Outraging the People by Stepping out of the Shadows

Gender roles, the ‘feminine ideal’ and gender discourse in the Soviet Union and Raisa Gorbacheva, the Soviet Union’s only First Lady.

Noraly Terbijhe

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Leiden University

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Everywhere in the civilised world, the position, the rights and obligations of a wife of the head of state are more or less determined. For instance, I found out that the President's wife in the White House has special staff to assist her in preforming her duties. She even has her own 'territory' and office in one wing of the White House. As it turns out, I as the First Lady had only one tradition to be proud of, the lack of any right to an official public existence.[1]

Raisa Maximovna Gorbacheva (1991)

[1] Translated into English from Russian. From: Raisa Gorbacheva, *Ya Nadeyus'* (Moscow 1991) 162.

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1. Introduction

I hope that someday someone will take the time to evaluate the true role of the wife of a president, and to access the many burdens she has to bear and the contributions she makes.[2]

- President Harry S. Truman.

On 21 September 1999 newspapers both in Russia and abroad payed tribute to the late Raisa Gorbacheva. The only First Lady the Soviet Union had ever known had passed at the age of 67. While Western media outlets published lengthy obituaries listing all Gorbacheva's accomplishments throughout her years, articles dedicated to her in Russian papers were of traditional Soviet nature, acknowledging her contributions to the Party and the country as a whole. One important aspect mentioned in both Russian and foreign articles was the fact that Gorbacheva managed to fulfil her position of the First Lady a country that did not understand what a First Lady was, as the concept did not exist in the Soviet Union.[3] Gorbacheva died as a result of her leukaemia, which was discovered only two months before. Though the pressures and accompanying stress she experienced towards the end of her life certainly did not help her situation. Since becoming the First Lady she became a controversial figure among her people and the criticism and even hatred towards her increased over the years. Upon hearing the news of Gorbacheva's sudden illness, she however received thousands of letters of support. These reportedly made her cry, saying: "I had to get sick with such a fatal illness to finally make people understand me."[4]

First Ladies are often misunderstood. This is also what Margaret Truman, daughter of American President Harry S. Truman, wrote in her book. She argues that the position of First Lady should be considered the second toughest job in the world, due to a non-existent job description and sky-high expectations. The First Lady does not receive the same respect her husband does, is often the subject of rumours and controversy as people tend to consider the First Family public property and – perhaps most importantly – whereas most presidents obtain their position because they hankered for it most of their lives, the First Lady has to come to terms with having

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[2] Robert P. Watson, *The Presidents' Wives: Reassessing the Office of First Lady* (London 2000) 19.
[3] - , 'She was First', *Vremya Novosteĭ*, 21 September 1999 in *Current Digest of the Russian Press* 51:38 (1999) 16-17.
[4] - , 'Biography', *The International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (The Gorbachev Foundation)*, n.d., https://www.gorby.ru/en/gorbacheva/biography/ (accessed 8 November 2019) and -, 'Gorbatschow fühlt sich schuldig am Tod seiner Frau', *Welt.de*, 13 March 2019, https://www.welt.de/newsticker/leute/stars/article114404210/Gorbatschow-fuehlt-sich-schuldig-am-Tod-seiner-Frau.html (accessed 1 October 2019).

to fulfil a position she did not choose.[5] Lastly, life at the centre of power can be very lonely. Truman remembers Bill Clinton once stating at the dinner table:

> *At one point during our evening of fine food and lively talk, he wryly suggested the place should be a line item in the budget as part of the federal penitentiary system. Hillary smiled in agreement to this presidential grousing.*[6]

Truman's reasoning is based on American First Ladies. Though it is safe to say that the lives of Kremlin wives during the Soviet era consisted of even more severe challenges. There was little to no tradition regarding First Ladies, which was perhaps seen as a Western affectation. For decades, ordinary Russians had no idea who the women standing next to the most powerful men in the country really were as the power apparatus in Moscow managed to keep the private lives of its top a secret.[7] To her own surprise, Russian writer Larissa Vasilieva was, thanks to her family connections and status as a writer, in 1991 granted permission to access the KGB files pertaining to the Kremlin wives. Her book *Kremlin Wives*, which provides information on all wives of the most prominent figures of the Soviet era including Raisa Gorbacheva, was the result. In its introduction she states:

> *If the lives the Soviet leaders led behind the wall are still a subject of fascination and mystery, those of their wives remain a complete enigma.*[8]

Today more information about the women behind the Kremlin walls is available to us. We know their lives consisted of freedom and repression, great privileges on the one hand and affairs, betrayal, fear for one's life and even suicide on the other. As Soviet custom considered it highly inappropriate for spouses of political leaders to perform prominent roles, the wives of the most important and powerful men in the country remained faceless creatures hidden quietly in the shadows. But all this changed when in the mid-1980s Raisa Gorbacheva entered the political arena. When she as wife of President and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev started accompanying her husband on trips both inside the Soviet Union and abroad, it send a wave of shock throughout the country. Not only was it extremely unusual for spouses of Soviet leaders to appear in public, but also her appearance and self-presentation were completely different from those who proceeded her. Reactions to Gorbacheva's break with Kremlin tradition concerning

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[5] Margaret Truman, *First Ladies: An Intimate Group Portrait of White House Wives* (New York 1995) 3.
[6] Truman, *First Ladies*, 3.
[7] Documentary: 'Gefangen im Kreml – Die russischen First Ladies', *ZDF*, https://www.zdf.de/dokumentation/zdf-history/gefangen-im-kreml---die-russischen-first-ladies-108.html (accessed 1 October 2019), Available on *YouTube* since 21 August 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2KQ5HBSkcY.
[8] Larissa Vasilieva, 'Introduction' in *Kremlin Wives* (New York 1992) 1.

the way women were 'supposed to act' varied into the extremes. While becoming an icon in the West, she was severely criticises and even hated by her own people.[9]

The opposite responses to Gorbacheva as the Soviet First Lady can be best explained through studying gender roles in the Soviet Union, which is what I aimed to do for this thesis. My research question was the following: How did Raisa Gorbacheva fulfil her role as the only First Lady of the Soviet Union and how did this correspond to the Soviet feminine ideal of the late-Soviet period? In order to successfully answer this research question, I immersed myself into both the life of Raisa Gorbacheva as well as gender roles and the gender discourse that prevailed throughout the Soviet era. My research method for this thesis has been an extensive literature review, for which my most useful primary source was Gorbacheva's own memoirs *Ya Nadeyus'* [I Hope]. In this book she describes her life both before and after becoming the First Lady through interviews with Soviet writer Georgi Pryakhin. Secondary sources I used include William Taubman's recent biography on Gorbachev titled *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* (2017), a book that not only provides much insight in the late Soviet period, but on Raisa Gorbacheva as well. Larissa Vasilieva's *Kremlin Wives* (1992) also proved to be extremely useful as it tells the personal stories of women at the centre of power – including Gorbacheva – and provides telling examples of how they were treated, what their perceived role in society was and how this varied throughout different time periods. I also included media excerpts from both Russian and foreign media outlets as media representation plays an important part in the shaping of the ideological platform of a country, including the regulation, control and support of a certain gender order.[10] Therefore, analysing the way Gorbacheva as well as the Kremlin wives that preceded her provides insight in the dominant gender discourse as well as the prevailing convictions concerning gender roles and the 'feminine ideal' of that time.

It is uncertain as to when the term 'First Lady' first came into use, varying from the year 1849, when American President Zachery Taylor's wife passed away and he in her eulogy called her 'our first lady for a half century', to the 1870s, when the term started to gain popularity.[11] The designation, which seems to have originated in the United States, is often used synonymously for the wife of a president as that this how the term is applied by Western media. It is however an unofficial title used for the wife of any non-monarchical head of state or chief executive.[12] During its sixty-nine years of history, the Soviet Union usually had a *de facto* leader who would hold the

[9] Robert Coalson, 'Gorbachev: 'Alone with Myself'', *Radio Free Europe*, 24 September 2009, https://www.rferl.org/a/Gorbachev_Alone_With_Myself/1830285.html (accessed 11 November 2019).
[10] Ekaterina Vikulina, 'Paternalistic images of power in Soviet photography', *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 9 (2011) 49.
[11] Watson, *The Presidents' Wives*, 7.
[12] 'First Lady' in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, retrieved 22 October 2019.

title of Premier or General Secretary, but who would technically not be head of state.[13] In the ideology of Vladimir Lenin, the country was led by a collective body of the vanguard party, but through Joseph Stalin's 'consolidation of power' the most powerful position changed from being in the hands of a group to those of one person: the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, a position synonymous to the leader of the Soviet Union. In March 1990, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev became the first President of the Soviet Union by adding the position to that of the General Secretary. He was the only person to occupy the office in the Soviet Union until he resigned in 1991.

The women who proceeded Gorbacheva can be referred to as First Ladies, because they were married to the country's leader. However, Raisa Gorbacheva was the first spouse to play an important role in her husband's political life since Nadezhda Krupskaya, the wife of the revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin. Because Gorbacheva made regular public appearances as a public figure and influenced presidential decision making, she should be considered the Soviet Union's only First Lady. Writing on Gorbacheva alone would however hardly be sufficient. In order to paint the complete picture, it was necessary to also research the lives of those women who walked the Kremlin halls before her as this teaches us about Kremlin tradition regarding the position of the leaders' spouses and enables us to acknowledge the persistence of these traditions. Without this context it would be impossible to understand the impact of Gorbacheva's actions. Furthermore, analysing this context makes it possible to demonstrate not only the ways in which Gorbacheva broke with tradition, but also those in which she stayed true to custom, at least to a certain extent.

The First Lady's actions do not only affect her, but the whole of society as she represents and serves as a symbol of womanhood in the country. The First Lady should be considered a mark of gender attitudes in society, which is why gender and the positions of a certain gender – in this case the female – make up a crucial part of this thesis. The literature review that follows provides an overview of the main developments in gender studies throughout the Soviet era, which serves as a foundation for the rest of this thesis. Following the literature review is a chapter dedicated to gender roles and discourse in Russia and the Soviet Union according to different time periods of the Soviet era. I examined the position of women of each time period through analysing both social economic circumstances and the dominant gender discourse. I also provide some insights in the life of the 'First Lady' of that time period in order to demonstrate how that First Lady mirrored – or deviated from – the image of womanhood of her time. In order to keep a clear overview, I decided to focus solely on wives of those Soviet leaders

[13] John A. Armstrong, *Ideology, Politics and Government in the Soviet Union: An Introduction* (New York 1967) 165.

who truly left their mark on Soviet society; Nadezhda Krupskaya (wife of Vladimir Lenin), Nadezhda Alliluyeva (second wife of Joseph Stalin), Nina Khrushcheva (wife of Nikita Khrushchev) and Victoria Brezhneva (wife of Leonid Brezhnev). With these analyses I focused on both these women's own experiences and their image and the ways – if at all – they were portrayed in the media in order to find out the extent to which these women acted accordingly to expectations put upon them by society. The third chapter centres around Raisa Gorbacheva and provides a clear overview of her life before and after becoming the First Lady, her experiences and how her actions influenced her image in the Soviet Union and abroad. Finally, I compare Gorbacheva's being and actions as the First Lady to the insights gained analysing gender roles in the USSR and Russia in order to successfully answer my research question in the conclusion of this thesis.

My overall purpose with this thesis is to shed a light on an often overlooked aspect of history, being the role of women in history. Like many other subjects concerning women, the impact of First Ladies on society is under-researched. Robert P. Watson, an American professor and former candidate for the United States House of Representatives stated that even though the First Lady can be considered the second most powerful position, research on the subject is inadequate.[14] Countless volumes and memoirs and research have been published in both Russia and abroad on the Soviet leaders, but these works – predominantly written by male authors – usually only briefly touch upon those women standing beside them. This may derive from the wide-spread assumption that First Ladies have – using Watson's words here – 'functioned as little more than a feminine window dressing to the office of presidency'.[15] This is simply untrue. And, as American professor of government Karen O'Connor e.d. argued in 1996:

> *The failure of political scientists and historians to consider the political role of first ladies neglects the role of a key player in the president's inner circle.*[16]

The fact that the subject of First Ladies – and Soviet First Ladies in particular as their lives were kept secret for decades – has not been more extensively researched, is both astounding as it is a shame. Not only do their stories offer great insights in and an alternative perspective on life at the centre of power, it also denies their political importance. Here a distinction should be made that is very important in regard to this thesis, which is the difference between formal and informal power and influence. The First Lady is a formal member of the presidential residency and she officially fulfils a role that is mostly ceremonial and symbolical. However, she also has

[14] Watson, 19.
[15] Ibid., 1.
[16] Karen O'Connor, Bernadette Nye and Laura van Assendelft, 'Wives in the White House: The Political Influence of First Ladies' in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26:3 (1996) 835-853.

informal powers, including exerting influence through being the president's unofficial advisor.[17] Truman emphasises the First Lady's significance by stating:

> *These days, as Hillary Rodham Clinton and other modern presidential wives have amply demonstrated, First Ladies are doing a lot. They have accomplished much both inside and outside the office, but the job remains undefined, frequently misunderstood and subject to political attacks far nastier in some ways than those any president has ever faced.*[18]

These words could not have been more fitting to Raisa Gorbacheva. Through this thesis I hope to create more understanding towards this remarkable woman and explain how she enraged her people by stepping out of the shadows.

[17] MaryAnne Borrelli, 'The First Lady as Formal Advisor of the President: When East (Wing) Meets West (Wing)', *Women & Politics* 24:1 (2002) 26.
[18] Truman, 5.

2. Literature review

During a 1996 international conference in Saint Petersburg, Yulia Zhukova of the Russian National Library held a lecture about the tools available at the time to write a history of women. According to her, the most significant problems she faced were the absence of research centres devoted to women's studies as the field was practically non-existent as well as the minimal development of Women's libraries and Archives in Russia.[19] In today's Russia, gender-related issues – like women's empowerment and overcoming discriminatory mass perceptions of lower social status of women – belong to the periphery of political interest and awareness, even though problems of gender and culture not only happen to be interrelated, but tend to compound; educational and professional segregation, lower salary levels for women, their under-representation in decision-making and overall gender asymmetry are pertinent to the cultural sector and apparent.[20] What is remarkable, is that among Russian scholars and cultural actors there is a widespread awareness concerning the underestimated potential of gender and culture oriented politics, but that despite multiple research efforts, the topics remain unclear for public and political consciousness. Even the very notions of 'gender', 'feminism' and 'culture' lack recognition in contemporary interpretations.[21]

The field of gender studies in Russia, like in the rest of the Western world, is rather young. After the universal suffrage revolution of the twentieth century, the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s promoted a feminist revision to challenge the accepted versions of history as they were known at the time. Feminist scholars worldwide perceived it their goal to question original assumptions regarding men's and women's attributions, to actually measure them and to report observed differences between the sexes.[22] The Soviet Union experienced a revival of the women's movement in the late 1960s, sparking a resurgence in the interest in women in pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union. By then, historians had foundations to build on, such as Elena Likhacheva's revolutionary study of women's education in Russia (1893) and S. S. Shashkov's survey of the history of Russian women (1898).[23] Early works on women in Russia in

[19] Helen Sullivan, 'Gender Bibliography: Introduction', *Slavic and East European Library*, 26 January 2006, http://cooper.library.uiuc.edu/spx/class/SubjectResources/SubSourRus/genderbib.htm (accessed 29 October 2019).
[20] - , 'Gender Equality and Culture (Russian Federation), *Informkultura Russian State Library*, n.d., http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/images/Informkultura_Russian_State_Library_Gender_Equality_and_.pdf (accessed 11 November 2019).
[21] Sullivan, 2006.
[22] Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender* (New York 1999).
[23] Elena Likhacheva, *Materialy dlia istorii zhenskogo obrazovaniia v Rossii* (Saint Petersburg 1893) and S. S. Shashkov, *Istoriia russkoi zhenshchiny* (Saint Petersburg 1898) in Barbara Alpern Engel, 'Engendering Russia's History: Women in Post-Emancipation Russia and the Soviet Union', *Slavic Review* 51:2 (1992) 309-321.

English were available as well, though these often lacked in scholarly rigor. That was until historian of Russian culture and professor of history at Georgetown University Richard Stites published his pioneering study in 1978. His book titled *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* proved extremely useful as it mapped the terrain other scholars would later explore into greater detail and from different perspectives. Overall the book opened up a new area of Russian studies.

Building upon Stites' study was American historian of Russia Barbara Alpern Engel among others. She wrote a multitude of books and articles on women in Russia including her solo books *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia, 1861 – 1914* (1996), *Women in Imperial, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Russia* (1999), *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (2000) and *Women in Russia 1700-2000* (2003). In 1992 she stated in an article that she felt part of a 'new generation of scholars that were personally as well as politically and intellectually motivated to seek 'our' past and to tell 'herstory'':

> *To correct the masculine bias of earlier accounts, we hunted though archives and published sources, looking for traces of women's experiences, trying to hear women's hitherto silent voices. [...] We questioned the nature and sources of patriarchal power and asked how being female shaped a woman's choices and activities.*[24]

According to Engel, most research stemming from this time period was placed in 'contribution history', a phrase coined by the Australian-born American historian and feminist author Gerda Lerner who wrote on the phenomenon of histories describing 'women's contribution to, their status in and their oppression by male-defined society' in her 1979 book.[25] Engel also noticed that – partly because of the intrinsic importance of the topics, but also because they left an accessible paper trail – most research focussed on either women of the intelligentsia or the Bolshevik attempt to liberate women after 1917. Some of her examples include Barbara Clements' *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Alexandra Kollontai* (1979), Robert McNeal's *Bride of the Revolution* (1972), Cathy Porter's *Fathers and Daughters: Russian Women in Revolution* (1976) and Gail Lapidus' *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development and Social Change* (1978). Engel declared that these works revealed hitherto unknown and neglected aspects of Russian women's experiences and that they contributed and were useful sources in the sense that they acknowledged the significance of women in Russian history. However, they primarily discussed the educated, the articulated and the radical and revealed almost nothing about the lives and

[24] Engel, 'Engendering Russia's History', 309.
[25] Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing women in History* (Oxford 1979).

experiences of ordinary Russian women. Overall they left the ways historians traditionally conceptualised and periodised Russia's past unchallenged.[26]

In the Soviet Union itself, the unbiased study of gender was complicated due to a multitude of factors. According to Irina Korovushkina, University professor and researcher in the field of cultural studies and historical anthropology, not only did censorship – of which the intensity varied between periods – prevent many works from getting published, the field of gender studies was also often used for purposes other than the enlightenment of the general public. In her article 'Paradoxes of Gender: Writing History in Post-Communist Russia 1987-1998' she explains that in the 1980s in particular, when the Communist Party struggled with declining popularity, authorities encouraged women's studies because it could be easily exploited in favour of the Soviet regime.[27] Research stemming from this period in time was mostly purposed towards building up a scientific background for the claim that Soviet women had more political rights and social and economic benefits than women in the West. Also, women's patriotism and heroic deeds during war and revolution were used in order to construct the idea of Soviet women as loyal citizens and active supporters of the Party's policy. Besides censorship and the exploitation of the field, Korovushkina names the division of subject matters between the disciplines in Soviet academia in which gender is an important factor.[28] Soviet history has been focused primarily on politics, military issues and class studies, subjects that are traditionally are considered 'masculine' whereas 'feminine' subjects such as those relating to everyday life, marriage and family and popular culture were labelled less important.[29] According to Korovushkina, this view persisted even throughout the period of glasnost and perestroika.

Carol Nechemias, Associate Professor at Pennsylvania State University, underlines Korovushkina's findings.[30] She states that the post-such as Soviet era did not break with the past in the sense that not only did the breakup of the USSR and the emergence of an independent Russia change little in respect to women's access to the power halls – Russian sociologist Olga Kryshtanovskaya's 1995 study demonstrated that of the two thousand members of Russia's political elite of the mid-1990s, women held just 3.9 percent of the responsible government posts, despite making up 44 percent of the workers in the state apparatus - women who did reach top political positions still were appointed in the 'feminine' spheres of social policy and

[26] Engel, 310.
[27] Irina Korovushkina, 'Paradoxes of Gender: Writing History in Post-Communist Russia 1987-1998', *Gender & History* 11:3 (1999) 571.
[28] Ibid, 572.
[29] E. S. Ryabkova, 'Zhenshchinȳ I zhenskiĭ bȳt v SSSR 1950-1960 v Sovetskoĭ I sovremennoĭ Possiĭskoĭ Istoriagrafii', *Istoriya Rossii*, 16:4 (2017) 671.
[30] Carol Nechemias, 'Politics in Post-Soviet Russia: Where are the Women?', *Demokratizatsiya*, n.d., 201.

culture.[31] The resemblances with the situation that American professor of Political Sciences Gail Lapidus' described in her 1979 book, are striking. Lapidus demonstrated that at the time not only were women rare in high-level state office, they were largely 'confined to the 'feminine' spheres of policy'.[32] Nechemias provides two possible explanations for this phenomenon. The first is given by one Russian commentator in 1999 stating that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) considered social policy and culture areas where 'women could ruin things and no great harm would be done'.[33] The second – and more common – explanation stems from women's existing connection to 'compassionate issues'; while men protect the fatherland, women should protect the children, elderly, disabled and the underprivileged in Russian society.[34]

Although the glasnost era (1985 – 1990) did not change much about gender stereotypes, it did enable the field of gender studies to develop. Documents and facts previously locked away in the archives became available to historians, making it easier to break away from the traditional narrative and allowing the field to move further away from the former Soviet paradigm. New research was able to point out women's significant roles in cultural, social and political life in Russia, even before the revolution and during this time names were brought up that were erased under the official Soviet histories, such as the wives of Russian rulers and noblemen and their influence on politics. Korovushkina describes this development as follows:

> *In publications that demonstrated a radical departure from the Soviet master-narrative, woman was represented not as a collective being but as an individual, a unique personality, whose life was important per se without any connection to a man, a party or an idea*.[35]

This new focus on the private rather than public events and ordinary rather than heroic brought about a rapid development in the fields and subjects that were previously considered non-historical, such as anthropology and the history of everyday life. One author briefly mentioned earlier in this review as the author of *The Life of Alexandra Kollontai* whose work fits well within this new approach is Barbara Evans Clements, Professor of History Emerita at the University of Akron, Ohio. She aimed to correct the highly propagandised and government-controlled images of Soviet women through her books *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*

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[31] Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley, California 1979) 214-224 and Olga Kryshtanovskaya, 'Zhdem soviu Margaret Tetcher', *Argumentȳ i faktȳ* 39 (1995) 10.
[32] Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*.
[33] Ol'ga Kholyachenko, 'Blondinkam Rossii', *Moskvicha* 42 (1999) 4 in Nechemias, 'Politics in Post-Soviet Russia', 201.
[34] Nechemias, 201.
[35] Ibid.

(1991), *Daughters of Revolution: A History of Women in the USSR* (1994) and *Bolshevik Women* (1997), which draws on a data base of more than five hundred individuals.

During this time period ideological taboos on forbidden subjects were removed, resulting in new studies including research on the history of sexuality and prostitution. Awareness concerning gender inequalities in the USSR including job discrimination, the exclusion of women from decision-making levels, women's 'double burden' (having to combine paid and domestic work) and patriarchal societal and family structures increased.[36] The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to further pluralization and diversification as gender found a place in cultural studies, a field that bloomed in the post-perestroika years.[37] According to Engels, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the focus within gender studies broadened, the questions grew more multifaced and the methodologies more diverse. For instance, more recent works do treat the lives of lower class women. However, Korovushkina emphasises that even in more recent works, gender in Russia is still approached differently from Western practice in the sense that it advocates dialogue rather than a power struggle and coordination between men and women rather than competition. According to her, this approach should be understood as a rational choice in present-day Russia, a society striving for coherence and unity.[38] And Engel states that in the field of social history, as in every other field of Russian history, there still is a persistent tendency to assume that the masculine experience is the universal one, which complicates the problem of interpretation and makes it difficult to shift the focus to women.[39]

What makes gender studies particularly interesting with regards to the former Soviet region, is that – other than in the Western world – Soviet women were emancipated without challenging the basic premises of patriarchal structure.[40] According to Korovushkina, a concept that applies to both the Soviet Union as well as Post-Soviet Russia is the 'Paradoxes of Gender', the phenomenon that instead of fighting patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes concerning gender, they are encouraged by both men and women. Before the revolution, Russian society can be described as purely patriarchal; women were to serve men and younger men in turn were subordinated to the older men in the community. This patriarchal society was transformed in the twentieth century under the norm of state-led industrialisation as women were getting involved in industry and were officially granted equality. However, as Libora Oates-Indruchová, Professor of Sociology of Gender at the University of Graz, Austria, states in her 2005 essay:

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[36] Alexander Kondakov, 'An essay on feminist thinking in Russia: to be born a feminist', *Onati Socio-legal Series* 2:7 (2012) 35.
[37] Korovushkina, 'Paradoxes of Gender', 574.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Engel, 311.
[40] Korovushkina, 569.

patriarchal values, gender hierarchy and the traditional division on labour within both the family and society very much stayed part of the Soviet mindset. She explains:

> *As state-ideology was built on the opposition to consumer capitalism, the proclaimed abolition of all capitalist relations should have included also the gender structures and, by extension, the whole patriarchal discourse. […] But not only did state-socialism not dismantle the patriarchal discourse, its oppositional position to the official ideology placed this discourse into an empowered position of resistance, and therefore of something desirable, from the perspective of popular sentiments representing the state ideology*.[41]

This 'Paradox of Gender' explains why feminism in the Soviet Union and Russia is inherently different from its Western counterpart. Furthermore, Nechemias amplifies that that in present-day Russia, the belief in the 'essentialist' or biologically based arguments about gender differences is ever strong:

> *Women are typically viewed as she is – despite her work force participation – devoted to family and hearth, deriving her primary meaning and happiness in life from motherhood. The serious pursuit of a career is considered an 'act of egoism' incompatible with being a 'real woman'*.[42]

According to Soviet and Russian philosopher and sexologist Igor Semyonovich Kon, Soviet attitudes to gender roles and sex differences could be defined as 'sexless sexism'. This paradox of Soviet society entails that despite sexual differences and specific needs of men and women for the sake of 'real gender equality', Soviet society remained profoundly sexist.[43] The widespread belief in essentialist convictions concerning gender roles, that include ideas of femininity that are usually related to biology and concern psychological characteristics such as nurturance, empathy, support and non-competitiveness, should be considered an important explanation for the absence of women in political leadership today.[44] This absence of women in power positions has started to gain more and more attention and according to Nechemias, in Russia this reveals continuity with the Communist past due to the following reasons; Firstly, during the Soviet era women were mostly included as 'symbolic figures in symbolic institutions' (councils or legislatures) which led to women serving as propaganda rather than policymakers. Throughout history, the role of women in society has repeatedly varied according to political conditions and

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[41] Libora Oates-Indruchová, 'From Raisa to Hillary: gender discourse in political speeches and selected news coverage of the Perestroika and early transition years' in *Mediale Welten in Tschechien nach 1989: Genderprojekten und Codes des Plebejismus* (München 2005) 59.
[42] Nechemias, 215.
[43] Larissa Remennick, 'The Terro Incognita of Russian sex: Seven decades of socialism and the morning after', *The Journal of Sex Research* (1996) 384.
[44] Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on The Politics of Bodies* (New York 1995).

discourse, for the purpose of serving the interest of those in power, and Soviet women were certainly no exception.[45] Nechemias states that this led to women not being respected as political forces, still making it hard for Russian women to be respected in positions of power today. Secondly, due to Communist legacy, the populace also had virtually no experience with women holding serious political office as party secretaries at the ration level and above were usually male and third, communism left a residue of negative public attitudes towards quotas as during perestroika quotas increasingly drew fire as an anti-democratic and discredited element of the communist past, making it hard for women's organisations to gain support for measurements such as establishing a set percentage of women on a party's list of candidates.[46] Today, women who make it to the top with only a few exceptions stay in office for brief periods of time and are often viewed as following in the footsteps of particular patrons.[47] Usually a position is vacated by the death of a spouse or by filling a vacuum created by the physical or mental disability of the former office holder. Other routes to the top include pursuing professional careers often within the fields of social policy and culture, via the Soviet *nomenklatura*, a category of people within the Soviet Union who held key administrative positions in the bureaucracy or lastly, via family connections. Overall however, as Russian political scientist Nadezhda Shvedova noted in 1999: 'Democracy in Russia still has a masculine face'.[48]

This literature review demonstrates that gender- and culture- oriented politics have been complicated throughout Soviet history due to a multitude of factors. Not only were studies in the field exploited by the Soviet regime for its own benefit and did it enforce censorship preventing progress from being made, Soviet history overall labelled 'feminine' subjects as inferior. Other than in the Western world, Soviet women were emancipated without the challenging of the basic premises of patriarchal structure, resulting in the so-called 'Paradoxes of Gender': instead of deconstructing the patriarchal system, it became enforced by both men and women. Additionally, the increased support of essentialist beliefs concerning gender differences resulted in a Soviet variant of feminism that is inherently different from feminism in the Western world. The dissolution of the Soviet Union did little to change the overall attitude towards gender

[45] Nicola-Ann Hardwick, 'Reviewing the Changing Situation of Women in Russian Society', *E-International Relations Students*, 20 December 2014, https://www.e-ir.info/2014/12/20/reviewing-the-changing-situation-of-women-in-russian-society/#_ftn22 (accessed 11 November 2019).
[46] Nechemias, 214-215 and Taubman, 320 on quotas during the Soviet era: quotas send down frown above had for instance determined how many '*kulaks*' (wealthy farmers) to exile. Many innocent people were exiled, only because people rushed to fulfill these quotas and the same thing happened during the purges of 1937, with the difference that now the quotas were set for a number of people to be executed.
[47] Ibid., 202.
[48] Nadezhda Shvedova, 'The Challenge of Transition: Women in Parliament in Russia', *Women in Politics: Beyond Numbers*, 21 December 1999 http://archive.idea.int/women/parl/studies2a.htm (accessed 15 October 2019).

differences large due to communist legacy. Understanding the predominant attitudes to gender roles in the Soviet Union and now Russia is crucial for the rest of this thesis as this will allow us to grasp attitudes towards the country's most visible woman: the First Lady.

3. Gender roles and discourse in Russia and the USSR

A chicken is not a bird, and a woman is not a person.[49]

- Traditional Russian saying

The traditional Russian saying above indicates a tradition of misogyny and a tendency to marginalise women in Russian traditional culture. Which, as Stites illustrates in *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, is rather accurate.[50] In his book, Stites describes how in the early nineteenth century all activities and movements of Russian girls born in wealthy families were guarded by their fathers and when of age, he would chose a man for her to marry after which her function would be to care for her husband, oversee domestic affairs and – most importantly – bear and raise children. One article of the 1836 Code of Russian Law stated that a wife was obliged to conform to her spouse's wishes while she lived 'under his roof', to cohabit with him and to accompany him wherever he happened to go or be sent, the one exception being when a husband was exiled, in which case a wife could choose whether or not to follow him. Overall, the status of gentry women in pre-revolutionary Russia was comparable to that of a landlord's serf in the sense that she had almost no identity of herself. Escaping from marriage through divorce was virtually impossible and even if she would be to succeed, the lot of an unmarried woman was dreadful as she was considered the lowest of the low, indicated by another well-known saying from this time that stated: "*Ne zhenat, ne chelovek*" ("*Not a wife, not a person*").

Life was particularly hard for women at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Due to economic hardship, many women fled to cities to seek work, often ending up in factories where they worked long days, earned even less than their male colleagues and were objected to sexual exploitation while being separated from their children. Nonetheless, like in the rest of Europe, the so-called 'woman question' did not emerge from the female masses at the bottom, but among gentry women, who until the 1860s were the sole beneficiaries of the limited facilities for female education, though these facilities really only prepared their students for their future roles as wives and mothers as anything beyond that was believed to merely 'distract the pupil from her main purpose'.[51] Russian feminism was born as early as in the 18th century when Peter the Great, inspired by Western Enlightenment and the significant role of women in the French Revolution as symbols of liberty and democracy, enforced a loosening constrictions concerning education

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[49] Elizabeth A Wood gives this saying as an example of an everyday phrase that indicated a nearly unbridgeable gap between men and women.
Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, IN 1958) 16.
[50] Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, NJ 1931) 7.
[51] Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia,* 4.

and personal freedom of women.[52] A new class of educated women was formed, which can best described as Russian feminists, though they themselves did not use that term. This early day feminism focussed much more on charity than bringing about fundamental change in women's lives and it was only accessible to aristocratic women, but it did provide these women with experience in leadership as well as it nurtured a feeling of self-respect and it aroused a consciousness of women's ability to function in public life.[53] In the years leading up to the Russian Revolution, lower-class women, inspired by socialist ideology but feeling neglected, ignored and marginalised by male socialists, established socialist all-women unions for female factory workers and in 1905 tensions resulted in an uprising followed by some liberation of the tight restrictions put on women as well as the creation of a national parliament (Duma).[54] And eventually in 1917, women's gathering in a mass protest on International Women's Day led to the toppling of the tsarist regime and eventually to the creation of the first socialist state under the Bolsheviks.

