

**Title:** Absent Fathers, Silent Mothers: Representations of the Family in Post-Soviet Russian Cinema

**Author:** Kirsten Rutsala, University of Oklahoma

The motif of absent fathers occurs in many Russian films, especially those produced during the Thaw, reflecting the reality of families destroyed and fragmented by World War II and the Terror. The nuclear family functions as a microcosm of the state, and in its turn the state is represented as a family; the absent father frequently stands for Stalin, the “Father of Nations,” whose death has left the orphaned country in turmoil. In Russian cinema of the 1990s and 2000s, a similar motif exists, though the absent father now represents the loss of security and defining cultural narratives in the postSoviet landscape. In addition, this trope has a counterpart: the silent mother, who may reflect the traumatized nation of Russia herself, whose authentic “voice” has been silenced by decades of Soviet rule.

This paper explores these motifs in three films: *Sirota kazanskaia* (1997), *Ital’ianets* (2005), and *Kak ia provel etim letom* (2010). In each film, the family structure has broken down; in response, the protagonists form alternative families and seek to reunite their original families. In the first two films, children search for absent parents, attempting to reforge broken familial bonds. Both films end with positive portrayals of stable new family structures. By extension, these endings suggest an optimistic outlook regarding the healing of the larger social structure, although the trope of silence is never fully resolved. In contrast, *Kak ia provel* depicts the family dynamic from the other side: we see the perspective of the absent father, rather than the abandoned child. When tragedy strikes, the possibility of reunion disappears, and the alternative family collapses as well. This paper investigates the complexities and ambiguities of these recurring motifs, examining the larger artistic and social implications in both the resolutions and lack of resolution the films offer.

krutsala@ou.edu