

## **De-Othering the Other in Soviet and Post-Soviet Film**

### Part I: Executive Summary and References List

The course I have designed is a semester-long sixth-level Russian language and culture course that focuses on exploring diversity in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras through the use of Soviet and Russian films produced between 1980 and 2021. This course will focus on the following themes: homophobia, gender roles, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and poverty. Approximately two weeks will be devoted to each topic, with students also reading books and articles that will segue into each of these particular film topics and provide them with background information to better understand the theme of each film. This course has been designed around the above-mentioned five themes, which are hot-button issues in post-Soviet space today, so that students of Russian become better aware of how these Soviet and Russian films attempt to portray the aforementioned issues in a new and atypical light. This will act as the starting point for classroom discussions in which students will reflect on ways in which these films address diversity and inclusion.

I have consulted with the following references and films while developing my course syllabus and this final project:

Avrutin, Eugene. *Racism in Modern Russia: From the Romanovs to Putin*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.

*Ayka [Айка]*. Directed by Sergey Dvortsevov, performances by Samal Esljamova and Sergey Mazur, Kinodvor, 2018.

Bessudnov, Alexey, and Shcherbak, Andrey. "Ethnic Discrimination in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Evidence from Russia." *European Sociological Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2020, pp. 104-20.

Dudwick, Nora, Gomart, Elizabeth, Marc, Alexandre, and Kuehnast, Kathleen, editors. *When Things Fall Apart: Qualitative Studies of Poverty in the Former Soviet Union*. The World Bank, 2002.

Essig, Laurie. *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and the Other*. Duke University Press Books, 1999.

- Get Thee Out! [Изыди!]*. Directed by Dmitry Astrakhan, performances by Otar Megvinetukhutsesi and Elena Anisimova, Lenfilm, 1991.
- Gibson, James L., and Howard, Marc Morjé. "Russian Anti-Semitism and the Scapegoating of Jews." *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2007, pp. 193-223.
- Healey, Dan. *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
- Karakum [Каракум]*. Directed by Arend Agthe and Uzmaan Saparov, performances by Max Kullmann and Murad Orazov, CineScreen Filmproduktion, 1994.
- Korey, William. "The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism: An Analysis." *Slavic Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1972, pp. 111-135.
- Leviathan [Левиафан]*. Directed by Andrey Zvyagintsev, performances by Aleksei Serebryakov and Elena Lyadova, Non-Stop Production, 2014.
- Lynd, Hilary, and Loyd, Thom. "Histories of Color: Blackness and Africanness in the Soviet Union." *Slavic Review*, vol. 81, no. 2, 2022, pp. 394-417, doi:10.1017/slr.2022.154.
- Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears [Москва слезам не верит]*. Directed by Vladimir Menshov, performances by Vera Alentova and Irina Muravyova, Mosfilm, 1980.
- Skoglund, Ekaterina. "Evolution of Gender Role Attitudes and Gender Equality in Russia." *Gendering Post-Soviet Space*, edited by Tatiana Karabchuk, Kazuhiro Kumo, Kseniia Gatskova, and Ekaterina Skoglund, Springer, 2021, pp. 3-26.
- There Are Women in Russian Villages [Есть женщины в русских селеньях...]*. Parallax Pictures, Kinoko, 2006, <https://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/4958/There-Are-Women-in-Russian-Villages>
- To See Paris and Die [Увидеть Париж и умереть]*. Directed by Aleksandr Proshkin, performances by Dmitriy Malikov and Tatyana Vasileva, Mosfilm, 1992.
- We Will Become Better [Мы станем лучше]*. Directed by Andzej Gavriss, performances by Maksim Avdeev and Nikita Orlov, Daddy's Film, Halal Amsterdam, Spot Films, 2021.
- White, Anne. "Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia: Attitudes and Expectations Among Women Students." *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 57, no. 3, 2005, pp. 429-455.
- You I Love [Я люблю тебя]*. Directed by Olga Stolpovskaja and Dmitry Troitsky, performances by Damir Badmaev and Lyubov Tolkalina, Malevich Productions, 2004.
- Zubarevich, Natalia V. "Poverty in Russian Regions in 2000-2017: Factors and Dynamics." *Population and Economics*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2019, pp. 63-74.

*2000 Songs of Farida [Faridaning ikki ming qo'shig'i]*. Directed by Yalkin Tuychiev, performances by Bakhran Matchanov and Marjona Uljayeva, Fox Music Cinema, 2020.