When the Bolsheviks came to power, they held a stereotyped and ambivalent view of women, believing that the ordinary woman was a conservative who could be an enemy of the revolution as well as a victim of an oppressive society in need of liberation. They believed their ideal, revolutionary woman already existed, but that she was massively outnumbered by those who would need to be transformed.[55] The idea of the 'poor Russian woman doomed to crushing labour, male tyranny, endless childbearing and an early death' had been formulated by populists in the nineteenth century and the Bolsheviks accepted this explanation, though they also had negative attitudes towards women stemming from the ancient belief in women's 'natural passivity'.[56] Many radicals – including the Bolsheviks – believed that beside long-suffering and faithful, women were also apathetic, religious and ignorant, beliefs that were underlined by women's absence in political activism, the fact that they did not join trade unions in large numbers, attended church more than men and were often illiterate.[57] However, this became a self-fulfilling prophecy as is it usually was *because* of women's perceived backwardness that they were excluded in both language and behaviour from positions of responsibility within

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[52] Edith Saurer, Margareth Lanzinger and Elisabeth Frysak, *Women's Movements: Networks and Debates in Post-Communist Countries in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Cologne 2006) 365.
[53] Stites, 68.
[54] Rose L. Glickman, *Russian Factory Women: Workplace and Society, 1880 – 1914* (Berkeley, CA 1984) 243 and Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild, *Equality and Revolution: Women's Rights in the Russian Empire, 1905-1917* (Pittsburgh, PA 2010) 147.
[55] Clements, 2-3.
[56] Ibid., 5.
Examples that demonstrate this view can also be found in: Nadezhda Krupskaya's, *Zhenshchina-rabotnitsa* (n.p. 1901), Inessa Armand's, *Kommunisticheskaya partiya i organizatiya rabotnits* (Moscow 1919) and Alexandra Kollontai's, *Sotsial'nye osnovo zhenskogo voprosa* (Saint-Petersburg 1909).
[57] Ibid., 6.

associations and their participation was complicated due to responsibilities at the home.[58] Because women had fewer opportunities than men, they were much more likely to maintain in contact with tradition and therefore stay 'backward'.[59] So the Bolsheviks did not acknowledge the causes of women's passivity, but they were convinced that when the poor, ignorant woman learned that she could end her suffering by revolting against the established order, she would be able to break the chains of her submissiveness. No longer a threat, but an asset to the revolution, she would become a 'new woman'. [60] German socialist August Bebel described the concept:

> *The woman of future society is socially and economically independent. She is no longer subject to even a vestige of domination and exploitation; she is free, the peer of man, mistress of her lot.*[61]

It should be emphasised however, that this independence that formed the defining characteristic of the new Soviet woman was an independence in which she would voluntarily chose to advance social well-being. In essence the ideal woman would be an individualist whose actions nonetheless contributed to the collective welfare.[62] The Bolsheviks had taken the concept of the new woman from Western Europe and blended it with Russian ideals to shape their feminine ideal. This model proved to be a useful instrument to the regime as in approving this antithesis of the passive, obstructionist '*baba*', the Bolsheviks declared the traditional conceptions of womanhood and therefore traditional roles obsolete.[63]

The supportive comrade

Nadezhda Krupskaya, the wife of revolutionary leader Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (better known under his alias 'Lenin') was the complete embodiment of the feminine ideal of the early-Soviet years. Krupskaya used to compare herself to the Russian countryside, not in need of bright colours. Becoming of age in a wealthy family, her mother became increasingly worried that her daughter, who made absolutely no effort to make herself appealing to men, would never find a husband. In *Kremlin Wives*, Larissa Vasilieva describes Krupskaya:

> *Her face was plain, but her lips were full, perhaps evidence of a passionate nature, though few would have dared to suggest this of her. She has protruding, wide-spaced eyes whose heavy lids gave her face a sleepy expression. Her forehead was broad, and her straight hair was parted in the middle and drawn into a bun at the nape of her neck. A few wisps escaped onto her cheeks.*

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[58] Anne E. Gorsuch, ''A Woman is Not a Man': The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928', *Slavic Review* 55:3 (1996) 640-641.
[59] Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 15.
[60] Clements, 6.
[61] August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism* (New York 1879) 343.
[62] Clements, 8.
[63] Ibid., 19.

Her figure was shapeless, but her bearing suggested that she had attended a good high school for girls. Her hands were elegant, but her neglected nails suggested someone more interested in action than in talk.[64]

Growing up wealthy but surrounded by injustice, the young Krupskaya became more and more involved in revolutionary activism.[65] The revolution became her life's purpose and she soon pitied her married friends who 'enslaved themselves in marriage' and 'threw away their talents to a man'. Needless to say, Krupskaya had no desire to get married. That was however until she first met 'the man from the Volga' (nickname for Lenin) at a secret debate held under the guise of a Shrovetide pancake party. This encounter in 1894 sealed her faith. She lived, worked and dreamt of the revolution and Lenin became the embodiment of her dream.[66] Soon after their first meeting, Lenin was exiled to Siberia and Krupskaya was arrested and sentenced to six months in prison for her role in the St. Petersburg strike movement. While in exile he wrote her a letter asking her to be his wife, to which her response was a simple "why not", confirming the widespread belief that she would have accepted anything he proposed.[67] After all, she trusted him implicitly and would go to the end of the earth for his cause, asking nothing for herself and accepting whatever role he chose for her.[68] After marriage Krupskaya kept her maiden name, which should be seen as a protest against the patriarchy, though throughout the years her feminist approach to life faded. Lenin reportedly had an extraordinary talent for directing female energy towards a greater goal and Krupskaya, who fought by Lenin's side for 25 years for the revolution and the liberation of women, gradually turned into Lenin's shadow as she learned to agree with him on everything.[69]

Official Soviet culture was to cast an aura of sanctity around Krupskaya's life as she perfectly embodied the role that the Bolsheviks envisioned for women in their new society. Women were made equal to men and they were allowed to be revolutionaries, but at the same time they were expected to act as men's faithful assistants. The image of Krupskaya as her husband's faithful friend who never contradicted him or spoke negatively of him, while also being a passionate revolutionary and self-sacrificing and supporting wife, was exactly what the Bolsheviks wanted the new woman to be like.[70] And so, Krupskaya often appeared in Soviet newspapers. Communist magazine *Kommunistka* for instance, featured her consistently and prominently. Though whereas the iconography of her leader husband increasingly presented him as a larger-

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[64] Vasilieva, 'Honest Nadezhda' in *Kremlin Wives*, 1.
[65] Ibid., 8-9.
[66] Ibid., 18.
[67] Ibid., 19-20.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 25-26.
[70] Vikulina, 53-54.

than-life, godlike figure raising his hand and pointing in the direction of the bright future, she was presented as the 'comrade in a skirt'; sober, grey and with minimal references to sexuality.[71] Krupskaya's image played a significant role in the creation of the Soviet heroine who was above all else a fighter, willing to dedicate her life to the cause of advancing communism. Often of lower-class origin, the Soviet heroine had fought her way out of the slavery that was a woman's lot, usually because the revolution had 'shown her the truth'. She then would have gone to work for the cause, distinguishing herself by her bravery, selflessness and her modesty (*'skromnost'*, meaning that she lacked the vanity commonly attributed to women). This last factor stemmed from the idea that in a society that claimed to be concerned with reducing gender differences, fashion and cosmetics, generally used by women to enhance and emphasise their feminine features, became more and more inappropriate.[72]

Among ordinary people, Krupskaya's image as a 'saintly lady', sparked sarcasm. Because she was a fierce defender of everything Bolshevik, was uncompromisingly tough (for example, she continued her revolutionary work even while being tormented by typhoid) and lacked the desire of becoming a mother, she was considered masculine by the old standards. Not only was her 'masculine' character ridiculed, her modest appearance was as well. Comments such as; "Krupskaya, the model of a faithful wife? With those looks, did she even have a choice? Nobody but Lenin would have liked her!" and "Lenin, faithful? Don't make me laugh!" were common at the time.[73] Rumours of Lenin supposedly being unfaithful started to sound more and more convincing when he became infatuated with French-Russian communist politician and feminist Inessa Armand, with whom he had long been in correspondence with and eventually met in 1909. There were persistent rumours about the relationship between Lenin, Krupskaya and Armand, but most evidence indicates that the two women became friends and worked well together, placing the revolutionary cause above all else and Krupskaya reportedly prided herself on her ability to 'rise above petit-bourgeois conventions of jealousy and marital fidelity'.[74] In 1917, Armand travelled with Lenin and Krupskaya in famous 'sealed train' from their place of exile in Switzerland back to Russia for the revolution. Once arrived in Petrograd, Lenin was received a hero, while the two women stood a few steps below him on the station platform, looking up adoringly while listening to his words.[75]

Though the list of Krupskaya's activities as a revolutionary was endless, in Soviet historiography she was always described as her husband's appendix, referring to her exclusively as 'the wife' or

[71] Vikulina, 'Paternalistic images of power', 51-54.
[72] Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Woman's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity* (New York 1999) 66.
[73] Vikulina, 55.
[74] Ibid., 44-45 and Vasilieva, 34.
[75] Vikulina, 40-41.

'colleague' of Lenin. She continued her work even after Lenin died in 1924 and continued her attempts to implement his ideas, though most of her efforts were in vain. Joseph Stalin, whom Lenin shortly before he died had deemed ill-suited to be his successor, had bypassed Lenin's testament and taken over nonetheless and he despised the outspoken widow. At one point he reportedly stated in reference to Krupskaya:

> *If she doesn't shut her mouth, the Party will appoint old Elena Stasova [an old Bolshevik comrade of Lenin] as Lenin's widow in her place!*[76]

On the evening of 26 February 1939, Nadezhda Krupskaya invited friends over to celebrate her seventieth birthday. Stalin did not attend the party, but sent her a cake. Later that evening Krupskaya was stricken with severe food poisoning and rushed to the hospital, where she died the following morning. Stalin's hate for vocal women was an indicator for the feminine ideal that would become the norm under his rule, though before he took power, the Bolsheviks silenced women in other ways. After gaining power in 1917, the Bolsheviks had granted women the right to vote, full access to education, the right to do heavy labour and they were encouraged to enter the lower, local levels of power.[77] Marriage was removed from the hands of the church, divorce became obtainable, illegitimate children were granted the same rights as legitimate ones and in 1920 abortion was legalised, making the Soviet Union the first country to do so. Overall, socialism promised greater social, political and economic equality, but the Soviets never succeeded in fulfilling that promise.[78] On paper, Russian women in 1918 became equal to men, but in practise their fate worsened by the revolution, at least in the short run. Their newly gained right to vote did not mean much under the Communist Party's monopoly on power, revolution and civil war had taken away their men and destroyed their fragile family businesses and food shortages and poor housing made women's traditional responsibilities considerably heavier.[79] Overall, women were granted rights that could not be adequately applied to in the new system and women started to complain to the Bolsheviks:

> *You deceived us. You told us there would be plenty, but the opposite is true. Life is only growing more difficult.*[80]

[76] Vasilieva, 75.
[77] Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York 1976) 166 and Vasilieva, 'The Woman Question and Men's Response' in *Kremlin Wives* (New York 1992) 10.
[78] John M. Echols III, 'Does Socialism Mean Greater Equality? A comparison of East and West Along Several Major Dimensions', *American Journal of Political Science* 25:1 (1981) 1.
[79] Barbara Evans Clements, 'The Birth of the New Soviet Woman' in *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, IN 1985) 220-237 in Engel, 318.
[80] S. Smidovich, *Rabotnitsa i krest'yanka v Oktyabr'skoĭ revolyutsii* (Moscow, Leningrad 1927) 43.

The Bolsheviks had also promised to abolish the individual family in order to liberate women, but in reality this restructuring was minimal, despite the efforts of Bolshevik feminist Alexandra Kollontai. In 1919 Kollontai had also established the *Zhenotdel* (The Women's Bureau) in order to organise working women, but many other Bolsheviks hardly concealed their contempt for it. Because women were considered a possible threat to the revolution, they could gain respect from their male comrades through sacrificing themselves for radical causes, but when women would pursue a feminist cause, men were ambivalent.[81] Overall, traditional values and attitudes of male supremacy not only survived, but were reinforced within the newly established Soviet society, the traditional domestic division of labour was not problematised and women's work just simply was not considered a priority.[82]

During civil war, most attention was dedicated towards military tasks while work in education or other social services was downgraded. As a result, the task of organising women was left almost exclusively in the hands of the Zhenotdel. And even then, often the argument rose that work on 'backward and unresponsive women' would only be valuable funds wasted.[83] In the 1920s, the new woman came under attack from within the party itself as two initially unrelated debates changed the feminine ideal; a discussion concerning sexuality resulting in the rejection of the nineteenth-century doctrine of 'free love' and the marriage law reform of 1926, which in effect gave blessing to the nuclear family that the Bolsheviks initially promised to dissolve. These changes were part of a syncretism in progress between Bolshevik ideology and traditional Russian values that in the 1930s resulted in the emergence of a modified feminine ideal. The ideal Soviet woman under Stalinism was 'an equal citizen and a loyal worker while also being a chaste wife and mother'. 'The Stalinist mother' had lost most of her autonomy – the defining characteristic of the new woman – and rather than rejecting or abandoning family life, she embraced it and performed it perfectly.[84]

According to Clements, it would be too simple to accuse the Bolsheviks of manipulating the feminine ideal to suit their own purposes ("The Bolsheviks did not praise the new woman's individualism during the civil war to simply break it down and abandon it as soon as conformity to their government became desirable"[85]). The transformation can be best explained though disagreements among the Bolsheviks themselves over the extent to which female emancipation

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[81] Engel, 316-317 and Linda Harriet Edmondson, *The Feminist Movement in Russia, 1900 – 1917* (Stanford 1984).
[82] Chris Corrin (ed), *Superwoman and the Double Burden: Women's Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (London 1992) in Oates-Indruchová, 'From Raisa to Hillary', 60.
[83] Ibid., 7.
[84] Clements, 22-25.
[85] Ibid., 22.

should lead to changes in sexual morality and family structure. These disagreements were however only acknowledged by the 1920s and whereas before, moderates had been content leaving the definition of emancipated women to the Bolshevik feminists, now, after the war crisis, the Bolsheviks were able to turn their attention to peacetime problems and began arguing that widespread divorce and 'promiscuity' could form a threat to the success of the revolution. Though they initially promised the abolition of the family, most Bolsheviks now believed that the family was a bastion against anarchy and that in order to maintain this stable factor, the preservation of women's nurturing roles within the family were crucial.[86] The family was now considered the 'foundation of the State' and within this foundation, official rhetoric emphasised the role of the mother much more than that of the father.[87] As another explanation for the resurgence of traditional values regarding women's place in society Clements names the growth of authoritarianism throughout soviet society. Historically, authoritarian government has depended on patriarchal values and has prised order and hierarchy over individualism.[88]

The hardworking mother

The alteration of the ideal of Soviet womanhood from revolutionary heroine to Stalinist mother illuminates the changes in Soviet policies on female emancipation.[89] After the death of Lenin in 1924, Stalin (born: Joseph Dzhugashvili), assumed leadership over the country and soon introduced 'Socialism in one country', a theory entailing that instead of aiming for a world revolution, the Soviet Union should strengthen itself internally as the Soviet Union had, according to Stalin, 'fallen behind more advanced countries by fifty to a hundred years'.[90] Through Five-Year Plans, the Soviet Union underwent rapid industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation resulting in disruptions in the food production resulting in both the famine of 1932-1933 as well as the death of tens of millions of people through Stalin's purges. This period of socioeconomic mobilization was characterised by, among other things, an intensification of women's labour in both the productive and reproductive spheres.[91] From the 1930s on forward, in the midst of chronic food and housing shortages, Soviet women shouldered the so-called 'double burden', combining industrial labour with domestic duties including feeding their families and bearing and raising children. The priorities of 'socialism in one country' ruled out any remaining commitment to the realisation of social services the Zhenotdel found necessary

[86] Ibid., 25
[87] Oates-Indruchová, 60.
[88] Clements, 23.
[89] Ibid., 3.
[90] Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (London 2004) 273.
[91] Thomas Schrand, 'Soviet 'Civic-Minded Women' in the 1930s: Gender, Class and Industrialization in a Socialist Society', *Journal of Women's History* 11:3 (1999) 127.

for women's emancipation and in 1930 it was abolished.[92] Conservative social policies were reinforced to enhance social discipline which included a strong focus on family units and motherhood. And in order to provide a steady supply of future workers, in 1936 women's right to abortion was revoked, leaving many to subject themselves to dangerous back-alley abortions.[93]

Before Stalin climbed the party ranks, he had been married to Ekaterina Svanidze, a Georgian woman who had died of tuberculosis in 1909 and had left him with their one-year old son Yakov. Soviet revolutionary Leon Trotsky later described Ekaterina as a 'young, uneducated girl', though she actually was educated at home by governesses. Bolshevik psychology simply determined that anyone from the countryside must necessarily be poor and uneducated.[94] On her death Trotsky wrote:

> *After visiting London for a congress, Koba's [affectionate name for Stalin] beloved, half-ignored Kato [Ekaterina] had died 'in his arms' […] Koba was heartbroken. When the little procession reached the cemetery, Koba pressed a friend's hand and said: "This creature softened my heart of stone. She died and with her died my last warm feelings for people".*[95]

In the summer of 1917 it had become urgent for Stalin to find himself a wife. Not necessarily because he longed for a loving woman to come home to, but because he had nowhere to live due to housing shortages.[96] Stalin's mother advised her son to marry a pretty girl from the Georgian countryside again and Stalin did agree it would be nice to find someone with whom he could speak in his own language, but it was out of the question. A simple Georgian girl would be no wife for the future leader of the people's government, surrounded by powerful, intellectual women like Krupskaya.[97] He found his wife-to-be in the young Nadezhda Alliluyeva, who at 16 years old was little more than a child. She was the daughter of friends of the Lenins and years earlier, Stalin had saved the girl's life in Baku when she had fallen into the water after playing on the dock. He had pulled her out just in time. On Stalin's future wife Vasilieva writes:

> *Nadezhda. A sweet little girl, slender and graceful, was in many ways the image of Stalin's ideal woman. She was pretty, clever, young, the daughter of a true Bolshevik, unspoiled and untouched. […] Nadezhda was a blank page on which he could write whatever he liked.*[98]

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[92] Lapidus, 103.
[93] Wendy Goldman, 'Women, Abortion and the State, 1917 – 1936' in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley, CA 1991) 243-267.
[94] Vasilieva, 'The Despot's Wife' in *Kremlin Wives*, 2-3.
[95] Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London 2003) 25.
[96] Vasilieva, 3.
[97] Ibid., 3-4.
[98] Vasilieva, 6.

