial contribution to the family budget, and combining various types of activity in the areas of production and reproduction. What in many Western feminist texts is regarded as the tradition of bourgeois society was the exception in the Russian context, an indicator of social prestige.

In our view, notions of gender traditions and gender models in the post-Soviet context also have their peculiarities. For our analysis of the debates over the position of the sexes during the post-1991 transition in Russia, we have identified two basic systems of reference for present-day Russian gender neotraditionalism: the liberal and the statist.³⁷

The liberal version of gender neotraditionalism rests on two principles: equal rights for men and women and the 'natural' differences between them. Essentially, it is a notion of gender-neutral citizenship. On the one hand, it is recognised that men and women have equal rights and may, therefore, take on different roles. They may become professionals, or look after the house, or combine various roles as they choose. On the other hand, it is asserted that naturally determined differences affect people's inclinations and determine the particular destinies of women and men. It is 'natural' differences which account for the phenomenon of the 'glass ceiling', the limits on the social mobility of women, who do not strive for public advancement on an equal basis with men. Overall, the social system reflexively limits women's career advancement, in that housework and childrearing are seen as a woman's role, exercised in the private and family domain, and not requiring state intervention. The core of this notion of gender-neutral citizenship in this case is the system of equal rights and obligations of men and women in the public sphere. In the mass media female images of businesswomen and housewives serve as models for liberal neotraditionalism.

Statist neotraditionalism also starts from a biologised view of gender differences. It is essentially a conception of gender-sensitised citizenship. Women are presented as a special category of citizens in need of a paternalist social policy. This ideology stresses that women have a gender-determined civil function – the demographic reproduction of the nation. Childrearing and support for households are regarded as matters of state interest, support and concern. It asserts that women suffer in the transformation period: if the state does not provide them with patrimonial support, they cannot be fully fledged working mothers, that is, fully fledged citizens. The core of gender-sensitive citizenship in this discourse is a system of social rights guaranteed to men and women, with the specific aim of enabling them to fulfil their 'social duty'. Models of statist neotraditionalism are advanced, first and foremost, in discussions of the social position of deprived strata: families with many children, the unemployed, employees in the military-industrial complex, migrants and so on.

Neotraditionalist projects of femininity

We shall look briefly at the main projects of neotraditionalist gendered discourse represented ideologically. These projects present normative practices for Russian female citizenship. These are projects, or models, of working mothers, housewives, and of sexualised femininity.

The model of the working mother is legitimised by the Soviet tradition, stretching over several generations, of mass women's employment, moral and economic responsibility for family life and naturalised motherhood (an exclusively female parenthood). It is represented in the liberal discourse of sex equality and is supported by the logic of market mechanisms. In the post-Soviet version the duties of the 'working mother' are not a civil obligation. The privatisation of motherhood and the removal of parenthood from the sphere of civic duties are combined with the 'privatisation' of work. This means that paid labour, in theory, also becomes a personal choice for women. The duty to participate in social production has been replaced by an economic need to provide for one's family, which has necessitated a more active role for women in the sphere of paid work.³⁸

The model of the housewife is legitimised by reference to a notion of the best life chances typical for the old Western middle class and the upper strata of pre-Soviet and post-Soviet Russian society. In the Russian context this project has never been based on women's mass experience, any more than the discursive project of men as the sole breadwinner in the family. The housewife's role features in this discourse in two ways. On the one hand, women in the middle and upper classes are presented in identical terms. On the other hand, there is the project of a desirable future for women workers with few qualifications and mothers obliged to work. The role of housewife ties in with the growing significance of the private sphere and the household, with the need actively to manage one's private sphere in post-Soviet market conditions. Woman as mother and manager of domestic life is a model image of a desirable future, unattainable for most families. Nonetheless, for a certain section of Russia's entrepreneurial class, the female role as housewife is becoming a mark of lifestyle status. Motherhood and nurturing remain basic attributes of the hegemonic discourse of femininity. This discourse is also based on religious values, which are increasingly being put forward in the post-Soviet public sphere.

Sexualised femininity as a hegemonic discourse is brought about by the commodification of sexuality, by which we mean the conversion of sexuality into a commodity. The commodification of sexuality expresses itself in the most diverse ways, from pornography and prostitution to marriage for material gain. The life chances of women are linked to her sexual attractiveness, which may be exchanged for social benefits and prestigious consumption as a result of a 'good deal'.