## Part II: Analysis

The sixth-level Russian course that I teach, which is a graduate-level course, explores a variety of themes connected with Russia and other countries that make up post-Soviet space. In previous semesters, this course has focused on themes such as education, migration, issues affecting young people in Russia today, demography, and consequences of the break-up of the USSR, among others. Although students find these topics engaging to discuss, I think it is important to call their attention to issues that focus on diversity and inclusion as they relate to post-Soviet space and the individuals who reside there. From past experience showing Soviet and Russian films in this course, I know that students welcome the opportunity to learn through this medium. Therefore, I decided to structure a semester of Sixth-Level Russian around Soviet and Russian films that focus on the five themes of diversity and inclusion that I have selected and, in so doing, encourage critical engagement with social issues that occupy a prominent place in the Russian-speaking world.

As stated above, Sixth-Level Russian is a graduate-level course; however, if undergraduates' Russian language proficiency is strong enough for them to test into this course, student enrollment then includes both graduate and undergraduate students. Moreover, Russian heritage speakers also occasionally take this course. Learners in Sixth-Level Russian have tested at or above the intermediate-high proficiency level on the ACTFL scale. Graduate enrollees studied abroad as undergraduates; many of them also worked abroad in Russia and/or a Russian-speaking country after receiving their bachelor's degree. Undergraduate enrollees also completed study abroad programs in Russia or a Russian-speaking country prior to enrolling in Sixth-Level Russian. Thus, students who register for this course have first-hand knowledge of Russian culture as it exists in post-Soviet space. Additionally, learners who studied in countries such as Kazakhstan, Latvia or Armenia, for example, are well acquainted with both Russian culture and a second one. Students' proficiency in the Russian language, as well as their direct exposure to Russian culture, allows them to both understand the films that I will be showing in our class and discuss the issues upon which these films focus.

Owing to the fact that learners in Sixth-Level Russian have taken a myriad of Russian culture classes—both in the US and abroad—they have already been exposed to the topics that we will cover in our course. In addition, they have gained knowledge about these issues thanks to Russian-speaking friends, host families, and (in the case of those students who already worked in post-Soviet space) co-workers. Students will also have learned about the topics we will be discussing thanks to articles and blogs they have read.

This course will be taught at a small private research university with an undergraduate enrollment of 7,500 and a graduate enrollment of 10,000. Tuition is \$60,000 for undergraduates and \$2,500 per credit hour for graduate students. The class size ranges from four to 10 learners, with five being the average. In addition to taking classes, many students also have an internship at a government or non-government organization.

The essential component of Sixth-Level Russian is speaking practice with a focus on syntax, vocabulary, and semantics so that learners at the intermediate-high level on the ACTFL scale can reach the advanced-low or advanced-mid level, and students at the advanced-mid or advanced-high level can reach the superior level. In order to accomplish this goal, students who register for “De-Othering the Other in Soviet and Post-Soviet Film” will not only discuss films but also articles and books that present background information about the following five topics around which this course is centered. The topics and respective films connected with each of them are the following:

- Homophobia (*We Will Become Better* (2021), *You I Love* (2004))
- Gender roles (*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1980), *2000 Songs of Farida* (2020))
- Xenophobia (*Leviathan* (2014), *Karakum* (1994))
- Anti-Semitism (*Get Thee Out!* (1991), *To See Paris and Die* (1995))
- Poverty (*Ayka* (2018), *There Are Women in Russian Villages* (2006))

Students will complete a final oral presentation for which they will choose a Soviet or Russian film that aligns with one of the five topics of this course in which they describe how the topic of homophobia, gender roles, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or poverty is addressed in their chosen film, what are some of the main points that the film’s director wants to convey to the audience, and why this film made an impression on them.

Based on the course content and objectives of Sixth-Level Russian, I have developed the

instructional goal of putting students in the position to communicate in Russian on all the aforementioned topics, which includes using inclusive language and asking their classmates questions to learn about their opinions and viewpoints.

### Part III: Design

#### Performance Objectives

Learners will:

- Analyze how films have been used as a means of social commentary in the Russian-speaking world.
- Engage with texts and films to further improve language proficiency and cultural competence.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the course themes and the ability to interpret a Russian language film and connect it with one of the course themes.

#### Learning Assessments

Learners will:

- Each lead a weekly group discussion that focuses on their interpretation of the film assigned for that week, summarize the key theme(s) of the article and/or book assigned for that week's reading, and demonstrate their ability to defend their points of view.
- Students will complete weekly one- to two-page reflective writing assignments in Russian on a topic I assign, for which they will reflect on and analyze each week's readings and film.
- Make a final presentation about a Russian language film that addresses one of the themes of this course.

#### Strategies, Activities, Methods

- Students will be assigned supplemental readings and writing assignments.
- Students will discuss films and readings in class.

- Students will make a list of vocabulary words that they will use in their final presentation and may be unknown to their classmates, translate them into English, and distribute the list prior to beginning their final presentation.