The fact that she was underaged, making their relationship illegal and him guilty of corrupting a minor under the 1918 Family Code he later endorsed himself, did not seem to bother the 39-year old Stalin, demonstrates that clearly he did not apply the same criteria to himself as he did to other people.[99] The couple got married in 1918 and had two children together, Vasily (born in 1921) and Svetlana (1926).[100] They misunderstood each other from the start. She was interested in politics and wanted to be a serious Bolshevik, believing that women who did not work were just *baba's*. Stalin on the other hand wanted a *baba.* He strongly disliked independently minded women and just wanted a woman who would just listen, obey and support him.[101] Stalin listened to his wife, who proved to be an efficient, tireless worker whom Lenin entrusted with the most secret documents, but Stalin, who expected his wife to share the information with him, was disappointed when she refused out of admiration for Lenin.[102] Her strongmindedness that he perceived as stubbornness infuriated him and soon he completely excluded her from political matters.[103] He also forbade her to have visitors at the residence out of fear for political intrigues. Meanwhile, Stalin himself was having affairs with several other women, most of them being fellow revolutionaries or their wives.

Disunity has always been the main reason for the overthrow of individual leaders and Stalin must have been aware of the importance of unity within the elite as a determinant of the survival of authoritarian regimes. He accentuated the gender division and polarised concepts of masculinity and femininity and laid a stronger focus on traditional family units in order to create the strongest foundation possible for his rule.[104] Marxist visions of social equality for women were abandoned and now had come to mean simply that women had the opportunity to do manual labour like men and to support them in their politics. Vasilieva writes:

> *There could be no thought of women expressing their concerns, whether emotional, social or political*.[105]

British feminist and political theorist Carole Pateman once argued that 'to explore the subjection of women is to explore the fraternity of men', through which she meant that the exclusion and devaluation of women can contribute to men's own definition of self.[106] Stalin became a stronger leader by silencing women and Stalin's treatment of his own wife set the tone for other women

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[99] Ibid., 11.
[100] Oleg Yegorov, 'In Stalin's shadow: how did the lives of his family turn out?', *Russia Beyond The Headlines*, 24 November 2017, https://www.rbth.com/history/326826-stalins-family-in-his-shadow (accessed 26 November 2019).
[101] Montefiore*, Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 7.
[102] Ibid., 35.
[103] 'The Despot's Wife' in *Kremlin Wives*, 17.
[104] Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge 2012) 4.
[105] Vasilieva, 'Empty Bed, Cold Heart' in *Kremlin Wives*, 1-2.
[106] Gorsuch, 'A Woman Is Not a Man', 650.

in the collective leadership. We now know that some prominent Party figures – including Molotov, Voroshilov and Kaganovich – did share ideas and political decisions with their wives, but always in the intimacy of their own households. No Kremlin wife's opinion was ever welcomed and those who challenged this fact were promptly arrested.[107] Molotov's outspoken wife Polina Zhemchuzhina – a friend of Nadezhda Alliluyeva's - for example, was accused of treason in 1949 and sent into internal exile where she remained until Stalin's death in 1953. And the strong-minded and self-educated Ekaterina Kalinina, wife of President of the Soviet Republic Mikhail Kalinin, in 1924 fled from her life in the Kremlin to the Altai region where she became a fierce critic of Stalin. Upon her return she was arrested for 'being a Trotskyist', an obvious move of Stalin to keep the president under his thumb.[108] Kalinin regularly received letters begging him to release detained loved ones, to which he now had to reply:

> *"My dear friend. I'm in the same position! I can't even help my own wife – there's no way I can help yours!"*[109]

It became the norm for women to simply be quiet and completely fall back into their serving roles as wives and mothers. Alliluyeva was a mother, but had no desire to be a housewife, and to her husband's frustration, the children ran wild. [110] Young as she was, Nadezhda wanted to study and enjoy her life, but she was surrounded by people in their forties and fifties who were distrustful and obsessed with power.[111] Her nerves became increasingly strained and she became more and more prone to hysterical attacks.[112] Stalin was often rude and unjust to her, ignoring his wife and son for days on end, but – as was expected of a supportive Bolshevik wife - she never told anyone.[113] When she stood up for herself, for example after seeing her husband flirt with other women, she would be criticised. This reaction that can be explained through the principle of '*partiinost'* (partymindedness), implying that the Party did not just come before family, it was the über-family.[114] A statement perfectly embodying this concept was made by Russian revolutionary Sergei Kirov who argued that: "A true Bolshevik loves his work more than his wife".[115]

After Lenin's death, Stalin orchestrated a popularity campaign to increase his influence over the Party. His portraits were carried through the streets and everyone loved, feared and respected

[107] Vasilieva, 'The Woman Question and Men's Response in *Kremlin Wives*, 10-11.
[108] Ibid., 25.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Montefiore, 60.
[111] Vasilieva, 'The Despot's Wife' in *Kremlin Wives*, 21.
[112] Ibid., 23.
[113] Ibid., 21.
[114] Montefiore, 14.
[115] Ibid.

their 'great leader'; why should she not stand by him and show her husband some support as he set about tackling his many enemies?[116] By the autumn of 1927 Alliluyeva had reached her limits:

> *Nadezhda was often ill and depressed. (…) Seizing rare moments of family peace to try to reason with Stalin, she would inevitably be told that these were not women's matters and would be send away to plan the evening's menu instead. His insults to her over dinner were worse than a slap in the face. She would flush and jump up silently from the table. Terrible fights would follow*.[117]

She began siding with her husband's opponents, going completely against Bolshevik philosophy which considered individual needs to be subsumed by the needs of society and expected couples think and act in complete unison. [118] Alienated from her husband, Nadezhda grew increasingly convinced that he could be Stalin's own daughter, and thus a sister to her own children as her mother – who had had many lovers throughout her youth – had been with Stalin for a while. In the days leading up to her death, the now 32-year-old regarded herself as damned.[119] In 1932 she shot herself, leaving behind her eleven-year-old son and six-year-old daughter. The suicide could not be announced publicly, because it would be interpreted as a political protest. Instead, her death was announced to be the result of appendicitis, a lie signed by doctors.[120] The obituary that appeared the next morning in *Pravda* stated:

> *We have lost a dear, beloved comrade with a beautiful soul. A young Bolshevik, filled with strength and boundlessly dedicated to the Party and the revolution, is no more. […] Unceasingly modest and vigilant, Nadezhda Sergeyevna selflessly served the cause of the Party, demanding much of herself […] The memory of Nadezhda Sergeyevna, dedicated Bolshevik, wife, close friend and faithful helper to Comrade Stalin, will remain forever dear to us*.[121]

It is easy to detect the feminine ideal of the time from this obituary; a devoted Bolshevik, modest, selfless and self-sacrificing. Alliluyeva was presented as a sexless creature dedicated only to the Party and revolutionary work. The truth was that she had not been a perfect Bolshevik wife and the severe criticism she endured for that continued after her death. "How could you do this?", her mother shouted to her late daughter at the funeral. "How could you leave the children?". Polina Zhemchuzhina agreed, stating it had been wrong of her friend to 'leave

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[116] Vasilieva, 26-27.
[117] Ibid., 28-29.
[118] Ibid., 30-31 and Vasilieva, 'The Personal Has No Significance' in *Kremlin Wives*, 3.
[119] Vasilieva, 49.
[120] Montefiore, 94.
[121] Vasilieva, 'The Depot's Wife', 70-71.

Stalin at such a difficult time'. Overall people sympathised with Stalin, whom his 'hysteric, crazy and most of all selfish' wife had left all alone.[122] Meanwhile the 'mourning husband' did not attend his wife's funeral, though official reports stated he did.[123] After the death of his wife, Stalinism continued to glorify female workers, but in the higher echelons of power there was no representation of women at all.[124] One woman who did appear in the press on a regular basis was cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova. She had proven the power of the 'weaker sex' by passing all the same physical and intellectual tests men were subjected to became a symbol for gender equality in the country. Nadezhda Alliluyeva had not appeared in the Soviet press at all and ordinary Russians had no idea who their First Lady had been.

The woman of the people

The Second World War produced a new wave of women's labour mobilization as, once again, women took over from their men who had left for the battlefield. During this time period many women obtained higher positions and actually were admitted to leadership and decision-making. However, when the war ended and men returned, women had to make way for them again. Overall, many scholars concluded that the post-war years marked a revival of pre-war conservatism after a short period of temporary liberalization and that not much had changed for women between the 1930s and 50s.[125] Female labour was essential to post-war reconstruction and it became crucial that Soviet women 'do it all' in order to rebuild and repopulate the USSR.[126] Later, the woman of the fifties would be praised for her selflessness as she 'helped out wherever society needed her', while the women themselves modestly declined the praise, stating they just 'did what they had to do'.[127] The Soviet feminine ideal of the working mother that became highly promoted in the post-war period in many ways corresponded with the ideals in other belligerents of World War II, because these countries were confronted with labour deficits and declining birth rates as well. But as the Soviet Union found itself in a Cold War with the United States, Soviet gender practises were used as 'evidence' of socialism's superiority to the capitalism. The magazine *Soviet Woman* (*Sovetskaya Zhenshchina*) for example attempted to gain support for the idea that productive labour leads to self-actualization by presenting women in the West as 'captive housewives'.[128] In reality, many Soviet women would have liked to stay

[122] Ibid., 44.
[123] Ibid., 36.
[124] Vikulina, 54.
[125] Engel, 319-320 and Barbara Evans Clements, *Daughters of Revolution: A History of Women in the USSR* (Arlington Heights, IL 1994), 81, 91, 112.
[126] Alexis Peri, 'New Soviet Woman': The Post-World War II Feminine Ideal at Home and Abroad', *The Russian Review* 77 (2018) 631.
[127] Oates-Indruchová, 63.
[128] Ibid., 621.

home and raise their families, but life's reality simply left them no choice.[129] They had to keep working as one (man's) salary usually was insufficient to sustain their families.[130] Western women often worked beside their husbands as well in order to support the family, but their salaries usually provided them a higher standard of living instead of mere survival.[131] The Cold War was largely a contest over deeply gendered values and ways of life. American media popularised an image of Soviet women as 'graceless, shapeless and sexless' in order to discredit not only communist women, but communism itself. US war correspondent Oriana Atkinson for example emphasised women's 'drab' appearance and their 'shockingly bad' clothes and cosmetics:

> *Soviet mascara smudged so badly that Moscow women looked like fugitives from a clown troupe and Soviet permanents made their hair resemble agricultural contour ploughing*.[132]

Soviet media tried to battle the stereotypes about their 'coarse' women, but while Soviet leaders were fascinated by elitist, haute couture that signalled prosperity, they struggled between the exclusivity of high fashion and the Soviet virtues of modesty and accessibility they preached.[133]

After Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev became the new Secretary General. On the 20th Party Congress in 1956 he delivered his famous 'Secret Speech' in which he denounced Stalin's purges and introduced a less repressive era better known today as 'the Thaw'. Censorship was released and millions of prisoners were released from the Gulag. The revisionist character of this time period impacted women in the sense that some natalist legislation was rescinded. In 1955 abortions for medical reasons were legalised, which in 1968 would be extended to all abortions, following Western European policy. In the mid-1960s, the state liberalised divorce procedures as well, though new limitations would be introduced in the late 1960s. The Thaw also brought about a more relaxed view on consumerism and beauty shops, selling perfumes and cosmetics, now became available to Soviet women.[134] The feminine ideal mostly remained consistent: the ideal Soviet woman had the same feminine bearing, talent for balancing professional and domestic duties and possessed an instinctual devotion to peace due to her nurturing nature. The representation of women in Soviet media however did change. As the focus did no longer lay on

[129] Beth Holmgren, 'Toward an Understanding of Gendered Agency in Contemporary Russia', *Signs* 38:3 (2013), 536.
[130] Informkultura Russian State Library, n.d.
[131] Alexandra Costa, 'Raisa Gorbachev a Role Model for Soviet Women?', *The Washington Post*, 13 December 1987, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1987/12/13/raisa-gorbachev-a-role-model-for-soviet-women/79b8ed59-5b5e-4ca9-9c5e-b7b0d9eb3819/ (accessed 28 November 2019).
[132] Peri, 'New Soviet Woman', 635.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Susan Reid, 'Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev', *Slavic Review* 61:2 (2002) 233.

rebuilding the country, instead of strong, 'masculine-looking' women, magazines now presented more traditionally feminine and elegant-looking girls.[135]

The First Lady on the other hand could hardly be described as 'elegant'. Nina Petrovna Kukharchuk was the second wife of Khrushchev and had been with Khrushchev since his first wife Yefrosinia had died of typhus in 1922. She was an educated women, coming from a family of wealthy peasants, and together they had three children. The Thaw changed the image of power and as the First Secretary Khrushchev presented himself as an ordinary human being capable of showing emotion. Along with that, the First Lady was presented as a 'woman of the people'. She was 'just an ordinary woman' who did not flaunt her wealth, even though the First Family lived comfortably and economic disparity was acknowledged. Unlike Alliluyeva, Khrushcheva did accompany her husband on work trips abroad. In 1959 she went along on a trip to the United States in order to show the 'human face of the Soviet Union', but the Americans were mostly shocked to see the First Lady wear simple, old dresses with floral patterns. Her shapeless dresses could not contrast more against Jacky Kennedy's expensive costumes. Reporters described the scene with snide observations, such as:

> *Khrushcheva looks like a grandmother who just came out of the kitchen, where she fried cutlets, except that she managed to remove her greasy apron*.[136]

And *Hearst*-columnist Dorothy Kilgallen wrote:

> *For heaven's sake. Couldn't the woman have stopped in Paris to pick up a couple of decent dresses?*[137]

In reality Khrushcheva was wearing a silk suit and the fact that she was almost twice Jacky's age, of course making her look older, wasn't mentioned. Nonetheless, the American people liked Khrushcheva for her 'cheerful personality' and 'motherly manner'.[138] Soviet newspapers named her 'mama Nina', '*matryoshka'* (referring to the famous Russian doll) and '*babushka'* (grandmother) as she looked like a typical Soviet grandmother. Khrushcheva was the personification of the feminine ideal of her time. Despite speaking five languages she gave up her career as a teacher in favour of her husband's and she did whatever the Party told her to do. Overall, she deluged modesty. When asked questions by the press on her position, her answer

[135] Ryabkova, 'Zhenshchinȳ I zhenskiĭ bȳt', 675.
[136] Mariya Alekhina, 'Perestroĭka ne mogla bȳ poĭti ot vozhdya, v sem'e kotorogo ne bȳlo ravnopraviya', *Novaya Gazeta*, 20 September 2019, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/09/20/82046-perestroyka-ne-mogla-by-poyti-ot-vozhdya-v-semie-kotorogo-ne-bylo-ravnopraviya (accessed 9 December 2019).
[137] Albin Krebs, 'Nina Khrushchev Is Dead at 84', *The New York Times*, 22 August 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/08/22/obituaries/nina-khrushchev-is-dead-at-84-widpw-of-former-soviet-leader.html (accessed 7 December 2019).
[138] Ibid.

would simply be that she was 'just a wife, a mother and a grandmother'. On the trip to America she did not try to impress anyone. In fact, few people even remember her being there at all. However, to Khrushchev that also was not important. What was, was that a message had been sent to the West that the Soviet Union changed after Stalin while not offending the sensibilities of the Soviet people.[139]

In 1964, Khrushchev was ousted out of office and he and his wife were ordered to leave their house and dacha and move into a small apartment while having to survive of a pension of 400 roubles per month. Khrushcheva's death in 1984 went by unnoticed as only one newspaper briefly reported on the fact referring to her by her maiden name and describing her as a 'personal pensioner'.[140] After Khrushchev was replaced by Leonid Brezhnev, his Thaw was reversed and replaced by (what Gorbachev later named) the Era of Stagnation, an era that was to continue under Brezhnev's successors Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko. The Brezhnev administration was characterised by conservativeness and with that, the First Lady again disappeared off the stage. Brezhnev's wife was born in 1908 as Viktoria Denisova in Belgorod, a city close to the Ukrainian border. The couple married in 1928 and had two children. Her relationship with Brezhnev was described loving, but old-fashioned as she during her husband's years as General Secretary rarely appeared in public.[141] She was not featured in pictures and even in a compilation of the family archive – published by Soviet magazine *Ogonyek* on the occasion of his 70th birthday – her pictures were absent.[142] Her husband claimed his wife 'did not like the attention' and that she was 'unpolitical', reportedly being perfectly content with her staying out of his politics while he did not interfere with her domestic work. Like Khrushcheva's, Brezhneva's death in 1982 went by unnoticed and she was soon forgotten. As the 'First Lady' Brezhneva however had fulfilled her role according to the feminine ideal of her time. They both helped their husbands and did what was expected of them, while mostly staying out of their limelight.

The stable factor in unstable times

From the 1960s on forward, gender differences in Soviet Russia acquired the status of scientific truth. Nevertheless, after the death of Stalin, alternative interpretations of women's roles were beginning to be heard and the debate on the woman question was revived and 'second wave feminism' emerged, stemming from the conviction that the old projects of women's liberation

139 Costa, 1987.
140 Krebs, 1984.
141 Vitaliĭ Moskvin, 'Pokhoronȳ Brezhnevoï', *ZN.ua*, 14 July 1995, https://zn.ua/POLITICS/pohorony_brezhnevoy.html (accessed 17 December 2019).
142 Vikulina, 54.

were now irrelevant.[143] Although the professionalisation of women's labour increased and their educational level equalled that of men by the 1980s, most women did not hope for a career and agreed to work for lower wages, because their salary in the family was considered 'supplementary'.[144] Women's increased desire to stay home and focus on raising their families resulted into the wide-spread belief that the focus of gender equality should not be on treating men and women the same, but emphasizing their inherent differences and that femininity should not only be emphasised but also highly valued.[145] These ideas were reflected into the feminine ideal that prevailed towards the end of the Soviet era, which overall was a combination of her dedicated and hardworking grandmother of the revolution and the loving and maternal, keeper of the family hearth.[146]

The period of perestroika was accompanied with a more objectified and sexualised attitude towards women, which according to Czech President at the time Václav Havel should be understood as a 'manifestation of the residual patriarchal discourse in the newly emerging consumer-capitalist conditions.[147] Another explanation can simply be found in the introduction of freedom of expression and information which provided new means to share ideas and express creativity. The breakdown of the Soviet regime brought Russian women their sexual liberation. Under socialism they often had to endure involuntary sex under the constant threat of unwanted pregnancy and abortions under humiliating circumstances. They also had felt forced to use sex as a trade currency in exchange for meagre goods or aid, all within a society that declared itself to be 'sexless'.[148] However, their new-gained sexual freedom was immediately transformed into social anarchy. Russian philosopher and sexologist Igor Kon wrote on this in 1995:

> *Instead of sexuality becoming individualised, more private and intimate, it is being deromanticized, commercialized and trivialized.*[149]

Perestroika allowed feminist thinking to break its way into the public debate and glasnost broke the stern ideological silence on women's issues such as abortion, rape and the lack of contraceptives, though the topics were not analysed in depth.[150] But with the collapse of the Soviet Union, patriarchal discourse, of which the existence may have been obscured by state-

[143] Engel, 320 and Carole Ferrier, 'Is Feminism Finished?', *Hecate* 29:2 (2009) 6.
[144] Informkultura Russian State Library, n.d.
[145] Kondakov, 'An essay on feminist thinking', 36.
[146] Clements, *The Birth of the New Soviet Woman*, 2.
[147] Oates-Indruchová, 65.
[148] Remennick, 'The Terro Incognita of Russian sex', 384.
[149] Igor Kon and James Riordan, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia: From the Age of the Czars to Today* (New York 1995) 267.
[150] Mary Buckley, 'Glasnost and the Woman Question' in *Women and society in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge 1992) 203.

socialism, got free reign.[151] The dissolution of the USSR also led to a whole new set of expectations put upon women as all of Soviet Russia experienced an identity crisis of which a gender crisis was an important aspect.[152] According to Korovushkina, this crisis seemed to affect men the most as they were compelled to continue to perform according to the traditional role of breadwinners in a situation that simply did not allow them. She argues that whereas men were dependent on their income for their masculinity, this was not the case for women and therefore, they experienced less pressure.[153] Oates-Indruchová however argues the opposite by stating women found themselves in a much more insecure position, because the demands of perestroika were addressed to them equally as to men, but at the same time they were told to spend more time with their families and 'fulfil their duties as women' by providing stability in these unstable times. Once again, women during the age of perestroika had to carry a double burden, but now more than ever it was unclear as to how this should be achieved.[154] Adding to this insecurity regarding the position of women, the perestroika period was accompanied with an absence of autonomous female voices in both the media and other parts of culture. Discussions of feminism and women's issues did appear in the media, but only as a 'special feature' and even then, the issue was frequently treated from a strong sexist perspective.[155] Since the late-1980s the feminist women's movement acted as part of a larger movement aiming for democracy, becoming more and more unpopular as the need for stability increased. Meanwhile, women's participation in high-level decision making was low, with no indication of change on the horizon.[156]

Through analysing the history of the position of women in Soviet Russia, we can conclude that throughout Soviet history, gender discourse and the creation of a 'feminine ideal' were powerful instruments to strengthen unity and therefore the regime. Kremlin tradition concerning the role of women varied over time, but what did not change is the idea that women should 'know their place' and 'fulfil their duty' to society, whatever that meant at the time. The presence or absence of women in leading positions proved to be a strong indication for the nature of a regime, with an active position for the First Lady indicating more democratic tendencies whereas under authoritarianism the wife's function is reduced to at most a decorative one.[157] When Raisa Gorbacheva became the First Lady of the Soviet Union she did so in a country that was dominated by strong patriarchal discourse, avers to feminism and lacking female representation

[151] Ibid., 68-69.
[152] Korovushkina, 570.
[153] Ibid.,, 570-571.
[154] Oates-Indruchová, 65.
[155] Ibid., 66.
[156] Nechemias, 215.
[157] Vikulina, 55.

in leading positions, context which will help explain Gorbacheva's image among the people. In order to complete the picture the following chapter provides an overview of her actions as the First Lady as well as a display of her personality, which all together will demonstrate the extent to which Raisa Gorbacheva as the Soviet First Lady corresponded to the Soviet feminine ideal of her time.

Raisa Gorbacheva: the only First Lady of the USSR

Raisa Maximovna Gorbacheva was the First Lady of the Soviet Union from October 1988 to December 1991. The same year her husband resigned from his position of President of the USSR, her autobiography came out. It was the first book written by a Kremlin wife since Krupskaya's memoir of her life with Lenin. Gorbacheva did not write it without reservations. In the years leading up to the publication, she had rejected all offers for book deals or interviews about herself or her family, simply because she found talking about herself 'unnecessary'. In her book she stated:

> *I'm not a movie star, not a writer, not an artist, not a musician, not a fashion designer or a politician. I am not a statesman who makes decisions and is responsible for the fate of the people. […] Eventually, it is the purpose for which Mikhail Sergeyevich, his colleagues and his supporters are fighting that essentially determines my current way of life*. [158]

Talking about oneself was highly unusual for women at the top and even considered inappropriate and as the president's wife Raisa Gorbacheva felt obliged to 'honour tradition'.[159] Nonetheless, in 1991 she decided to break her 'vow of silence', inspired by the 'lively and genuine interest' expressed by people worldwide in the developments in the Soviet Union. At one point the First Lady needed an extra office to store all the letters addressed to her and though it has always been custom in Russia to address letters directly to the head of state, the fact that the First Lady received them, was unheard of.[160] Besides answering questions of the public, she also wanted to react to the increasing amount of false information about her in the media in which she often 'did not even recognise herself'. [161] Overall, the book was meant as a statement. She wanted to be heard and most of all, she wanted to be understood.

Naturally, the book starts with Gorbacheva's childhood, which she herself found hard to talk about. She definitely preferred to speak of 'we' [her and Gorbachev] instead of 'me'.[162] Before Gorbachev, her name was Raisa Maximovna Titarenko and she was born in 1932 in Rubtsovsk (Altai region) to Ukrainian railway construction engineer Maxim Titarenko and his Siberian wife Aleksandra Parada. Raisa's mother came from a family of peasants, who – like millions of other Russian families – suffered through the hardship of the revolution and Stalin's collectivisation, a

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[158] Translated into English from: Raisa Gorbacheva, *Ya Nadeyus'* (Moscow 1991) read online via Libcat.ru, https://libcat.ru/knigi/dokumentalnye-knigi/biografii-i-memuary/176086-4-raisa-gorbacheva-ya-nadeyus.html#text (accessed 4 November 2019) 14-15.
[159] Raisa Gorbacheva, *Ya Nadeyus'* (Moscow 1991) 15.
[160] Gorbacheva, 40.
[161] Ibid., 16.
[162] Ibid., 50.

violent process that took millions of peasants' lives.[163] In the early 1930s, their property was confiscated after being labelled *kulaks* (wealthy peasants), Raisa's grandfather was executed for 'Trotskyism' despite having no idea who Trotsky was and her grandmother died of grief and hunger as the wife of an 'enemy of the people'.[164] As a railway construction engineer, Maxim Titarenko travelled extensively and therefore, so did his family. Raisa changed schools many times, always managing to do well while getting used to being the 'new girl' and the attention she received from that.[165] In 1949 Raisa graduated high school with a golden medal, enabling her to enter any higher education institution in the Soviet Union without entrance examination. She chose the Philosophy Department of Moscow State University (MSU). She remembered it being a triumph and ordeal at the same time:

> *The sadness of parting from my family… from my school friends… from the world in which I was at home and understood. Sadness and anxiety. The beginning of the unknown*.[166]

Her student years were happy years.[167] That is also when she met her future husband Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, a law student at the time. He was a smart and ambitious young man born on March 2, 1932 in the village of Privolnoe, located around ninety miles north of Stavropol (North Caucasus). Like Raisa's, his family had suffered under Stalinism. Two of his uncles and one aunt perished in the famine of 1932-1933 and the Great Terror swept up both of his grandfathers, though they did survive the Gulag. His father was reportedly killed in the war, but due to an administrative mistake, he returned home four years later.[168] Gorbachev's misfortunes had happy endings, resulting in him becoming a confident and optimistic person. In 1948 he received the coveted order of the Red Banner of Labour signed by Stalin himself for his remarkable accomplishments harvesting grain and this prize combined with his efforts at school allowed him to enter MSU one year after Raisa had.[169] One evening in 1951 as he was reading a book in the Stromynka dormitory, his friends Volodya Liberman and Yura Topilin came running in calling: "Misha, what a babe! Come on, take a look!". Gorbachev recalls trying to continue reading, but that his curiosity got the better of him. He walked over to the club where he – in his own words – 'met his fate'.[170] He remembers the young Raisa being 'particularly feminine'. She

[163] The Gorbachev Foundation, n.d.
[164] Gorbacheva, 24.
[165] Ibid., 75.
[166] Ibid., 22, 46-47 and Irina Bobrova, 'Poslednaya ledi SSSR' in *Raisa: Vospominaniya, dnevniki, interv'yu, stat'i, pis'ma, telegrammȳ* (Moscow 2000).
[167] Gorbacheva., 64.
[168] Ibid., 8.
[169] Taubman, 35-36.
[170] Mikhail Gorbachev, 'My prosto byli drug dlia druga. Vsiu zhizn' in *Obshchaia gazeta* 1:68 (1999).

could not afford fancy clothes nor any make-up or jewellery, but she looked 'beautiful without trying'.[171] He later described his future wife:

> *Her father is an employee of the organization that built the railways; a simple family. But her behaviour, manners and her attitude to life were like that of a princess. This has been a mystery to me all my life.*[172]

Raisa had an inner compulsion to look good on every occasion which she kept throughout her life and 'she never appeared in the morning with a hair out of place'.[173] Her roommates remember her as smart, outspoken but always calm and collected, crying just once, when her fiancé-at-the-time broke up the engagement after his mother disapproved of Raisa's humble origin. After the break-up, Raisa, to whom her first meet with Gorbachev had not been love at first sight, decided to give Mikhail a chance. They became inseparable and got married in September 1953. In 1990 Gorbachev told an interviewer:

> *Our relationship and our feelings were perceived by us as a natural inseparable part of our fate. We realised that our life would be unthinkable without each other. Our feelings were our very life itself.*[174]

It was a typical 'student wedding'. The couple did not inform their parents about it until the last minute and since they could not afford rings, Raisa borrowed a pair from a girlfriend.[175] She got pregnant soon after. They found out it was a boy and even came up with a name for their child: Sergey, in honour of Gorbachev's father.[176] However, Raisa became so ill that the young couple faced the devasting decision to either save the life of the mother or their unborn baby, after which she had an abortion.[177]

Throughout his student years, Gorbachev rose in the Komsomol ranks and in 1952 he officially became a full member of the Party.[178] After her graduation in 1955, Gorbacheva followed her husband to Stavropol, the town near where he was born and where he was now sent to work as a lawyer. Raisa gave up her plans of doing post-graduate work in Moscow, even though she had already passed the examination for it and joined the course.[179] Her choice was unsurprising as

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[171] Taubman, 59.
[172] Anna Veligzhanina, 'Otkrovennoe priznanie Mikhaila Gorbacheva: Mȳ s Paisoĭ poteryali sȳna', *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 2 March 2019, https://www.kp.ru/daily/26284.3/3160642/ (accessed 19 November 2019).
[173] Mikhail Gorbachev, *Naedine s saboĭ* (Moscow 2012) 103-104.
[174] Ibid., 61-62.
[175] Taubman, 68 and Veligzhanina, 2019.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Taubman, 70-71.
[178] Taubman, 42,
[179] Ibid., 75.

this was what was expected of a wife at the time, though it was a hard choice for her to make. Especially because she – too educated, too refined and too unwilling to lower herself to the provincial wives of her husband's colleagues – did not fit in with the local wives. She also dressed 'too well' and soon rumours started spreading that she had a personal fashion designer, though in realty her clothes were made by a neighbour.[180] Overall, she learned during these years that the knowledgeable, educated woman was often disliked.[181] It took her four years to land a job in her field, but eventually she became a teacher of Marxist-Leninist philosophy at the Stavropol Agricultural Institute whilst working on her graduate degree. She enjoyed her work, stating in her book that it was not merely a way of making money. It gave her guidance to the point that without it she would have 'considered her life a failure'.[182]

As the head of the Stavropol city Komsomol Gorbachev looked for ways to improve the conditions for people in the countryside. He consulted several specialists, mainly other young professionals, but also his own wife, whom he continued to ask for advice on political matters all throughout his career.[183]

> *She was 'very smart', and he 'knew that and listened to her. He did not trust many party workers, but he did trust her – in everything.' Even when the advice she gave him was not good, at least it was 'sincere'. His aids just 'weren't on his level'. That is why she influenced him on everything, including personnel issues.*[184]

In 1957 Raisa gave birth to her and Mikhail's only child Irina and soon she experienced the double burden that had rested on Soviet women's shoulders for decades.

> *I shall never forget her little eyes, full of tears and despair, her nose flattened against the glass door when, after I had been kept late at work. She would cry and keep saying: "You didn't forget me? You wouldn't leave me?" I constantly had and still have the feeling that at some point in her childhood I did not give her enough attention.*[185]

Though feeling guilty for leaving her child at day care, she needed her work to feel fulfilled. Gorbachev helped out at the house, although his domestic contributions diminished as his party workload increased.[186] During this time it became clear that Gorbachev was different from most provincial party and government officials wo were notoriously dissolute. Whereas they drank a

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[180] Ibid.,, 84-85.
[181] Galiya Ibragimova, ''Vashe mesto v kontse', Za chto jlybili i nenavideli Raisu Gorbachev', *Ria Novosti*, 20 September 2019, https://ria.ru/20190920/1558866443.html (accessed 24 November 2019).
[182] Gorbacheva,, 91.
[183] Taubman, 94.
[184] From an interview of Taubman with Raisa Bazikova on July 4, 2005 in Stavropol.
[185] Gorbacheva, 102-103.
[186] Taubman, 88.

lot and took their liberties with women, Gorbachev treated women with respect and went out of his way to appoint women as city and district leaders.[187] Victor Kalyagin, a state farm director and later a rural district party boss described the Gorbachevs as an exemplary couple:

> *"What a good guy! He treated his wife with such respect and love! As for the rest of us, our wives would criticise us, saying, 'Look how Gorbachev treats his wife! You should treat us the same way!"*[188]

Of course not everyone liked the couple. Gorbachev was resented by several of his colleagues for being different, more cultured and successful. Komsomol colleague Aleksei Gonochencko already in 1955 argued Gorbachev was 'too soft to be a leader' and fierce critic of Gorbachev Viktor Kaznacheyev accused Raisa of supposedly 'doing almost nothing at home'.[189]

In 1967 Gorbacheva completed her Candidate's Degree (equivalent to a Ph.D.) in sociology at the Pedagogical Institute of MSU. Later she would explain that the field of sociology had 'ceased to exist in science', because in the 1930s it was considered 'dangerous' to the system Stalin was constructing. Sociology was revived as part of Khrushchev's Thaw and continued to develop in the 1960s and 70s, but it continued to face strong resistance from guardians of ideological orthodoxy. Taubman in his book emphasizes that the fact that Gorbacheva opted to pursue a career in sociology despite this, demonstrates her independent state of mind.[190] For her dissertation on the conditions on collective farms she travelled hundreds of kilometres over country roads, hitchhiking, by car, motorcycle, horse and wagon or by foot on rubber boots in order to conduct interviews.[191] That she resorted to fieldwork rather than state-approved information, was something completely new, radical even, and it deepened her understanding of real life on the countryside. She was especially moved by stories of old women who had lost everything in the war, but had 'preserved the selflessness and sympathy for the misfortunes and sorrows of others that have always animated the Russian woman's heart'. In her memoirs she describes an encounter with an old peasant lady:

> *"Say, sweetie, how come you are so terribly skinny?" I said, "Oh no, I have always been like this." But she didn't stop there. "I suppose you do not have a husband?" I said, "Yes , I do." She sighed, "Then he must drink?" "No." "Does he beat you?" "Absolutely not." Then she said:*

[187] Ibid., 102.
[188] Interview of Taubman with V. V. Kalyagin on 5 July 2005 in Stavropol, in Taubman, 103.
[189] Taubman 103-104.
[190] Ibid.., 112.
[191] Gorbacheva's dissertation is available online: Raisa Gorbacheva, 'USSR Report. Human Resources. Raisa Gorbacheva Dissertation on Life of Kolkhoz Peasantry', *Defense Technical Information Center*, 9 September 1986, https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA372656 (accessed 8 November 2019).

"Come on, sweetheart, why try to deceive me? I've lived a long time and I know people don't go round from door to door unless they're driven to it."[192]

Stories like these nor Raisa's feelings of sympathy towards these women were included in her dissertation however. Some irony can be detected, though this is far from obvious. Instead, her work praised certain Soviet achievements, such as the rise in rural literacy.[193] Her scholarly and teaching career prospered, but also largely due to her husband who between 1969 and 1978 went from communist leader of a provincial capital to regional party boss. She remembered not always liking her new status, once complaining to one of her husband's colleagues:

People don't just greet me. They bow for me. It's disgusting![194]

"Don't pay attention to it", was his advice. "You will get used to it". Which eventually, she did.

Becoming the First Lady

As Gorbachev rose in the party ranks, he started going on work trips outside of the Soviet Union, often bringing his wife with him. In 1971 Gorbacheva accompanied her husband to Italy and in 1977 to France, where they 'stood out for their youthful appearance and openness'.[195] As Gorbachev climbed, Gorbacheva had to socialise with his colleagues. Struggling to fit in, she soon felt isolated. Her exposure to the other Politburo wives only made things worse as she was much younger, better educated, more attractive and energetic than they were.[196] She was astounded by the way family members of other Soviet leaders treated each other. In her memoirs she wrote:

The first thing that struck me was the extent to which people were estranged from each other. You were seen but somehow not noticed. They didn't even greet each other.[197]

Like the young Nadezhda Alliluyeva, Gorbacheva felt out of place at the meetings of the Kremlin wives, where there were 'endless toasts to the health of those higher up and nasty talks of those lower down, discussions of food and their children's and grandchildren's 'unique' abilities and card games.[198] Whereas the Gorbachevs tried to raise their daughter as 'normal' as possible; sending her to a regular school and rejecting the usual practise of having daddy's chauffeur drive her to class, children in the Kremlin were ranked accordingly to their father's status:

[192] Gorbacheva, 101.
[193] Taubman, 113.
[194] Ibid., 156.
[195] Ibid., 149-150.
[196] Ibid., 167.
[197] Ibid., 124.
[198] Gorbacheva,124.

I remember once openly expressing my opinion on the behaviour of a group of young people. The woman I was talking about got very upset and exclaimed: "How can you say such a thing? – those are the grandchildren of Brezhnev!"[199]

Raisa had always been protective of her husband, but with his promotions her anxiety increased. She remembered 'never-ending alarms and worries' connected to her husband's work in addition to her own professional and family cares. His exalted status ensured that the family's financial state increased, they got better medical treatment, housing and were able to take wonderful vacations at the most beautiful resorts within the Soviet Union and abroad, but with power came burdens.[200] After moving back to Moscow, the couple landed a residence that included servants, cooks, bodyguards, secretaries and other aids, who besides protecting them also kept close watch for the KGB. The Gorbachevs felt lonely and mentally uncomfortable as they had no privacy. The only time they could talk in private, was outside on their walks, where they spoke about everything and anything while guards quietly followed them, keeping some distance.[201]

While Mikhail Gorbachev worked twelve to sixteen-hour work days, Raisa kept herself busy by attending academic conferences and studying English.[202] Feeling drawn to research work again, she told her husband that she was thinking of starting on her doctorate. He responded only lukewarm to the idea, suggesting that she should abandon her career altogether. Her friend Lydia Budyka remembered:

That was very hard for her. Very very hard. She loved her work so much. She often talked about how much it meant to her, but she sacrificed it for his career.[203]

Raisa herself explains that for a while she continued to gather material for a thesis, but that her daily life forced her to make a choice:

I eventually decided to give up my own professional career. I don't want to claim that it was an easy decision. On the contrary. […] But I do not regret my decision. At the time that was what my family needed most.[204]

The decision was an acceptable wifely choice to make and so was following him wherever he would be continuing his career. In December 1984, a few month after Gorbachev was appointed chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Gorbacheva accompanied her husband for the first

[199] Ibid., 124.
[200] Taubman, 157.
[201] Ibid., 165.
[202] Ibid., 166.
[203] Ibid., 166.
[204] Gorbacheva, 141.

time on a foreign trip. It was a visit to London at the invitation of Prime-Minister Margaret Thatcher, who had reached out to Communist leaders during the new cold war out of 'curiosity'. Gorbachev, who wanted to gain experience in the field of foreign affairs as well as signal the West that he was interested in improving Soviet-American relations, of course brought his wife along with him.[205] Martin Nicholson, the British Foreign Office official who interpreted for Raisa, remembered that she tried her best to not come across as 'just another dumpy, head-scarved wife'.[206] And Thatcher later stated in 1993:

> *Mrs. Gorbachev was dressed in a smart, western-style outfit, a well-tailored grey suit with a white stripe – just the sort I could have worn myself.*[207]

After lunch, Margaret's husband Denis Thatcher showed Gorbacheva their library where she pulled volume after volume down from the shelves and commented to them in length. Both Mrs. and Mr. Thatcher were impressed by her 'sound knowledge sharp comments', but Thatcher's personal secretary Charles Powel got a different impression, stating:

> *Poor old Denis was longing to get out and practice his golf on the lawn. Instead he was stuck with this quite opinionated, highly intelligent, slightly didactic lady*.[208]

This interpretation of Gorbacheva's attitude became wide-spread when she became the First Lady. Her didactic manner alienated many who interpreted it as arrogance, whereas her husband defended her by reminding people that his wife was a teacher and that this was just the way she spoke.[209] Other criticism came from the hands of British and other Western media who covered the visit in lavish detail. Referring to the couple as 'the new Gucci comrades', they wrongfully reporting that Gorbacheva used an American credit card to make expensive purchases while in reality she bought a pair of earrings costing several hundred pounds which she paid for in cash provided by the Soviet embassy.[210] The Soviet press on the other hand, dedicated much less attention to the trip as its editors were aware that some Kremlin colleagues were jealous of the attention Gorbachev received.

A few months later, in march 1985, Gorbachev received the news that General-Secretary Konstantin Chernenko had died and that the question arose of him taking over the leadership. Raisa wrote in her memoirs that that was 'completely new' to her and that she was 'in shock',

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[205] Taubman, 196-197.
[206] Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: At Her Zenith: in London, Washington and Moscow* (New York 2016) 237.
[207] Margaret Thatcher, *Downing Street Years* (New York 1993) 459.
[208] Taubman, 200.
[209] Interview of William Taubman with Mikhail Gorbachev on March 2, 2007 in Moscow.
[210] Constantine Pleshakov, *There Is No Freedom Without Bread!: 1989 and the Civil War that Brought Down Communism* (New York 2009) 136.

which seems odd considering the fact that the couple shared everything with each other.[211] However, Gorbachev later did admit that his wife was not keen on the idea of him taking over, but that he was determined, stating that he came to Moscow hoping and believing that he could change something about the current situation and that so far, he had not accomplished much. He aspired to 'safe socialism' by reforming it, just like Lenin had done decades before. "I have to accept the position, assuming they offer it to me of course", he said. "We just can't go on living like this."[212] And Gorbacheva stated in her memoirs:

> *Do you ever wonder what would have become of the country if someone else, who was exactly like his predecessors, had come to power and would exercise power for fifteen years? What would have become of us then? [...] Six years ago that was the first thing we thought of and that is why Mikhail Sergeyevich made this decision*.[213]

Serving as the First Lady

Raisa Gorbacheva knew her life would change by becoming the First Lady, describing her feelings of the 'night before' in her memoirs.

> *That evening neither the children nor I had a clue about the heavy task he had taken upon his shoulders. We could not imagine what Mikhail Sergeyevich's 'new job' really meant and what awaited him and our family in the future*.[214]

Though in many ways her life also stayed the same. Her new position was not a real position and she did not receive much respect. Overall, she 'just remained a wife', performing her role through always being a charming hostess to her husband's colleagues.[215] When Gorbacheva appeared for the first time as the First Lady in the company of the Soviet leaders, it made those leaders look more sympathetic, attractive, accessible and even happier. The couple also made the Soviet top appear younger, which was important at a time when the personification of power in the recent years had taken the form of elderly people struggling with health problems.[216] She was almost always present when her husband spoke in public, both within the Soviet Union and abroad, but both the reactions and therefore the ways Gorbacheva felt she had to act in public differed from the start.[217]Abroad, the Soviet First Lady always sat somewhere in the front row at press conferences, whereas she in her own country tried to avoid the camera's. In this sense she

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[211] Gorbacheva, 12.
[212] Gorbacheva, 12.
[213] Ibid., 132.
[214] Ibid., 131.
[215] Vladimir Koval, 'Dopustimȳe poteri', *Vzglyad*, 5 December 2006 https://vz.ru/politics/2006/12/5/59866.html (accessed 28 November 2019) and Taubman, 224.
[216] Gorbacheva, 49.
[217] Nikolai Efimovich and Saed-Shakh, 'Raisa Gorbacheva: ya nikogda ne vmeshivalas' v ego dela' in *Raisa: Vospominaniya o neproshedshem vremeni* (1983) 160 in Taubman, 225.

could have been following the advice of Gorbachev's Moscow University classmate Dmitry Golovanov who had warned him to 'not let Raya get so close to you in front of television camera's', though she also must have felt herself that her presence was not appreciated or seen as a positive contribution.[218] In her memoirs, she recalls regular comments she received such as:

> *Raisa Maximovna - why do you continue to listen to those debates here? Why do you do that to yourself? You might as well go home and watch it on television*.[219]

Of course she did not leave. Considering their strong bound, it would be shocking had she not accompanied him everywhere or had he not tried to include his wife in everything. When *NBC*-newsman Tom Brokaw once asked Gorbachev what serious issues he discussed with his wife, he answered: "All", an answer few political leaders in his position would have allowed themselves to give, Soviet leaders in particular as most of them believed admitting such things would weaken their masculinity and independence in the eyes of other people.[220] Gorbachev's answer was considered too sensitive to be broadcasted to the Soviet people and cut from the interview and Gorbacheva carefully downplayed her role stating that:

> *Never have I interfered in governmental or political affairs. My role was just to be supportive and helpful. Of course, I had my own views. And like any normal people, we discussed things, argued and sometimes quarrelled. What's so special about that?*[221]

According to Raisa's sister Ludmila, Gorbacheva was not completely adverse to the self-display that came with being the First Lady. Despite her obsessive desire to keep her family life private, she 'wanted to be seen':

> *It was in her blood. She knew how to approach people. She was very ambitious. I would even say she was too ambitious…*[222]

She started to be resented by the people, who believed that women should 'know their place'. They argued that since she has no official duties, she should just stay home and let her husband do his job.[223] This resentment also reached into the Politburo. In Taubman's biography on Gorbachev he describes one occasion where and aide informed Gorbacheva about a meeting with the Ukrainian party leadership her husband was about to attend to which she replied that 'then she would be going to the Politburo meeting too'. Ukrainian leader Volodymyr

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218 Taubman, 226.
219 Gorbacheva, 76.
220 Ibid., 77.
221 Efimovich and Saed-Shakh, 'Raisa Gorbacheva: ya nikogda ne vmeshivalas' 160.
222 Bobrova, 'Poslednaya ledi', 287.
223 William Eaton, 'Gorbachev Says Women Have Greater Rights', *The Washington Post*, 24 June 1987, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/06/24/gorbachev-says-women-have-greater-rights/2bc3ab7d-71b6-410f-a211-9494ee3ee059/ (accessed 10 December 2019).

Shcherbitsky reportedly contained himself until the Gorbachevs had left to then sarcastically sneer to his wife: “Perhaps you should accompany me to Politburo meetings too from now on.”[224] Sarcasm led to jokes, of which one example was that Gorbachev was once stopped by a guard as he was about to enter some government building. “What do you mean?”, Gorbachev objected. “I’m the General Secretary.” To which the guard replied: “Excuse me, Comrade Gorbachev. I did not recognise you without Raisa Maximovna.”[225] And another: What does CPSU-WORLD (Russian: *KPSS-MIR*) stand for? – Who Rules the Soviet Union, Misha and Raya! (*Kto Pravit Sovetskim Soyuzom, Misha i Raya*).[226] Another well-known joke about the First Lady was that she was ‘the first wife of the country’s leader to weigh less than her husband. [227] This was just one of many examples of jokes and rumours centred around the First Lady’s appearance instead of her actions or intellect.[228]

Gorbachev’s frustration about the dysfunctions of the Soviet system mounted and he became increasingly tense and convinced that what was needed was real change. During his initial period in power (1985-1987) Gorbachev talked about modifying central planning, but did not make fundamental changes, a policy referred to as ‘*Uskoreniye*’ [‘Acceleration’]. He then introduced more fundamental reforms under the banner of ‘*Perestroika*’ [‘Rebuilding’ or ‘Restructuring’] and in 1986 adopted ‘*glasnost*’ as a political slogan, which was taken to mean increased openness and transparency in government institutions and activities in the Soviet Union.[229] With glasnost came more freedom of speech and press and previously banned films, plays and literature started to be rehabilitated, according to the president a crucial process as this ‘recruited and mobilised perestroika supporters’.[230] The public took the changes as a sign that radical change was on its way and it boosted the Secretary General’s popularity as well as it alarmed his hard-line colleagues.[231]

Part of Gorbachev’s reforms was his ‘new political thinking’ (or ‘new thinking’ for short). Major elements of this were ideologization of international politics, priority of universal human interests over the interests of any class and mutual security (in the East and the West) based on

[224] Taubman 226.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Andrew Sidorchik, Pervaya 'pervaya ledi'. Za chto sovetskiĭ narod nedolyublival Raisu Gorbachevu', *Argumentȳ i Faktȳ*, 20 September 2019, http://www.aif.by/timefree/history/pervaya_pervaya_ledi_za_chto_sovetskiy_narod_nedolyublival_raisu_gorbachevu(accessed 19 November 2019).
[227] Margarita Doroshevich, ‘Samaya stil’naya v SSSR: pochemu sovetskie zhenshchinȳ ne lyubili Raisu Gorbachevu’, *Spletnik*, 18 January 2018 http://www.spletnik.ru/look/starstyle/80356-samaya-stilnaya-v-sssr-raisu-gorbachevu.html (accessed 19 October 2019).
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ed Hewett (ed.) and Victor Winston (ed.), *Milestones of Glasnost and Perestroyka: Politics and People* (Washington 1991).
[230] Taubman, 314.
[231] Ibid., 246-251.

political rather than military instruments.[232] He believed improvements of relations with the United States were necessary, because not only had Soviet military spending plummeted, the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl had showed him how devastating a nuclear strike would be'. In 1985 Gorbachev and his wife visited the United States for the first time. Raisa was nervous to make her international debut. Of course, she had travelled with her husband before, but that was before he had taken power and these travels were more tourism than they were diplomacy. The question of how to go about this arose. In many other countries the spouse of a leader appeared in public and Gorbachev wanted to do the same. The plan was to 'do it naturally', so that the world and they themselves could get accustomed to it.[233] Taubman writes:

> *She was aware that she had no special diplomatic knowledge and certainly no experience of high society. She learned for the first time that there are strict rules governing diplomatic ceremonies and protocol, that even such occasions as lunch or tea have their own individual elements of diplomatic etiquette, that dinner, which has to take place in the evening after seven o'clock or later, had a strict and well-defined order of seating at the table and, as a rule, [required] formal or evening attire*.[234]

Raisa Gorbacheva quickly adapted to these rules and her glamorous appearance, which stood in great contrast to the conventional dreary image of Kremlin wives, turned into a successful public relations exercise attracting considerable media attention.[235] When she accompanied her husband to Great Britain in 1984, journalists were confused as to how to report the new phenomenon.[236] She was described as an appendage of Gorbachev rather than an individual with her own agenda and articles placed great emphasis on her femininity while contrasting it with her serious interests. The articles were overloaded with adjectives ('frail woman', 'very sweet', 'spontaneous with a sense of humour') drawing attention to Gorbacheva's feminine appearance and gesture.[237] A telling example of this can be found in the Russian newspaper *Gazeta*, which dedicated an entire article to the fact that Gorbacheva had shared recipes for potato dishes with the British minister of agriculture.[238] Gorbacheva became the patriarchal archetype of the 'feminine surface'; meaning that her appearance and gestures were most noticeable about her.

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[232] David Holloway, 'Gorbachev's New Thinking', *Foreign Affairs* 68:1 (1989) 66.
[233] Gorbacheva, 4.
[234] Ibid., 165-166.
[235] Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Malden, MA 2008) 51.
[236] Oates-Indruchová, 61.
[237] Líkařová Zdena, 'Minuty s Raisou Maximovnou' [Minutes with Raisa Maximovna], *Mladá fronta* 2 (1987).
[238] -, 'Raisa Gorbacheva otpravlyala britanskomu ministru petseptȳ blyud iz kartoshki', *Gazeta.ru*, Archive: 30 December 2014, https://www.gazeta.ru/lifestyle/news/2014/12/30/n_6794021.shtml (accessed 2 January 2020).

Her husband's appearance on the other hand, was simply documented through pictures. Interesting in this regard is that later, during Bill Clinton's presidential campaign Hillary Clinton was presented according to the patriarchal archetype of the 'masculine woman', an intellectually and economically powerful individual. As it became clear however that the American voters preferred a more conservative First Couple, Clinton had to transform her image into that of a woman who liked to discuss new hair colours and recipes for apple pie.[239] The emphasis on Gorbacheva's femininity can be explained through the prevailing idea all throughout the Soviet era that 'women exist to help or support men' and that they were to be 'selfless and modest' while doing so.[240]

She learned much of her travels. For instance, one trip to Paris left her amazed by the fact that other First Ladies had staff helping them fulfil their positions. Other than her personnel to help out with domestic work, Gorbacheva had no help. She did not even have a secretary.[241] Because of her inexperience, Gorbacheva tried her best to master her new role by preparing her trips abroad in great detail and during the trips she would take notes to reflect on afterwards. Most of those notes recalled commentaries about the visits in the local press that contained 'misconceptions, superficial and primitive judgements and frequently gossip and obvious slander'.[242] Much of it focussed around the assumed tensions between her and the American First Lady Nancy Reagan. Reagan wrote on their first meeting that she had been nervous to meet the Soviet First Lady, but that she 'needn't have worried, because Raisa talked and talked and talked'. She wrote that on several other occasions she found Gorbacheva to be 'preachy' and just plain rude.[243] An example of one such occasion was a dinner on November 20th during which Gorbacheva supposedly was the 'chief orchestrator of the party', changing the subject when her husband had been on it long enough and introducing new subjects in 'which she certainly not confining herself as most wives of heads of state and government did in such meetings, to cross-chat with Mrs. Reagan on palace housewifery and other harmless subjects'. At the end of the evening an astounded Nancy Reagan commented: "Who does that dame think she is?"[244]

Possible explanations for Reagan's reactions to the First Lady can be found in their different backgrounds, Reagan coming from a family of privileged with her grandfather being a well-known neurosurgeon and her mother an actress. Also, Reagan did not share Gorbacheva's academic credentials, as well as interests. Gorbacheva, a philosophy graduate, just did not like

239 Oates-Indruchová, 62.
240 Ibid., 63.
241 Taubman, 280.
242 Ibid., 262.
243 Nancy Reagan, *My Turn* (New York 1989) 336-340.
244 Donald Regan*, For The Record* (New York 1990) 314.

the usual small talk Reagan was accustomed to.[245] Journalists' obsession with the First Ladies' alleged strained relations destressed Gorbacheva, who publicly denied rumours of a feud. Overall it looks like she did not want the rumours to distract public attention away from her husband's achievements, Gorbacheva's following statement underlining this idea:

> *Nany Reagan and I were lucky to be present at the greatest and most important historic meetings between leaders of our two countries. All our feelings, worries and anxieties were just a drop in the ocean of the hope born of these meetings and felt by people throughout the world.*[246]

Another frequent subject of gossip surrounding Gorbacheva was the way she dressed. Her presentation and her particularly tasteful attention to her appearance (on her trips abroad she impressed spectators wearing luxurious fur coats, evening gowns and pearl necklaces) made her an international celebrity. Foreign media fell in love with the 'Communist lady with Parisian charm', whereas her popularity amongst her own people steadily declined.[247] Gorbacheva's 'Western style' may have been her way of seeking rapprochement to the West, like her husband was doing on the greater scale, though that is mere speculation. What is certain, is that she wanted to instil taste in Soviet Women. But whereas Jacqueline ('Jacky') Kennedy became a style icon to American women, to Soviet women, living under harsh conditions and having to deal with shortages and often total unavailability of goods, Gorbacheva became an eternal irritant. These women who handmade their own outfits simply disliked her too much to admit that their First Lady was an example of good taste.[248] Gorbacheva's outfits became a byword. According to gossip, the First Lady – in this context often referred to as 'Madame Gucci – spent millions of state rubbles on outfits that she changed several times a day.[249] In reality, Mrs. Gorbachev did her best to dress elegant in the Western manner, but even for the First Lady this was difficult.[250] She later wrote:

> *An invitation would come in from Nancy Reagan, clearly stating what I should wear to the White House receptions. I was to wear an outfit only once, because everybody would be watching and God forbid someone would notice the First Lady was wearing an outfit twice.*

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[245] Taubman, 289.
[246] Gorbacheva, 165.
[247] Doroshevich, 2018.
[248] Veligzhanina, 2019, Sidorchik, 2019 and Conor O'Clery, *Moscow, December 25, 1991: The Last Day of the Soviet Union* (New York 2011).
[249] Vinogradova, 2019 and Martijn Roessingh, 'Gorbatsjov besprak alles met zijn grote liefde', *Trouw*, 21 September 1999, https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/gorbatsjov-besprak-alles-met-zijn-grote-liefde~b6a5b6aa/?referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F (accessed 16 December 2019).
[250] Taubman, 283.

[…] Because laws on the First Ladies did not exist, I had to buy unnecessary things at my own expense, from the family budget.[251]

The negativity concerning Gorbacheva's appearance can be best explained by the inexperience of the Soviet people with women in power positions. The traditional demeanour of leading men rarely betrays the extent of their privileges, with the exception of their chauffeured cars and better quality suits. This was, though not without some occasional grumbling, accepted by the people as the popular perception goes that these men have worked hard in order to obtain their position. Now that a wife became a public figure, she did not have the same 'excuse' and her 'luxury lifestyle' was perceived as contemptuous towards ordinary women of the lower classes.[252]

Besides the First Lady's 'undeserved' influence and perceived arrogance, people raised their eyebrows over the affection the Gorbachevs displayed towards each other in public. They often held hands and overall the General Secretary never hid his love for his wife from the people.[253] This was another completely new aspect to the image of power that left the public shocked and it became one more thing to make fun of Gorbachev over, again questioning his masculine and ability to be a good leader.[254] Gorbacheva herself tried to explain all the criticism she was subjected to in an interview with Russian online newspaper *Vzglyad* by stating that she simply had to deal with 'being the first First Lady' and that the first of anything has to deal with more than those who follow.[255] Though she definitely was aware it was not just that:

Of course other things have come to my attention. That I 'pretend to have a special position', that I 'interfere with matters that do not concern me', that I am 'the secret weapon of the Kremlin' and so on. I don't believe it necessarily is my individuality or my deviating thoughts, attitudes and judgements that make people have opposing opinions about me. […] Possibly it is just the fact that I am open in public.[256]

There were some high-ranking officials who did value the First Lady however. Gorbachev's closest aide Anatoli Chernyaev for instance insisted that Gorbacheva did not dictate to her husband and that their late-evening walks on which he tried out ideas on her and heard out her

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[251] Koval, 2006.
[252] Costa, 1987.
[253] Yuriĭ Rost, 'Takaya tak bȳla', *Novaya Gazeta*, 20 September 2019, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/09/20/82047-takaya-kak-byla (accessed 10 December 2019) and a documentary that shortly touches upon this is 'Lyubov i Vlast' Raisȳ Gorbachevoĭ, *Memocast: a project by the Gorbachev Foundation*, 2012, available on YouTube via https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7l83L_pzVo.
[254] Coalson, 2009.
[255] Koval, 2006.
[256] Gorbacheva, 155.

reactions had salutary effects. Overall her presence toned down the kind of swearing at which he was as skilled as his male colleagues. Soviet embassy official Vitali Gusenkov praised Raisa for being 'tougher' and 'less likely to compromise' than her husband and another aide Georgi Shakhnazarov once stated that Gorbachev could have avoided many mistakes had he listened to his advisors more. According to him, Gorbachev did not listen to his wife too much, but too little.[257] Some ordinary people also were grateful to 'finally have a First Lady to be proud of'. One letter assigned to her for instance read:

> *Thank you. Because of you and your husband the image of the Russian woman in the Soviet Union and beyond is changing. She regains her dignity!*[258]

American journalist Bill Keller reported in 1989 that after an incident where Gorbachev was scolded on national television in 1989 for being 'incapable of avoiding the influence of his wife', some Soviet women came for her defence:

> *"All women are for you!", one exclaimed. "That's right!", chimed in another. "That's exactly how the spouse, the wife of the General Secretary, should be, like Raisa Maximovna, with her intellect, her schooling, her charm. We are proud of her." "We finally have someone to show off abroad!", the chorus continued. "At last! Someone to show off!"*[259]

In the West, Gorbacheva's appearance as the First Lady was perceived an indicator of political change, a sign that the Soviet Union was becoming more 'human' and the response of the general public could hardly be more positive. In 1987 Gorbacheva was named 'Woman of the Year' by the British magazine *Woman's Own* and 'Woman of the World' the following year.[260] Important to note here is that though the Soviet Union sought rapprochement to the US, it was still a period of suspicion and mistrust. Some Americans were sceptical and believed perestroika was just a means to deceive the West while secretly preparing the ground for further Soviet expansion.[261] Gorbacheva was also named the 'Kremlin's secret weapon', indicating that charm is also capable of bearing political rewards.[262]

Her wide-ranging charitable work, including her support of Russian blood banks, donations to combat cancer, efforts of sending Russian doctors abroad for additional training, helping to found and maintain the Soviet Culture Foundation and its journal *Our Heritage* as well as the

[257] Taubman, 225.
[258] Gorbacheva, 77.
[259] Bill Keller, 'Reporter's Notebook: Raisa Gorbachev Hits Back: All Women Are For Me', *The New York Times*, 27 May 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/27/world/reporter-s-notebook-raisa-gorbachev-hits-back-the-women-are-all-for-me.html (accessed 9 December 2019).
[260] Veligzhanina, 2019.
[261] Taubman, 398.
[262] Gorbacheva, 187 and 'Gefangen im Kreml' (2017).

opening of a leukaemia treatment centre at Moscow's Children's Hospital and her ongoing attempts to improve the situation of Russian women was insufficient to boost her image.[263] It was yet another field where she was the first and these activities much more resembled that of American First Ladies. The press coverage of the First Lady's charity work worried Gorbachev's advisors, believing it would only make the situation worse. Gorbachev turned down the advice, believing the Western press' reports on the Soviet citizens' negative reactions towards the First Lady were merely 'attempts by Western centres of psychological warfare' to discredit him.[264] In the West however, her charity work only added to her image as an admirable woman. Western feminists even tried to label her as an example to the feminist movement, though Gorbacheva distanced herself from the movement, though being it in a discrete manner. In an interview for her biography, her interviewer remembers her answer when he asked her:

> *Do you think that it was destiny that determined that you would commit yourself to women? "I don't know," she replied, glancing in my direction. But I understood from her reaction that she did not want to talk about that topic any more.*[265]

Feminists in the West may have perceived Gorbacheva a feminist because she acted independently from her husband and she spoke out about the harsh working environments of women and that double burden which was further complicated due to extreme shortages leaving women to stand in line for food for hours on end. She believed the constant balancing of responsibilities was the major reason for women's lower positions and she wished to see domestic labour – something the ideal Soviet woman had dedicated her life to all throughout Soviet history but had always been treated as something inferior and 'backward' – valued more.[266] But she did not actively try to change the situation. Comparable to how she handled her dissertation, she was aware of issues and tried to better the situation, but always within what she considered appropriate for a communist wife. She never wanted to compete with her husband, just to support him and she 'wanted to be perceived as the 'weak' woman, and she saw this as her strength'.[267] On the other hand, in the Soviet Union Gorbacheva was labelled a feminist *because* she acted independently, though the label was used to indicate a negative change. After decades of being told women should accept their fate as mothers, women's movements were often considered 'radical'. Western-style feminism overall had gained a

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[263] Coalson, 2009 and Ibragimova, 2019.
[264] Taubman, 374.
[265] Ibid., 100.
[266] Gorbacheva, 107.
[267] Vasilieva, 230.

negative image under communism because Soviet 'liberation' supposedly had already given women equal rights.[268]

To Gorbachev, his wife was perfect as she sacrificed herself through suffering pressure and criticism and supporting him in his attempts to reform the system. However, because she was so involved in his affairs, his mistakes also impacted her image and over time she became a hostage of her husband's failures. Perestroika did not show the desired results and the deeper the country slipped into an economic crisis, the stronger the dislike and even hatred for the wife of the head of state became.[269]

By 1990, the Cold War had ended, mostly free elections were introduced and a functioning parliament had replaced the Supreme Soviet. The popularity Gorbachev enjoyed because of this was short-lived as the government had also lost virtually all control over economic conditions. Incomes increased, but shortages too and ethnic discontent in the satellite states had led to explosions threatening Gorbachev's reforms altogether. [270] The ever positive Gorbachev seemed at a lost and Raisa, a sensitive person who internalised stresses and strains even more than he did, became more and more anxious. Perestroika had led to chaos and anarchy and many now believed what the country needed now was a 'strong hand' to re-establish order and maintain stability.[271] Gorbachev's long-time rival Boris Yeltsin seemed to fit this description and in May 1990 he overtook Gorbachev as the most popular politician in Russia.[272]

Stepping back into the shadows

In 1990 Gorbachev created both a Russian Communist Party subordinate to that of the CPSU as well as a new role for himself as President of the USSR. The problems in the country were stacking up and for his intended solution – a transition to a market economy – massive sums of money were needed, which Reagan's successor President George Herbert Walker Bush was not just going to hand over. He wanted to see fundamental changes first while Gorbachev did not want to beg for the huge sums needed to safe his plans out of fear that critics would label that as surrendering to the West.[273] In the West Gorbachev was considered one of the best politicians of the century and he was overloaded with awards, including the Nobel Peace Prize, which he won in 1990 for his role in ending the Cold War. He had mixed feelings about the prize, of course being flattered but also worried about following in the footsteps of Boris Pasternak and

[268] Nechemias, 199 and Ferrier, 'Is Feminism Finished?', 6.
[269] Sidorchik, 2019.
[270] Ibid., 366-369.
[271] Taubman, 438.
[272] Ibid., 455.
[273] Ibid., 570 and 590.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose awards were regarded 'anti-Soviet provocations'.[274] The President received thousands of letters condemning both him and the prize. The following one just being one example:

> *Mr. Nobel Prize winner: Thank you for impoverishing the whole country, for earning a prize from world imperialism and Zionism, for betraying Lenin and October and for destroying Marxism-Leninism.*[275]

Gorbachev's popularity in the Soviet Union had plummeted and along with that, so had his wife's. Her health also suffered tremendously due to the stress and she suffered terrible headaches and insomnia. In 1990 a tired and anxious Raisa wrote:

> *All those dramatic events were tests for the soul, the mind and will. It meant terrible headaches and sleepless nights. When the phone rings at night, it is like a gunshot that disturbs the peace. These days I am afraid of telephones. They bring pleas, cries of despair, suffering and sometimes someone's death.*[276]

Opposite to Gorbacheva, the American First Lady Barbara Bush was popular amongst her people. When Gorbacheva asked her in 1990 how she was so well-liked, she answered:

> *I threaten no one. I am old, white-headed and large and I stay out of my husband's affairs.*[277]

In February 1991 Yeltsin held a speech on national television calling for Gorbachev's resignation. Thousands of demonstrators took the street and civil war was in the air. In June Yeltsin was elected President of Russia and in August, as Gorbachev and his family left for a much-needed vacation to the Black Sea, a group of hard-line members of the Party and the KGB attempted to take control of the country through a coup d'état (better known as the August Coup). The plotters tried to force Gorbachev to resign and when he refused, placed the family under house arrest. The coup, opposed by Yeltsin, collapsed after only two days and after it Gorbachev returned to power, but the event destabilised the USSR even further. Raisa, deeply hurt by the fact that some of their most trusted people had turned against them, suffered a stroke and instead of meeting the massive crowds in the streets of Moscow and presenting himself as still being in charge of the country, Gorbachev stayed home to take care of his wife,

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[274] Taubman, 572.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Gorbacheva, 170.
[277] Barbara Bush, *Barbara Bush: A Memoir* (New York 1994), 342-344.

something critics would hold against him for years. Two days later, Gorbachev, after pledging to reform the Party, resigned from his position of General Secretary. But by then he had already been destroyed politically and support had swung over to Yeltsin, who took advantage of the situation by taking what remained of the Soviet government.[278] Then, on December 8th, he – without Gorbachev's knowledge – together with the presidents of Ukraine and Belarus, announced the dissolution of the Soviet Union and on the 25th, Gorbachev resigned from his position as Soviet President and Commander in Chief in a speech that was broadcasted internationally. The Soviet Union officially ceased to exist at midnight on the 31st of December 1991.

After the resignation, the Soviet people for the first time felt some compassion towards Raisa Gorbacheva, who in her memoirs that came out four months before the failed coup had referred to her anxiety and now just looked tired and confused.[279] The compassion did not last long though as a retired Gorbachev and his wife continued to travel abroad as well as enjoy privileges allowing them to avoid the problems ordinary citizens experienced struggling to survive under the weight of 'shock therapy'.[280] Furthermore, the people were furious about the dissolution of their once great Soviet empire. Gorbachev fought his depression with work and in 1996 ran for president. His exhausted wife begged him not to, but submitted in the end, because:

> *After all, I am his wife*.[281]

His performance was pitiful. He received only 0.5 percent of the votes, clearly demonstrating he was no threat to Yeltsin's new regime. In 1997, Gorbacheva founded Raisa Maximovna's Club, a foundation aiming to support women in political life and worked to raise awareness for children's issues, but by then she mostly stayed out of the public eye in order to avoid the judgement she was subjected to before. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, patriarchal discourse got free reign and little respect the state-socialist pseudo-emancipation had offered her, had now disappeared. Whereas she before was at least presented with respect in terms of address ('Gorbacheva' or 'Raisa Maximovna'), she was now simply referred to as Raisa and her intellectual achievements were no longer mentioned. Instead the media now focussed on her personal characteristics such as jealousy and hysteria.[282]

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[278] Hubert Smeets, 'Coup 1991: van hilarisch fiasco naar 'totale triomf'', *Raam op Rusland*, 1 September 2016, https://raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/geschiedschrijving/254-coup-1991-van-hilarisch-fiasco-naar-totale-triomf (accessed 16 December 2019).
[279] S. Tifft, 'Those Days Were Horrible', *TIME Magazine* 138:11 (1991) 37.
[280] Sidorchik, 2019.
[281] Taubman, 660.
[282] Oates-Indruchová, 61.

In July 1999 Gorbacheva was diagnosed with leukaemia, sparking new gossip now concerning her illness. Some said her cancer was the result of a radioactive cloud that had covered Gorbacheva's hometown after tests with atomic weapons whereas others claimed the disease developed after she had visited the Chernobyl nuclear power plant immediately after its explosion in 1986.[283] Together with her husband and daughter, Gorbacheva travelled to Germany for treatment. Now that she was ill, the ex-First Lady was flooded with expressions of sympathy. The Gorbachev Foundation received thousands of letters and phone calls of people assuring they were praying for her health. She was also sent money and even herbs that were supposed to cure her. Once day Gorbachev brought his wife an article from *Izvestiya* titled 'Lady of Dignity' and read to her:

> *Fragile and elegant, with a refined taste for beautiful clothes, she became a symbol of a country liberating itself from drabness. But we didn't understand her. Perhaps because we didn't want to understand her. Perhaps we demanded too much of this family when they were in power*.[284]

She began to cry, whispering that 'apparently you need to die to finally be understood'.[285] In a last attempt to save her life, a stem cell transplant was scheduled from her sister Ludmila.[286] However, Raisa passed away on 20 September 1999, two days before the scheduled operation, at the age of 67.

The First Lady's Legacy

With his wife's passing, Gorbachev had lost the person he loved most in the world, the one who had always been by his side and – unlike many others at the top –had always been honest with him and now that she was gone, he was left feeling responsible. Although his wife contributed positively to the new image Gorbachev tried to create for the Soviet Union, he felt like he should have done more to protect her:[287]

> *There was so much gossip and nonsense about our family. I stopped paying attention to it, but she took everything to heart. It was perestroika that took my wife away from me. My experiences shortened her life*.[288]

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[283] Sidorchik, 2019.+
[284] Giulietto Chiesa, 'Grustnaya missiya Gorbacheva', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 20 1999.
[285] Ibragimova, 2019.
[286] Evgenii Al'bats, 'O chem bolit serdtse', *Novoe Vremya*, 3 March 2018, https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/150003 (accessed 3 December 2019).
[287] Taubman, 320.
[288] Sidorchik, 2019.

People's reputations rise and fall over the course of time due to changing perspectives that bring about changing interpretations of people's actions and it turns out Raisa Gorbacheva was right when she stated that she would only be accepted after her death. The ten year anniversary of her death was surprisingly widely noted in Russia considering the controversy surrounding her when she was alive. The Political History Museum in St. Petersburg devoted an exhibition to the First Lady, including documents and photographs of her own personal archive and a memorial service was held near her grave in the Novodevichy monastery.[289] People now saw the different sides of their First Lady; educated, dedicated to her work and family, stylish and someone who used her position to contribute positively to society. [290] All these things previously went by unnoticed as people were too busy blaming her for not looking and acting like a 'real' Soviet woman. The album 'Songs for Raisa', that Gorbachev released in honour of the ten year anniversary of his late-wife's passing also made many realise that though Gorbacheva was not like the others, it had been her who was able to bring out the human qualities in their former General Secretary.[291]

During the events leading up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's opponents had tried to humiliate him as much as possible in order to remove him. That his wife suffered through this as well was considered by most an 'acceptable loss'.[292] The philosophy of 'the end justifies the means – a phrase by 19th century revolutionary Sergey Nechayev that was later picked up by both Lenin and Stalin in order to justify their murderous acts – seems to apply perfectly in this context. The goal to remove Gorbachev was considered important enough to regard any method of reaching it acceptable. The *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* in their obituary seemed to refer to this in Gorbacheva's obituary, stating:

> *She revealed a different Russia to the world. She revealed the Russian feminine soul: loving, devoted and true. Farewell, our First Lady. Farewell and forgive us*.[293]

After Gorbachev, Yeltsin, failing to cope with the deepening crisis and paralysis of power, provoked the Russian people to long for order and an 'iron hand'. He brought about a rise of traditionalism, surrounding himself with churchmen and rehabilitating the royal family, through which he expressed continuity with the past. His successor Vladimir Putin built upon the

[289] Coalson, 2009.
[290] Alekhina, 2019.
[291] Sean Michaels, 'Mikhail Gorbachev's 'debut album' sells for £100,000', *The Guardian*, 22 June 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/jun/22/mikhail-gorbachev-debut-album (accessed 20 December 2019).
[291] Watson, 8-9.
[292] Koval', 2006.
[293] Gayaz Alimov and Yuri Bogomolov, 'Raisa Maximovna Gorbacheva is Dead', *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 51:38 (1999) 17.

framework provided by his predecessor.[294] The creation of a more stable society through an effective centralization of power allowed him to present himself as a keeper of stability after the chaos of the 1990s and through his bold moves in Syria and Ukraine he became the restorer of Russia's 'Great Power Status', which was lost under Gorbachev. Putin achieved a symbolic power as 'keeper of traditional values' that portrays Russia's conservative identity as being superior to the West, of which the identity is described as materialistic, imperialistic and lacking a sense of self and morality. These actions and rhetoric combined consolidated a stronger sense of national identity resulting in the restoration of pride lost with the fall of the USSR.[295] With the rise of traditionalism, the public image of the First Lady disappeared. Both the wives of Yeltsin and Putin maintained a low profile, indicating once again a separation in the public and private sphere. The position of Lyudmila Putina cannot even be compared to that of Gorbacheva. Whereas Gorbachev discussed everything with his wife, Putina was not even aware of the fact that her husband was replacing Yeltsin as the President of Russia. In 1999 she found out with the rest of the country as she watched Yeltsin's New Year's speech. Initially, she did accompany her husband on trips at home and abroad as Putin supposedly 'understood the role of the First Lady and the purpose of it'.[296] Though with time she appeared in public less and less. Presenting himself as the father of the nation there was no place for a woman by his side. Vikulina writes on this:

> *The image of Superman – practicing judo, skiing, surfacing out of the deep sea with ancient amphoras – does not need a woman's supplement which would only detract from the main character*.[297]

In 2013 Lyudmila separated her husband, making her the first First Lady (in both the Soviet Union and independent Russia) to do so. An interesting fact that underlines the idea that a more prominent position for the First Lady can be considered an indicator of democracy was that the reign of Dmitry Medvedev, President of Russia from 2008 to 2012 during the so-called 'Putin-Medvedev tandem', was described by many as a weakening of vertical power and that during this time the president's wife became a more powerful figure.[298] Svetlana Medvedeva headed several initiatives though she did shy away from photographers and rarely gave interviews.[299]

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[294] Lilia Shevtsova, 'Post-Communist Russia: A Historic Opportunity Missed', *International Affairs* 83:5 (2007) 839.
[295] Suzanne Loftus, 'Insecurity and the Rise of Nationalism: The Case of Putin's Russia - Keeper of Traditional Values' (2018). *Open Access Dissertations*. 2016.
[296] 'Gefangen im Kreml' (2017).
[297] Vikulina, 55.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Amie Ferris-Rotman, 'Enter Russia's new first lady – Svetlana Medvedeva', *Reuters*, 5 March 2008, https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-election-firstlady/enter-russias-new-first-lady-svetlana-

The 1990s can be called 'the decade of the gender' as perestroika had allowed women's movements to emerge. To everyone's surprise the political bloc Women of Russia (ZhR) in 1993 won 23 of the 450 seats in the State Duma. The circumstances surrounding the elections with Yeltsin forcibly dismantling the Parliament may account for an explanation for this as the image of women seeking for peace and consensus rather than power, may have been attractive.[300] However, the greater visibility of women became tokenism as parties now felt the need to prominently display a woman as a symbol of the party's concern. In 1998 Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov praised women deputies as 'charming and attractive', but noted they 'should not ask too many questions or argue about critical issues.[301] By the time Gorbacheva passed away, circumstances no longer favoured women's electoral chances and Russia's political atmosphere emphasised strong leadership, nationalism and a 'get tough'-policy in regards to Chechnya; all considered to be 'manly features'.[302] In January 2000, Putin recognised the lack of women in power positions and stated that he would like to see a woman as the next speaker in the Duma. However, his actions since then – one of them being the strengthened supervision of societal movements and civic organisations – proved that increasing women's presence in Russia's leadership is not a priority.[303]

medvedeva-idUKL2952826820080305?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews&rpc=451 (accessed 20 December 2019).

[300] Nechemias,s 207.

[301] -, 'No Easy Life for Russian Women', *BBC News*, 8 March 1998, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/despatches/63186.stm (accessed 15 October 2019).

[302] Nechemias, 210.

[303] Ibid. and Suvi Salmenniemi, 'From a Researcher: Pussy Riot's Background Dates Back to the Russian Feminism', *University of Turku*, 14 October 2014, https://www.utu.fi/en/news/news/from-a-researcher-pussy-riots-background-dates-back-to-the-russian-feminism (accessed 20 December 2019).

4. Conclusion

The research question I aimed to answer with this thesis was: How did Raisa Gorbacheva fulfil her role as the only First Lady of the Soviet Union and how did this correspond to the Soviet feminine ideal of the late-Soviet period? In many ways her actions as the First Lady differed from those women who walked the Kremlin halls before her. With the exception of Nadezhda Alliluyeva, who suffered greatly for not fitting into the picture of the feminine ideal, the First Ladies who preceded Gorbacheva mirrored the ideal woman of their time. Nadezhda Krupskaya was the personification of the Soviet feminine ideal and admired for her hard work, dedication to the revolution, her modesty (*skromnost*), selflessness and unconditional support for her husband. As part of the Thaw, Khrushcheva accompanied her husband abroad, but looking like a typical Soviet woman and staying in the background, and Brezhneva embodied the feminine ideal of the era of stagnation by sticking to domestic work while letting her husband run his political business.

Throughout the Soviet era the feminine ideal proved a useful tool to those in power to promote and demote certain behaviour in women. A symbol of womanhood in the country, the First Lady was arguably subjected to this ideal more than anyone else. An advocate of political change and reform, Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary wanted his wife to share the spotlight with him and because of that Gorbacheva became the first First Lady who acted independently, made regular public appearances and influenced her husband's decision-making by being his most trusted advisor. In the West, Gorbacheva's prominent presence was received with great enthusiasm as an indication of democratisation of the Soviet Union and emancipation of Soviet women and they admired her sense of style, which challenged the persistent stereotype of the drab, coarse Soviet woman. Many tried to label the Soviet First Lady to be a feminist, but as the literature review of this thesis demonstrated, the emancipation of Soviet women occurred under completely different circumstances than in the West, resulting in a Soviet variant of feminism inherently different from feminism in the West and something Gorbacheva did not want to be associated with out of fear for hurting her image.

However, her break with Kremlin tradition concerning the place assigned to women in Soviet society was enough to spark controversy. She did not act according to the feminine ideal by not 'knowing her place'. She let her voice be heard, which many believed was just simply uncalled for. The fact that she as the First Lady continued to make use of her intellectual capacities became a constant source of criticism and this in combination with her fashionable appearance was perceived as arrogance, because through her display of both her intellect and money she lacked the modesty propagandised upon women all throughout Soviet history as well as it indicated a lack of solidarity to the common Soviet people. The First Lady became the subject of gossip and jokes which highlighted her femininity while Gorbachev's masculinity and ability to be a leader were questioned. Through time Gorbachev's popularity plummeted and due to her close connection to him, her image reached rock bottom as well. It is safe to say that Raisa Gorbacheva as the First Lady in many ways did not correspond to the Soviet feminine ideal of her time, though there were also some aspects as to which she did. She was a caring wife, very protective over her family and she supported her husband unconditionally, even if his decisions hurt her well-being. She sacrificed her own career and with that part of her happiness in favour of his, followed him wherever the Party stationed him and as a wife she made sure her husband always appeared in the best way possible through always emphasising his accomplishments while downplaying her own.

As the only First Lady the Soviet Union ever knew, Raisa Gorbacheva gave the USSR a 'human face', which contributed to the improvement of relations between the East and the West, but at home appreciation for her was complicated through a multitude of factors including the persistence of Kremlin tradition concerning the position of women in power and the roles assigned to women in general, but also the overall way through which women had obtained their position in society. Soviet women, emancipated without challenging the basic premises of patriarchal structure, did not look up to Gorbacheva, because the First Lady looked like a foreign element. Overall people were unable to look past gender roles that had prevailed for decades and had been underlined through strong patriarchal discourse. Before Gorbacheva, there had really only been one spouse who exerted as much influence on her husband's decision making as her: Alexandra Feodorovna Romanova (wife of last Tsar Nicholas II) and the associations of the Soviet people towards this woman who formed one of the factors that led to the collapse of the Russian empire possibly made their genetic memory wary of her. Blaming Gorbacheva for the fall of the Soviet Union is much too far a stretch, but considering the course Russia has followed after Gorbachev, one of traditionalism and nationalism, it is not to be expected that a new Russian First Lady with a public role will enter the stage any time soon.

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