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Y/Our Land and Y/Our People: Filmic Constructions of Soviet National Identity 1926 and 1944

The first population census conducted in the U.S.S.R. in 1926 recorded 176 distinct nationalities, which were included in the Soviet project of creating a Soviet (mass) society. Early Soviet cinema (among other arts) was employed to carry out the promotion of a Soviet national identity. Benedict Anderson has observed that constructions of nationalism depend on a dialogue with a number of cultural categories, among them racial, linguistic, sexed and gendered categories. Through four films: Dziga Vertov's *The Sixth Part of the World* (*Шестая часть мира*, 1926) and *Three Songs About Lenin* (*Три песни о Ленине*, 1934), Nikolai Ekk's *Road to Life* (*Путёвка в жизнь*, 1931), and Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (*Иван Грозный*, 1944), I track the progression of the Soviet nationalities project in relation to formulations of gender and expose tensions and contradictions. Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, which along with Laura Mulvey's articulations on scopophilia, illuminate processes in these films, and problematize these processes by questioning the male gaze in relation to the portrayal and ability to hold power over a female audience. Furthermore, relying on scholarship about the films by Joan Neuberger, Lilya Kaganovsky, Kevin Platt, among others, I contend that the creation and dissemination of Soviet national identity experiences a change, from one of assimilation into

East Slavic identity to multiculturalism under the umbrella of ethnic Russian, but yet Eurasian identity. Formulations of nationality are complicated cultural constructs, however; the cinema of the early Soviet Union allows for a concise archive from which to track the development of these constructs, mostly thanks to the emphasis placed on the role of the cinema in the creation and propagation of Soviet ideology.