Apart from the dominant models, models of femininity have appeared in public discourse which deviate significantly from the only legitimate role, previously supported by Soviet policy, of the 'working mother'. These models are many and varied.³⁹ They all construct the social space of problematised gendered citizenship. Women's and human rights organisations, political parties, the church, the media,

professional experts and social scientists are all taking part in problematising and redefining gendered citizenship.⁴⁰

Male citizenship is also being problematised further.⁴¹ Society expects a solution to many gender-marked problems from the state, but the state's social policies are seen as ineffectual. In many strata nostalgia for the patrimonial and state-determined traditions of the Soviet model is growing. At the same time an ever larger discursive space is being conquered by models of femininity and masculinity which appeal to liberal neotraditionalism in their conceptions of gendered citizenship. For all this open competition between discourses appealing to different traditions, they are alike in their view that the practice of female citizenship has a biologically determined basis.

The neotraditionalist versions of gender polarisation in post-Soviet discourse, for all their attractiveness, can contribute to sexual segregation, discrimination between citizens on grounds of sex and the displacement of women into the private sphere. Hitherto this declared 'equality in diversity' has been an unattainable ideal. Only a developed civil society can enable it to be achieved.

Notes

- 1 B. Turner, 'Outline of a theory of citizenship', *Sociology*, 24: 2 (1990), 189–217; T. Marshall, 'Citizenship and Social Class', in T. Marshall and T. Bottomore (eds.), *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Polity Press, 1992).
- 2 N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997); R. Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspective* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); C. Pateman 'Equality, difference, subordination: the politics of motherhood and women's citizenship', in G. Bock and S. James (eds.), *Beyond Equality and Difference. Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 1992); S. Walby, 'Is citizenship gendered?', *Sociology*, 28: 2 (1994), 379–95.
- 3 A complete analysis would, of course, require that men's citizenship be reconstructed and compared with the category of women's citizenship.
- 4 A state-determined system of stratification displays the following peculiarities: the mode of production is monopolised by the state, the role of which continually increases; the economy is militarised; there is caste stratification of a hierarchical type, in which the positions of individuals and groups are determined by rank conferred by the state; there is no civil society or law-governed state, and there is a system of subjection and party rule. See V. V. Radaev and O. I. Shkaratan, *Sotsial'naya stratifikatsiya* (Moscow: Aspekt-Press, 1996).
- 5 I. Kon, *Seksual'naya kul'tura v Rossii. Klubnika na berezke* (Moscow: OGI, 1997); G. Lapidus, 'Sexual equality in Soviet policy: a developmental perspective', in D. Atkinson, A. Dallin and G. Lapidus (eds.), *Women in Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 115–38.
- 6 A. Rotkirch, *The Man's Question. Loves and Lives in Late 20th Century Russia* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Department of Social Policy, Research Report no. 1, 2000).
- 7 N. S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat. The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1946).
- 8 See the introduction by A. Kollontai to *Rezolyutsii Pervogo Vserossiyskogo Soveshchaniya Rabotnits* (Petrograd: Gosizdatel'stvo, 1920), 7.

- 9 See *Ibid.*, 5.
- 10 Yu. Shcheglov, *Komentarii k I. Il'f, E. Petrov, Dvenadtsat' stul'ev; Zolotoi telenok* (Moscow: Panorama, 1995), 455.
- 11 *Rezoliutsii*, 10.
- 12 At the same time men were seen as a separate category. Their duty was to defend the Soviet motherland, to be prepared for labour and defence, and for military and labour mobilisation.
- 13 S. Kukhterin, 'Fathers and patriarchs in communist and post-communist Russia', in S. Ashwin (ed.), *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 71–90.
- 14 See also Shcheglov, *Kometarii*; S. Chyukina, *Zhiznennye traektorii dvoryan v sovetskom obshchestve: Leningrad 1920–1930-kh godov*. Avtoreferat kandidatskoi dissertatsii (St Petersburg: F IS RAN, 2000).
- 15 See Chyukina, *Zhiznennye traektorii*.
- 16 We do not examine the special forms of gender mobilisation employed in wartime, as they deserve a separate study.
- 17 Timasheff, *The Great Retreat*.
- 18 Communal houses, in fact, were merely a utopia of the Bolshevik period, but the idea was implemented in the system of workers' barracks and hostels. The writers, Il'f and Petrov, described a hostel for chemistry students: 'The pink building with the attic was something in between a communal house and a feudal village... As we know from physics, a plywood partition is the best transmitter of sound. The large attic room was divided by plywood partitions into long slices, each five feet wide. The rooms were like pencil cases, the only difference being that instead of pencils and pens, they contained people and primus stoves.' I. Il'f and E. Petrov, *Zolotoi telenok* (Moscow: Panorama, 1995), 221–2.
- 19 See K. Gerasimova, 'Sovetskaya kommunal'naya kvartira', in *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal*, 1–2, 1998, 224–44.
- 20 Rotkirch, *The Man's Question*; A. Temkina, 'K voprosu o zhenskom udovol'stvii: seksual'nost' i identichnost', in *Mishel' Fuko i Rossiya* (St Petersburg: The European University, 2001), 316–44.
- 21 L. Zavadskaya (ed.), *Gendernaya ekspertiza rossiiskogo zakonodatel'stva*, (Moscow: BEK, 2001), 105.
- 22 A. Dallin, 'Conclusion', in Atkinson, Dallin and Lapidus (eds.), *Women in Russia*, 390.
- 23 I. Sandomirskaya, 'Kniga o rodine. Opyt analiza diskursivnykh praktik', *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, Special Issue, no. 50 (2001), 285.
- 24 Turner, 'Outline of a theory of citizenship'; Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*.
- 25 S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivisation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 26 The strategy of women's participation in state-initiated movements grew out of the movement of women delegates of the 1920s and 1930s.
- 27 S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 143.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 140.
- 29 This concept refers to families in which women are, in effect, in charge, taking the most important decisions.
- 30 Rotkirch, *The Man's Question*, 115–17.
- 31 Zavadskaya, *Gendernaya ekspertiza*, 106.
- 32 T. Baraulina, 'Moral'noe materinstvo i vosproizvodstvo zhenskogo opyta', in E. Zdravomyslova and A. Temkina (eds.), *V poiskakh seksual'nosti* (St Petersburg: D. Bulanin, 2002), 366–495.

- 33 The question of private vs. public yardsticks for assessing gendered citizenship is a problem which has been actively discussed in western feminist writings. It consists in the fact that publicly-declared equality stands in contradiction to persistent sex inequality in the private sphere and to the social rights offered to certain categories of citizens who benefit from social support – in this case, mothers. See B. Siim, *Gender and Citizenship. Politics and Agency in France, Britain and Denmark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*.
- 34 L. A. Gordon and E. V. Klopov, *Chelovek posle raboty* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972).
- 35 E. Zdravomyslova and A. Temkina, 'Krizis maskulinnosti v pozdnesovetskom diskurse', in S. Ushakin (comp.), *O muzhe(n)stvennosti* (Moscow: NLO, 2002), 432–51.
- 36 A. Temkina and E. Zdravomyslova, 'Die Krise der Mannlichkeit im Alltagsdiskurs', *Berliner Debatte*, 12: 4 (2001).
- 37 L. Popkova has identified similar versions in her analysis of women's political participation. See L. Popkova, *Political Participation of Women in Russia/Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition* (manuscript), and A. Temkina, 'Entering politics: women's ways, gender ideas and contradictions of reality', in A. Rotkirch and E. Haavio-Mannila (eds.), *Women's Voices in Russia Today* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishers, 1995), 206–34.
- 38 N. M. Rimashevskaya, 'Gendernye aspekty sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi transformatsii v Rossii', in I. V. Ryvkina and L. Ya. Kosals (eds.), *Sotsial'nye posledstviya rynochnykh reform v Rossii* (Moscow: 'Demografiya i sotsiologiya' series, vol. 17, 1997), 138–55.
- 39 Among the new gender projects related to various aspects of civil status are those of feminists, members of ethnic and sexual minorities, women who consciously reject motherhood, disabled women, victims of violence in combat zones, refugee women and so forth.
- 40 The questions of post-Soviet gendered citizenship and its redefinition in relation to national conflicts, wars, military service, migration and so on require special study. We can only list them here.
- 41 The problematisation of male citizenship arises in relation to discussions of demographic problems (the gender gap in life expectancy), self-destructive behaviour, health, violence, military liability and so forth.