### Alignment

Objective	Assessments	Strategies/Activities/Methods
Analyze how films have been used as a means of social commentary in the Russian-speaking world.	Prepare a summary in Russian of the points on which they want to focus when it is their turn to lead a weekly discussion of the readings and film that will be discussed.	Discussions, written summaries
Engage with texts and films to further improve language proficiency and cultural competence.	Written reflections (in Russian), reading (in English), and film comprehension (in Russian).	Supplemental readings, collective textual and film analysis, class discussions, written work
Demonstrate understanding of the course themes and ability to interpret a Russian language film of each student's choosing and relate it to one of the course themes.	Final oral presentation.	Film selection, research, slide creation, vocabulary handout creation

### Grading

- Final oral presentations will be graded out of 100 points according to the following criteria: whether students chose a film that aligned with one of the five topics of this course, described how the topic of homophobia, gender roles, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or poverty is presented in their chosen film, addressed some of the main points that the film's

director wants to convey to the audience, made a Russian language vocabulary list with a translation of each word/phrase into English, and maintained grammatical control. Grammatical errors will be graded by considering whether they were frequent and impeded listener comprehension, errors were occasional and did not impede listener comprehension or errors were isolated and only in low-frequency words.

- Weekly one- to two-page reflective writing assignments will be graded out of 20 points according to the following criteria: how thoroughly students addressed the essay topic that I assigned them, their ability to use grammatically correct Russian, demonstrate control of Russian orthography, and adhere to the norms of Russian language stylistics.
- Students will be graded on their performance while leading a group discussion—namely, whether they presented an interpretation of their assigned film, summarized the main points of the article and/or book assigned for that week’s reading, gave each of their classmates a chance to participate and present their own viewpoint(s) of the week’s film and readings, treated everyone equally and fairly, made all students feel that their opinions are valid, and demonstrated Russian grammatical and lexical control while leading the discussion. I will grade this assignment out of 100 points.

#### Part IV: Development

- To implement this course, students will be assigned 10 readings, which come from books and journals, and 10 films. I will provide them with PDF files of the reading material.
- Students will have access to all the films for this course on Canvas.
- To present content for this course, I will need to have access to Canvas, as this is where I will upload the course syllabus, schedule, and films, retrieve students’ weekly written reflections, and post students’ grades.
- Although all the readings will be important for me when teaching this course, perhaps some of the most useful information will come from the two books that I have decided to include in the students’ reading list—*Racism in Modern Russia: From the Romanovs to Putin* and *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*—because of the comprehensive look at the topics of xenophobia and homophobia that they present to readers.

- I have the support of my Chair and colleagues for conducting this course. In addition, should any technical issues arise when I or the students are attempting to access the films on Canvas, the director for industrial resources at our university will assist us.
- Because of the fact that one of my colleagues taught a similar course in spring 2022 entitled *Russian Literature Fights Xenophobia*, which was well received by our department and students alike, I do not anticipate encountering any disapproval from others. Moreover, as I mentioned previously, students who register for Sixth-Level Russian have already spent time in post-Soviet space. Therefore, they are familiar with these topics as they relate to the culture and lives of Russian speakers.

#### Part V: Implementation

- The syllabus for Sixth-Level Russian includes information about the university's honor code, which students sign upon admittance to our university, and the student code of conduct and ethics, which states that all students must uphold academic integrity, respect all persons, their rights and property, and the safety of others. Furthermore, at the beginning of every semester, I remind students that I will not tolerate any disrespect or negativity in my classroom, as I want everyone to feel welcome and safe.
- Thanks to Dr. Sunnie Rucker-Chang's presentation on supporting first-generation students, I have changed the wording in my syllabus from "office hours" to "student hours," which will be held both in-person and virtually to accommodate students who are unable to come to my office. Perhaps some first-generation learners may feel slightly intimidated by the phrase "office hours" and therefore decide not to seek out assistance from me about any difficulties they are having. For this reason, I have decided to implement this change in language to help students feel more comfortable about meeting with me.
- I have included information in my syllabus so that learners know they are allowed four unexcused absences during this semester-long course and ask them to email me should something come up during the semester that requires them to miss more than four classes.

#### Part VI: Evaluation



- I will administer both a mid-semester and end-of-semester survey in order to gauge student perception of the topics chosen for this course and the effectiveness or lack thereof of the assessment measures used. Based on this feedback, I will make changes to this course that will be implemented when I teach it again.
- In the middle of the semester, I will meet with each student individually for approximately 10 minutes to learn how comfortable they feel in this course given the sensitivity of the topics we will be discussing.
- In order to keep improving this course in the future, I will consider the possibility of inviting guest speakers (e.g., friends who identify as Jewish and grew up in the former USSR before immigrating to the US) and taking students on field trips (e.g., to the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC).