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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### Gendering the Costs of the Political Economy Transition in Russia

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#### ABSTRACT

*Russia is an important global player that has witnessed the pressures and challenges of globalization, international economic liberalization and privatization. Since the early 1990s, Russia has been charting new paths towards democracy and market-oriented institutions. How did Russia's integration with the global economy reshape its power in internal political and economic gender frameworks? To answer this question this article maps out the gender impact of political and economic reforms under Yeltsin. We argue that some of these reforms fueled a conservative turn in social attitudes that legitimized gender inequalities in the political economy of Russia, marginalizing women both as workers and as political actors. Our findings suggest that the transition to a new political economy created new social risks with far-reaching consequences for gender equality.*

**KEYWORDS:** The political economy of transition, Yeltsin, Gender, Labor market, Russia

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## 1. Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought sweeping changes to various aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural life, not only in Russia, but also throughout the world. In fact, after seven decades of its existence, Russia's incarnation as both a threat and hope have disappeared – depending on one's ideological inclination in different national and international contexts. The transition toward a democratic system and a market-oriented economy generated interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes, including economic liberalization, globalization and deep institutional changes, that restructured the social fabric of Russian society.

The demise of the communist regime in 1991 represented a time of stark and rapid transformation, a critical juncture that radically altered the status quo of Russian political economy. At the same time, globalization was reshaping the world economy,<sup>1</sup> influencing Russia's transition to democracy and to a capitalist economy. Vorobyov and Zukov (2001 p.251) believe that 'globalization was the driving force in Russia's transition'. Although the impact of global forces on Russia is often inseparable from internal factors of socio-economic and cultural transformation, it is still possible to mark patterns of adjustment and resistance to the global world (Semenenko 2003).

In her recent review of the literature on political economy, Renate Mayntz (2019:10) identifies three types of political economic relationships: (1) political processes and actions impacting on economic phenomena; (2) economic processes and actors impacting on politics, and; (3) political and economic actors or processes that influence each other. Our work examines the third type of relationship, exploring how dismantling the command economy and Soviet social services may have impinged on the female labor force as well as political participation. As Mayntz (2019, p. 7) states, the 'political economy enquiry is not a unified discipline with a shared

The article was written by the two authors in collaboration, however Rosa Mulè is responsible for sections 1.,4., 4.1, 4.2 and Olga Dubrovina is responsible for sections 2., 3., 3.1 and 5.

<sup>1</sup> The term globalization has been defined in a number of ways, intersecting different fields such as political, economic, social and cultural. The etymology refers to globe, i.e., universal, worldwide. In this article we define globalization as international economic integration.

paradigm, composed of a set of core concepts and core questions asked about it'. On the contrary, political economy is an interdisciplinary research field which is addressing the need for an analytical perspective by integrating the selective disciplinary perspectives of economics and political science (Mayntz 2019, p. 5). The analytical perspective of political economy enables us to reach novel insights regarding the feedback effects between politics and economics, encouraging us to ask how policy implementation transforms the webs of relations between the political and economic spheres.

A political economy approach is particularly apt for analyzing Russia in the early 1990s, when the country underwent the twin transition of political and economic transition. This transition involved on one side the shift from a centrally planned economy, under government control, intended to develop mixed or market-based institutions; on the other side, and at the same time, the political system morphed from a totalitarian to an authoritarian regime (Gel'man, 2015). Hence Russia in the period under examination experienced a crucial political economy transition that altered the fabric of society.

What are the implications for gender equality of the huge transformations initiated by the processes of democratization and economic liberalization? We argue that in order to understand the gender impact of Russia's political economy transition we should go beyond giving pride of place to either the economic or the political sphere, but explore instead *the interaction* between the politics and the economy. Our work analyses the quantity and quality of women's participation in the political process as well as of women's labor force participation, stressing the feedback effects between political representation and labor market participation. Instead of considering the two different spheres of gender bias separately, namely the economic and the political spheres, the article brings the two spheres together offering a fresh approach on the gender costs of the political economy of the transition period.

The rise of Russia as a global player rose the expectations of many in the field of gender equality. Yeltsin's political and economic reforms raised new hopes

for freedom, social progress and democratic representation. We ask whether these reforms produced favorable or unfavorable conditions for women to enter parliament. Exploring those conditions that affect women's descriptive representation is important. Anne Phillips (1995) claims in her book entitled 'The politics of presence' that different life experiences and personal characteristics of representatives influence their view points and policy priorities. The presence or underrepresentation of women in the political arena molds the issues raised in political debates, determining the quality of democratic representation (Schwindt-Bayer 2011).

Democratization and international economic liberalization entailed a shakeup of the Russian social fabric. Like all political economy upheavals, those reforms redistributed resources and power between social groups, including between men and women. How did gender map onto Russia's transition to a new political economy? What effects did the dismantling of state sponsored socialist welfare policies have on women's agency, most notably on their opportunity to influence the political economy? Rosenbluth et al. (2006) argue that in industrialized countries the key mechanism affecting women's probability to enter parliament resides in welfare state policies. Welfare state policies free women to enter the paid workforce and provide public sector jobs that disproportionately employ women. These factors change the political interests of working women, and create incentives for parties to compete for the female vote by including more and more women in their parliamentary delegations. Rosenbluth and her co-authors (2006) find that as the size of the welfare state increases, so does female representation in parliament in the industrialized countries. Welfare services and programs enhance women's ability to have a voice in society and influence policy. Consequently, if social services and the welfare state are retrenched, political economy reforms, stemming from globalization and deregulation, may have ominous implications for gender equality. Although empirical evidence on the globalization-welfare state nexus is mixed (Meinhard & Potrafke 2012), in Russia the introduction of neoliberal policies ushered in hefty cuts in social spending. Our work indicates that a new dynamic was at work with significant consequences for the political economy of gender inequality.

The article is structured as follows. Section two examines women political representation in the Soviet era. Section three explores continuities and changes in gender representation under Yeltzin's democratization process. Section four explores women's economic conditions and opportunities in the Soviet era. Section five analyzes the gender impact of the economic transition under Yeltzin and the cutting back of public social services. Section six summarizes the results of this article. Our methodology is a case-based research that contributes to the 'return of single country studies', which allows in-depth analysis of micro-level processes (Pepinsky, 2019). The empirical findings draw on Russia's official statistical data, including Rosstat, *Russian Statistical Yearbook* and Demoscope Weekly, which is a demographic electronic journal, published by the Russian Institute of Demography, as well as government publications, legal documents and the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey. Drawing on multiple economic and political data sources is a requirement of the interdisciplinary political economy approach endorsed in this article.

## **2. Political representation: illusion of gender equality in USSR**

We begin by looking back at women's role in the political economy of Soviet Russia. In Russia, for more than 70 years of Soviet power the idea of gender equal rights was reflected in every constitution (1918, 1924, 1977). The question of women's rights together with that of gender equality was considered resolved. It was believed that equality had been achieved. It has become a myth and the embodiment of the victory of the proletariat over past times (Pushkareva 2008, p. 118). The Bolsheviks proclaimed the equality of political and civil rights of women and men already in the 1918 Constitution where it was underlined that citizens of both sexes benefited from the right to elect and be elected. Russia became one of the first five countries in the world that granted women political rights (Polenina 2000). Dispelling the myth, it should be remembered that women obtained the right to vote in the spring of 1917 through a decree of the Provisional Government. Furthermore, the concept of equal opportunities, whose absence almost rendered the

equation of political rights superficial, was not taken into consideration by the Soviet legislators.

Thanks to the quotas that existed in the USSR, women were assigned 30% of the seats of the Supreme Council of the USSR. But this number was more to guarantee a series of other, more important criteria. In 1984, 90% of female members of Parliament (MPs) belonged to the category of manual workers (weavers, milkmaids, machine operators) and only 10% of mandates were assigned to teachers, doctors and other representatives of intellectual work. Of the 492 deputies, only 66 (13%) women were re-elected, i.e. they had a real opportunity to penetrate into the work of the Supreme Soviet, to participate more assiduously in its activities, to work more efficiently than novice deputies. Most of the male MPs obtained the mandate for life, so, it was women who guaranteed the rotation of the parliamentary body (Novikova 1994, pp. 13-18).

There were only two women in the Politburo, the institution where the real power was concentrated. In the first Soviet government (1917-1922) there was only one woman, Aleksandra Kollontaj, out of 67 people's commissioners. Until 1991 only two women directed the commissariats and the ministries: Polina Zhemchuzhina, the commissioner of the fishing industry, and Ekaterina Furtseva, the Minister of Culture. Thus, among the ministers of the Soviet period women constituted 0.5% in Politburo and in other institutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) women constituted 3%. These figures, and not those that demonstrate a wide participation of women in soviets of different levels, must be considered as the real index of the political status of women in the USSR (Kochkina 1999, p. 181), because the real power was concentrated in the highest level of soviet hierarchy.

In fact, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet authorities were very concerned about encouraging women's participation in urban and rural soviets. However, the real participation could not be significant because of pressure from the top that was applied to reach the expected figures. The stereotypes rooted in the early Soviet society of the 1920s and 1930s could not be removed through person-

nel policies. The representation of women in the traditionally male spheres of activity provoked reactions of frustration in the "stronger sex" (Shabatura 2013, p. 507). As an example, we can cite the data on southern Russia that demonstrate an extremely weak involvement of women in administrative-managerial positions of the kolkhozy<sup>2</sup>: in 1939 out of all kolkhozy presidents only 3% were women (Skorik & Gaditskaya 2013).

According to Russian researcher Voronina (2016), a tacit agreement was stipulated between the Soviet state and women: women were deprived of political rights in the interests of the state that exploited them to solve economic and demographic problems depending on the needs of a specific period. In return, women acquired the guarantees of political and above all economic stability. Through the system of subsidies and benefits, the State exercised the role of a true patriarch and head of families, closely intertwining the economy of the country with that of each family. Voronina (2016, 173) argues that "women ceased to be the property of their husbands as they were before the revolution and became the property of the State". As a result, in the USSR a specific type of traditional gender system was born: a Soviet patriarchy, where the main mechanism of discrimination was not men but the State. In order to more fully dominate women, to use their productive and reproductive resources for its own purposes. It is in the "resubordination" of women from husbands to the State that lies the deep meaning of Soviet emancipatory politics. Of course, such alienation of male rights to women in favor of the State does not only contribute to the reconstruction of patriarchal principles of social order, but it also strengthens them. If the material and symbolic status of the patriarch is assigned to the State, then the gender identity of real men is mixed. Therefore, in the early 1990s the paradoxical goal of feminist movement consisted not in rooting the idea of equality between men and women in public opinion, but in demolishing the myth of achieved equality that was built over 70 years (Pushkareva 2008, p. 119). The tacit agreement of which the validity lasted throughout the Soviet period left indelible traces on the political mentality of post-Soviet women.

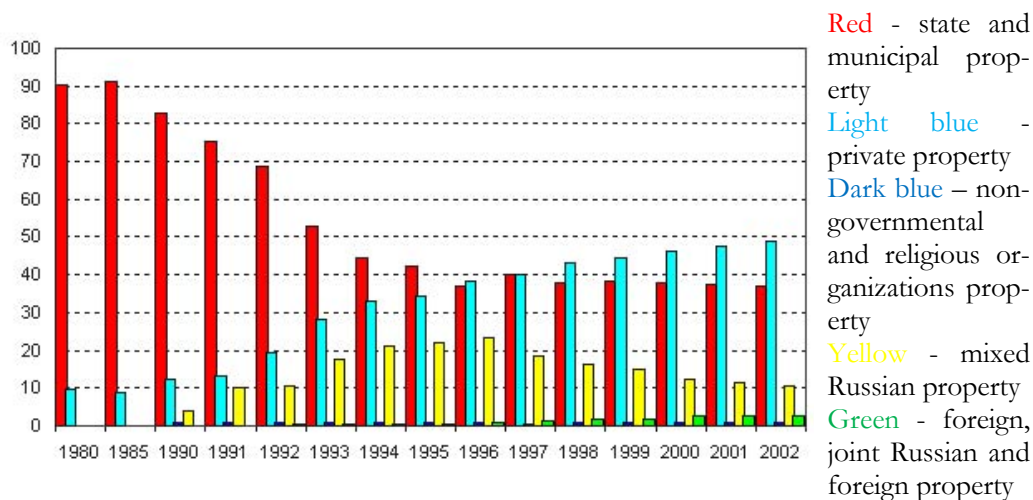
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<sup>2</sup> A kolkhoz was a form of collective farms in the Soviet Union.

In the years of "perestroika" the situation of representation of women in politics got worse. After holding the first alternative elections in 1989, the share of women among MPs was reduced from 33% to 15.7%. After the legislative elections to the Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) in 1990, women constituted only 5.4% of parliamentarians (Kan 2007, p. 14).

Moving to inspect the labor market, it should be noted that in soviet Russia full employment policies and high levels of education amongst women meant that women occupied positions at all levels of the occupational hierarchy. According to the socialist ideology, most of the population was supposed to work in the State sector (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Distribution of workers based on the ownership type of enterprises and organizations, 1980-2002 (percentage)**



Source: <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2003/0117/barom02.php>

Women's labor force participation under the socialist command economy was sustained by social programs and services, including state-sponsored childcare, which helped women to balance work and family responsibilities. State-sponsored social services enabled soviet Russia to achieve high levels of female labor force participation, contrasting Western capitalist countries, while maintaining fertility rates



close to replacement levels (on average at about two children per woman). High participation rates were encouraged to speed up economic growth by utilizing all labor resources and as a proof of equality of the sexes - an early Communist objective. Women labor force participation was facilitated by a pro-children policy as reflected in generous family allowances. Hence, state sponsored social services and maternity leave allowed women to have similar participation levels in the labor market to men. The main measures of the Soviet family policy included direct and indirect “material” support provided to citizens with family responsibilities, as well as “service” support. Material support was aimed at improving conditions of families with children through direct and indirect payments. These payments included maternity leave, child allowances, tax breaks for large families, housing programs for young and large families, as well as parenting and care through creation of a network of social welfare institutions. Service support provided by the state was intended primarily to aid socialization of family functions, such as housekeeping and raising children. This could include measures for the creation and development of public catering, pre-school and school circulation systems, such as 24-hour nursery and summer camps, day schools, boarding schools for all children, etc. (Chernova 2013, p. 101). Women were more likely to be teachers, nurses, clerical workers, sales and service employees. Men were more likely to work in the construction, mining and transport sectors. Thus, similarly to capitalist economies, women’s labor force participation was characterized by occupational segregation.

### **3. Post-soviet era: new challenges, same problems?**

With the collapse of the communist system, observers expected that the diffusion of Western values would strengthen the role of women in society and enhance their political and economic influence. What happened, then, to women representation in parliament as Russia moved in a more democratic direction? Did Yeltsin’s liberal reforms favor women’s participation in the political sphere? At the beginning of the transition period in Russian society, a conservative and patriarchal

attitude towards women prevailed which interfered with their political emancipation.

The very idea of female participation in politics was compromised because it was presented not only as a part of the political culture of the left, but also as a part of the Bolshevik culture. In the 1990s it was considered *mauvais ton* to talk about women's social problems, their political demands and career claims (Aivazova 1998). In addition, this habit developed over 70 years in the Soviet regime, not only to trust the central power but also to entrust important aspects of their lives to the State (family planning, maternity protection, work placement, pension treatment).

Russian women did not participate in struggles for the sharing of property and power in the country (Aivazova 1998). Indeed, the political system in Russia in the 90s was characterized by a tight intertwining of politics and economics. Wherein the elite concentrated not just on political power, but also to have the power to manage most of the goods and resources by themselves. The composition of the political elite reflected the relationships of different pressure groups in society. In the 90s, the decisive role in the process of appointing senior officials resided with the business structures that promoted "people of trust" at all levels of power. Thus, while globalization encouraged democratic and neoliberal reforms, women's lack of access to economic resources inhibited their active participation in electoral campaigns as well as in making inroads into the political establishment (Aivazova 1998).

The problem of equal rights, but above all equal opportunities, came back to the limelight in the early 1990s. During 1992, in the so-called "Brezhnevian" Constitution of 1977, an amendment was made: the provision of equal opportunities was removed from Article 33, and only the clause "men and women have equal rights and freedoms" was left. Only thanks to the active position of non-governmental women's organizations, was the new Russian Constitution of 1993 amended with the provision "men and women in Russia have equal rights and equal opportunities for their realization" (Pushkareva 2008, p. 120)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Translated by the authors.

During the 10-year term of Yeltsin's presidency, some decrees were issued aimed at promoting women participation in political life. Apart from national commitments, the new Russian political elite took responsibility for all international documents signed by Soviet governments. According to enforced international standards, the equalization of the positions of men and women is a mandatory element of all social strategies and programs of any country that declares to be oriented towards democratic development (Aivazova 1998).

In 1993 Yeltsin signed a decree on the "Priority objectives of national policy towards women", which focused upon conditions for effective female participation in the activities of state institutions and social organizations. In 1996 another important document was published entitled "On the increase of women's role in the system of federal government bodies and government bodies of the subjects of the RF" (*«O povыshenii roli zhenshin v sisteme federal'nykh organov gosudarstvennoy vlasti i organov gosudarstvennoy vlasti sub'ektov RF»*). This act denounced weak female involvement in politics, discrimination in the workplace, worsening of health and the growth of violence against women (Polenina 2000). To these two acts must be added the decree of the Government of the RF of 26 August 1996 "On the approval of the National Action Plan to improve women's conditions and increase their role in society until the year 2000" (*O Natsional'nom plane deystviy po uluchsheniyu polozheniya zhenshin i povыsheniyu ikh roli v obschestve do 2000 goda*).

Following this legislative activity, the committees on women's issues, families and children were summoned to the President of Russia, the Russian government and parliament as well as to the subject administrations of the Russian and local administrations. The focus of the programs elaborated by these commissions was to develop a reality of women's rights based on the principle of equal opportunities. If these programs had been implemented there probably would have been the opportunity to change the conditions of women in Russian society by overcoming existing gender asymmetry. However, they were never implemented due to lack of funding and the early dissolution of the commissions themselves (Pushkareva 2008, p. 121).

Data on women's participation in national institutions highlight the inefficiency of state policies on equal representation of gender. In 1993 there were 13.5% women members of parliament, this figure dropped to 10.2% in 1995 and fell to 7.8% in 1999. In 2003 the situation improved slightly with the share of women in parliament rising to 10%. In some regional parliaments, women were not represented at all (the regions of Novosibirsk and Chelyabinsk). While in the Karelian Republic they constituted 32% of parliamentary members. There were multiple barriers to entry for women candidates for the legislature. Firstly, experts pointed to the mixed electoral system in the 1990s that was unfavorable to the participation of women. Only a proportional system, according to political scientists, can guarantee a conspicuous presence of women in parliament (Golder et al. 2017). 'One reason is that in a PR system with several candidates running on a list, the party can try to balance its ticket so as to appear to be equitable, by selectively and strategically placing women on the list to assuage vocal pressure groups' (Vengroff et al 2000, p. 200). However, the electoral system is not a sufficient condition for women's representation. In Russia, for example, even in the political parties' lists women were at the bottom, which obviously prevented them from entering parliament (Chirikova 2013, p. 37).

What is more, the cultural factor should not be understated. In the 1990s, public opinion found it difficult to accept women in politics, rather it viewed the role of women in society in terms of traditional values (Kan 2007, p. 15). The same situation also pertained to the administrative and executive bodies. In 1995, 44% of state apparatus members were women of which only 3.9% occupied executive positions (for example Inga Grebesheva, a vice premier for Social Policies, and Ella Pamfilova, the Minister of Social Protection). Only after approval of the decree of 1996, and therefore during the second mandate of Yeltsin, the number of women in the managerial positions slightly increased: some directed the ministries of health (Dmitrieva Tatjana), of culture (Dementieva Natalia) and also of work and social development (Dmitrieva Oxana)<sup>4</sup>. In this period there were no women in charge of

<sup>4</sup><https://rg.ru/2011/02/21/pravitelstvo-sostav.html> (access date 5/6/2019).

the administrations of the federal subjects, mayors, no women in the Security Council (only Valentina Matvienko in 2003 and from 2011).

### *3.1. Political involvement from below*

The struggle to achieve political equality and the protection of women's rights can take place through at least two channels: one official, through state institutions, and one unofficial, through self-organization and actions independent of state structures. In Russia, towards the end of the 1990s there were about 600 women organizations registered with the Ministry of Justice. However, analysts argue that the figure is much higher, around 2000, which constituted 0.5% of all non-profit organizations in Russia. Many women's councils (reconstructed during *Pereestroika*) were transformed in the 90s into non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Women's NGOs developed mainly in the big cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, <sup>5</sup>45% of all NGOs were registered in Moscow and only 9% were established in St. Petersburg (Abubikirova et al. 1998).

Regarding their activity, three fifths of female focused NGOs dealt with issues related to civil rights, social protection and rights of different categories of citizens. For example, a large number of NGOs aimed to protecting the rights of recruits, and 10% of these NGOs took care of the work and employment of women, while 11% sought to protect women who suffered from different types of violence. Other women NGOs dealt with education, including different types of schools, educational centers, professional development, etc. Still other NGOs engaged in the production, collection, storage and dissemination of information, working with journalists or practicing journalism. A large number of NGOs took care of families, gave aid to families in need or worked in the female entrepreneurial sector.

For the purpose of this article, it is important to stress that there were few female groups involved in politics. Only 10% of registered women associations participated in elections or political activities. The most famous associations are those

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<sup>5</sup> This is the so-called effect of 'one country inside another', which reflects the huge distance in terms of both information and economic resources between the two cities and the rest of Russia.

committees of mothers of soldiers who organized protest demonstrations. Only 6% worked with MPs, female voters, candidates for elections, or with the State authorities (Abubikirova et al. 1998).

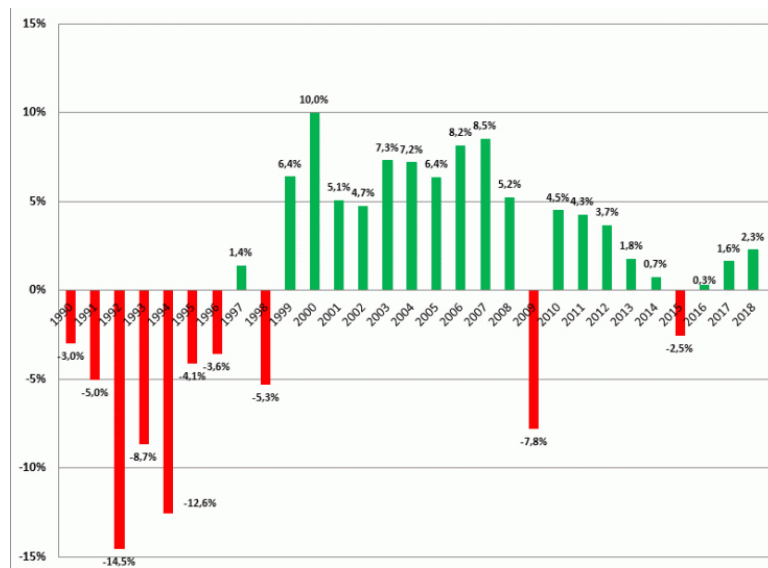
Yet the mere existence of an independent women movement born in the early 1990s was significant in its own right for the development of civil society in Russia. The female movement's political activity between 1993 and 1995 could be described as focusing upon interactions with government structures and the political party system. In the beginning, women's organizations did not participate in political debates, but by the mid-1990s female activists became increasingly involved in the political process (Abubikirova et al. 1998). One argument in favor of political participation was the need for substantive representation, that is, the need to represent the economic and social interests of women in domestic politics. In the national forums, women tried to raise awareness among the parties (in 1993 there were 40 parties) but with little or no success. As a result, the first women's party, "Women of Russia" was created and gained 8% of the votes in the legislative elections of 1993. Women of Russia appealed to the values of modern society, especially to the rights of men and women and fought for greater opportunities for women. However, during the Chechen war, Women for Russia were not vocal enough and consequently lost the 1995 elections.

#### **4. The Wild and Evil 1990s**

The demise of the command economy and the breakdown of the USSR generated mass disruption, the creation of new states and a significant drop in GDP, with huge social costs. Following Milanovic (1998) these costs can be divided at least into two categories. Firstly, the costs associated with decreased output due to systemic changes (the transition to market economy) and macroeconomic stabilization that are represented through lower incomes, greater inequality, and increased poverty. Secondly, unemployment and the loss of income costs that are associated with transition. Mass privatization of medium and large state-owned firms, meant that in 1992 only 5% of the total workforce were employed by enterprises with pri-

vate ownership, but by autumn 1995, 38% of Russians worked in privately owned enterprises (Milanovic 1998; see Figure 1 above). The transition to a market economy triggered a deep economic recession, stimulating a thorough restructuring of the labor market, including adjustments to infrastructure. The severe contraction of GDP is clearly visible in Figure 2, which shows that in the 1990s real GDP growth fell, with a contraction of -14.5% occurring in 1993.

**Figure 2. Real GDP growth in Russia, year on year percentage change.**



*Source: Rosstat.*

Several hypotheses emphasize the direct effect of economic transition on the quality and quantity of female participation in the labor force, suggesting that women become increasingly vulnerable in transitions to capitalist economies. These hypotheses ask questions regarding the extent to which gender affects access to paid work during transition from state socialism to market capitalism in Russia. Were women more or less likely than men to experience job losses, lower wages, or engage in part-time work? Short-term predictions of segmentation theory center on the different ability of men and women to hold onto jobs during periods of economic transition. In Russia, labor market restructuring combined with the decline of

state sponsored employment guarantees, led some observers to argue that women would be severely disadvantaged during the transition to a market economy. Russian researcher Yelena Mezentseva (1994) argued that in those days the status of women in the employment market was far less favorable than their male counterparts. Furthermore, not only was the gap between men and women not narrowing, but rather a number of developments indicated that it was actually widening, despite the propaganda about “non-discrimination against women”, “equal opportunities”, “equal pay for equal work” and so on. Where working conditions were hazardous to employees’ health, a high employment rate of women in jobs existed; women’s wage levels lagged considerably behind those of men; the existence of multiple obstacles for women gaining further qualifications and career promotion. These conditions testified to the unfavorable position of women. An additional factor that aggravated women’s working conditions was the increasingly patriarchal ideology and direct appeals to reduce female employment and “return women to the home” (Mezentseva 1994, pp. 75, 76). Scholars suggested that the introduction of a capitalist economy and the retrenchment of State sponsored welfare policies would create new opportunities for gender discrimination as managers gained more power over their labor allocation process (Kotowska 1995).

Comparative research indicates that in periods of structural reforms, women are often more negatively affected than men because of men’s position in power structures and the division of labor (Pailhé 2000). Reasons for women’s special vulnerability are related to the fact that measures taken to overcome economic crises are passed on to enterprises and institutions where equality between men and women does not exist. Not only this, but inequality becomes more marked when there is a crisis.

As a consequence, during transition, significant disadvantages existed for many women, such as declining wages relative to men (Brainerd, 1998), particularly for those with young children, thus women became increasingly vulnerable in nascent capitalist labor markets (Glass 2008). Gerber and Mayorova (2006) explored dynamic gender differences in post-socialist labor markets in Russia and looked at



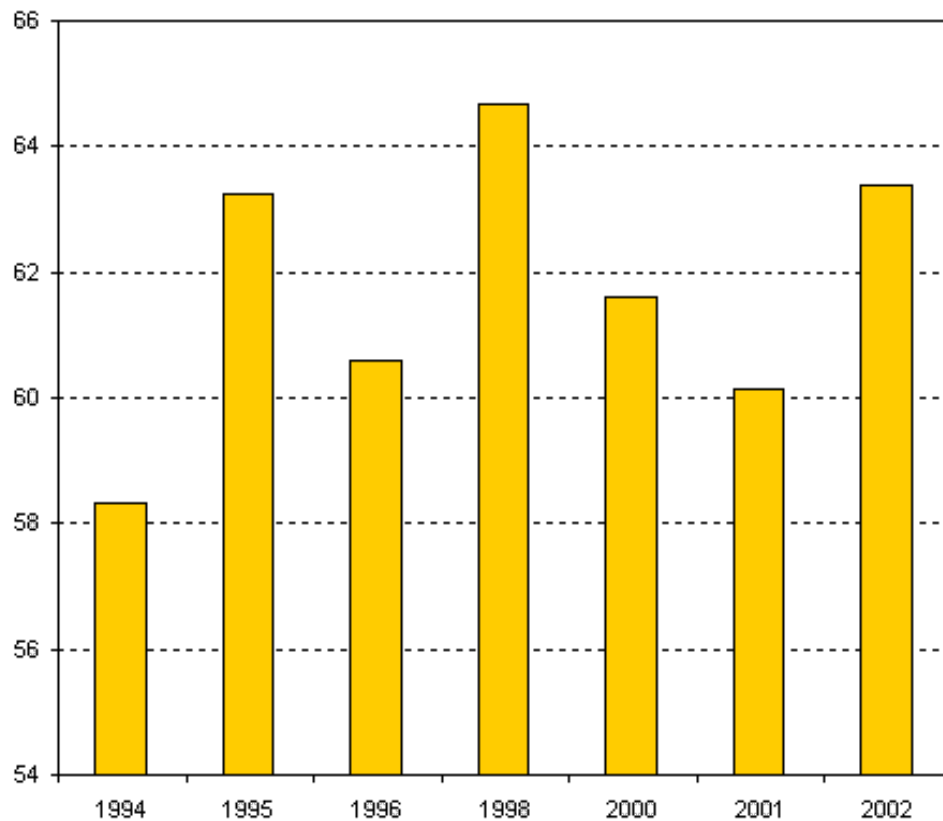
rates of labor market transitions, including levels of entry or exit from employment, job mobility and the quality of new jobs. They find that women are disadvantaged in the labor market due to higher rates of employment layoff, lower rates of employment entry and job mobility, and a greater probability that their new jobs are of a lower grade. Their research indicated that the gender gap in job quality widened. Hence, being a woman represented a new social risk generated by the restructuring process.

A significant increase in the role of the private sector in the economy contributed to a deepening of gender discrimination. The Russian case shows that changing employment conditions dovetailed with changes in ownership of enterprises and organizations. As a consequence of privatization and corporatization, private enterprises and organizations became dominant, which in 2002 accounted for 49.1% of total employment in Russia. The proportion of people employed in state and municipal enterprises stabilized at the end of the 1990s, reaching 36.9% in 2002. The proportion of people employed in mixed-type enterprises grew rapidly in the first half of the 1990s, but after 1996 it almost halved, to 13.2% in 2002 (Naselenie i obschestvo 2003).

However, another strand of literature plays down the gender implications of globalization by drawing on human capital theory. Some authors claim that the diffusion of market mechanisms would expand opportunities for women and would lead to greater equality in the labor market as a result of education and entrepreneurial experience gained by women under State socialism (Fodor 1997; Glass 2008). An additional factor is that in Russia women possessed human capital that would make them attractive to capitalist employers (Fodor 1997). Consistent with human capital theory, Fodor (1997) contends that when faced with competition and budget constraints employers will find gender discrimination more expensive and therefore be less likely to engage in such discrimination. This is particularly true in the social context where women possess more valuable human capital than men. However, the following section shows that the Russian landscape paints a rather different picture.

A third line of scholarship claims that traditional job segmentation by sex, while unfavorable to women in terms of wages and job status, turns into an advantage during transition periods (Monousova 1998). This line of thinking stresses the fact that traditional female jobs in hotel and tourism, retail and educational services, undergo disproportionate growth in transition economies—whereas the deindustrializing post-socialist economy penalizes mainly male workers. Women in Russia constitute the largest share of those employed in education, health care, social work, trade, and nonprofit sector - the least paid sectors of the Russian economy (The Russian Statistical Service 2009).

**Figure 3. Ratio of women's wages to men's wages, 1994-2002 (percentages).**



Source: *Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey-HSE*.  
<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2005/0219/tema03.php>

Gendered analysis of employment patterns demonstrates that women had higher unemployment rates than men in the 1990s (Tab. 1).

**Table 1. Labor force and unemployed workers in Russia, 1992-2000 (thousands).**

	1992	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
<b>Total labor force</b>	74946	70861	69660	68079	67339	72175	71464
Men	39171	37336	36749	35925	35379	37639	37154
Women	37154	33525	32911	32154	31960	34537	34310
<b>Unemployed</b>	3877	6712	6732	8058	8902	9094	6999
Men	2026	3616	3662	4371	4792	4801	3781
Women	1851	3096	3070	3687	4110	4293	3219
<b>Total unemployed registered at state employment offices</b>	578	2327	2506	1999	1929	1263	1037
Men	161	872	930	721	682	383	322
Women	417	1455	1576	1278	1247	880	715

*Source: Rosstat, 2003.*

Here it is worth noting that one regular feature of the Russian labor market was a remarkably low level of registered unemployment, which throughout the entire transition period remained far lower than the total number of unemployed workers. To a large extent, this gap was associated with peculiarities of the Russian system of support for the unemployed, which, firstly, did not provide enough incentives for registration and, secondly, was focused on "cutting off" the long-term unemployed (Kapeljushnikov 2002). An equally important factor was the fact that the Russian labor market constantly generated a significant number of job vacancies, so that many unemployed workers could successfully search for work without seeking help from the state employment services (Kapeljushnikov 2002). It should be noted that fewer men than women were registered at state unemployment centers, prefer-

ring alternative channels to find work. Between 1992 and 1998, Russia saw the total size of its employed workforce decline by 11.68 million.

Table 1 shows that in the 1990s there was no substantial difference between the numbers of working men and women. However, the differences in the workplace were not so much in quantity as in quality and remuneration of labor. Women might be as likely as men to engage in economic activities, but their economic opportunities may vary greatly. Research findings indicate that women more often took up poorly paid jobs with no promotion prospects relative to men (Ashwin & Yakubovich 2005). Moreover, most unemployed men found a new job rather easily, whereas the majority of women displaced from social production lost their work for ever (Khotkina 2001, p.23). Changes in employment patterns clearly had a pronounced effect upon gender asymmetry. The process of personnel layoffs was sharply asymmetrical during the early 1990s and cannot be explained by purely economic reasons, but rather by increased discrimination against women in the Russian labor market. It was in this period that people began to talk about the phenomenon of the "feminization of poverty": the state no longer guaranteed social services support. Unemployment had the "female face", and legal protection no longer protected women from abuse at work and at home (Khotkina 1994).

#### *4.1. Women in the informal labor market*

A further point worthy of note was the unprecedented development of the informal economy, which highlighted the economic vulnerability of women during the transitional period. The term informality refers to unprotected workers, underpayment or nonpayment of taxes, and informal employment (or "in the shadows"). Scholars noted a flow of women from the formal to the informal economy and found that women were overrepresented among workers in the informal sectors (Khotkina 2001; 2006). Although by the mid-1990s the socio-economic heterogeneity of the shadow economy was identified and clearly marked, only in 2001 did the State Statistics Committee of Russia conduct their first survey assessing the scale and types of employment in the informal sector of the economy. The survey "On

employment in the informal sector of the economy in the Russian Federation in 2001” (*O zanyatosti v neformal'nom sektore ekonomiki v Rossijskoy Federatsii v 2001 godu*) showed that in November 2001 8.2 million people were working in the informal economy, or 13-15% of the total employed population. The data revealed that women constituted 47% of those employed in this field. Among the urban population, in the industries producing goods, women only consisted 27.1% of the total, and in the sectors related to service and trade delivery it was 53.6% and 59.1% respectively. However, official statistics do not reflect the full picture. It is assumed that the number of women employed in the informal economy sector was much higher (Khotkina 2006).

Therefore, reflecting on the structuring of the shadow / informal sphere and clarifying the question of what makes women invisible in the informal economy, we can now consider the “gender pyramid of informal activities”. The largest part in the base of the pyramid is women trading in markets and underground passages, in tents and from trays, working in underground workshops and at home, in various kinds of cafes and “eateries”, as well as farm laborers. Occupying the lower floors in the social hierarchy, they are virtually powerless and are subject to over-exploitation, for instance: hiring without contracts, irregular working hours, difficult working conditions, a lack of sick pay and poor retirement benefits (Khotkina 2006).

The feminization of the informal sector had social and personal costs. The socio-economic costs consisted of declines in GDP and tax payments while personal costs included a lack of social guarantees, deteriorating health and the devaluation of education and professional skills as well as degradation (Khotkina 2001). Gorbachev’s (in)famous statement “women should go home”, summarizes the conservative logic that inhibited most post-transition regulation of the labor market. Despite the conservative turn in social attitudes and the deep economic recession, rising poverty rates did not allow women to leave their jobs and become full-time homemakers. Hence privatization, economic depression and competition for scarce jobs left women underpaid and underemployed. Russian women had more limited access

to productive assets as well as services. They also faced additional constraints on their use of time that were tied to local norms and beliefs about the place of women in the family.

#### *4. 2. Demographic crisis, social services and democracy*

The economic transition had direct effects upon female labor force participation, mainly due to the widening gap in job quality, but additionally due to indirect effects derived from the dismantling of Soviet state sponsored welfare services. This combination of direct and indirect effects caused a declining fertility rate in Russia. In the 1990s, the death rate was 1.5 times higher than the birth rate. By the end of the 1990s, the rate of natural decline in the population exceeded 900,000. According to the 2002 Census, the population of Russia decreased by 1.8 million (~ 1.3%) from 1989 to 2002 (The Russian Statistical Service 2010). Table 2 shows that between 1990 and 2000 the total fertility rate fell dramatically from 1.8 to 1.1.

**Table 2. Fertility rates in Russia by women age group, 1990-2000 (number of live births per 1000 women).**

Years	Women's age						Total fertility rate
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	
1990	55,0	156,5	93,1	48,2	19,4	4,2	1,892
1995	44,8	112,7	66,5	29,5	10,6	2,2	1,357
2000	27,4	93,6	67,3	35,2	11,8	2,4	1,195

*Source: Aganbegyan 2016, p. 56.*

This demographic crisis is not surprising given the strong correlation between affordable childcare, rates of female employment and fertility levels discussed in a vast body of literature (Michel & Mahon 2002; Morgan 2002). Scholarly work indicates that childcare services which support mothers' commitment to work must be extensive, accessible and affordable (Gornick & Meyers 2003; Michel & Mahon

2002; Szelewa & Polakowski 2008). Numerous comparative studies demonstrate that generous parental leave strengthens mothers long-term labor market attachment, preventing women from leaving paid work and/or full-time work (Gornick, Meyers & Ross 1997; Pylkkänen & Smith 2003; Ruhm & Teague 1997; Waldfogel et al 1999).

In Russia, the enterprise of micro-welfare supported by the Soviet system enabled 4 in every 5 children over the age of three to attend kindergarten. Meanwhile, in post-Soviet Russia only about one in every two preschool children received in-home care (Teplova 2007, p. 293). The situation changed drastically during the economic transition, where privatization and neoliberal economic policies introduced hefty cuts on spending by inefficient enterprises, causing a downsizing in their welfare responsibilities (Cook 2007). Lack of funding meant that enterprise childcare centers were closed down, or that these enterprises were no longer responsible for maintaining their childcare center network. Yet at the same time, private childcare was neither accessible nor affordable due to both the high costs of this service and the increasing poverty rate among families with children. According to the State Statistical Committee, the number of childcare institutions declined from 87.9 thousand in 1990s to 51.3 thousand in 2000. This revealed a 50 percent decline in enrollment rates for children aged three and above (Table 3).

**Table 3. Number of pre-school institutions and children in Russia.**

Year	Number of pre-school institutions (in thousands)	Number of pre-school children (in thousands)
1990	87.9	9,000.5
1995	87.9	5,583.6
2000	51.3	4,263.0
2005	46.5	4,530.4

*Source: Russian Statistical Yearbook 2010.*

This data demonstrates how structural changes were taking place as childcare systems were less available, and the federal state therefore abandoned all responsibility for childcare facilities and early years education.

Furthermore, the fertility rate fell despite the persistence of pro-natalist policies which were a legacy from the Soviet era. Welfare restructuring expanded the Soviet style pro-natalist policies in an attempt to increase women's childcare responsibilities, mainly through extended leave policies and cash transfers to women in childcaring. But since the parental leave was unpaid many women opted out (Teplova 2007). Scholars indicate that Russia's policies shaped and maintained gender inequalities in the labor market (Avdeyeva 2001). Against this background, the literature correctly identifies that focusing exclusively on market mechanisms and factors of production means that unpaid housework and the care of dependent family members is often overlooked (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999).

A question remains over which factors, direct or indirect, were more important in explaining the respective patterns of women labor force participation and fertility rates in post-Soviet Russia. The available data does not allow us to provide a clear-cut answer. However, we can draw on the experiences of Western countries. We know that the diffusion of social services in the Scandinavian states positively correlates with women employment rates and fertility rates and, conversely, the insufficiency of social services among southern European states adversely affects female opportunities to enter the labor market and helps to explain low fertility rates (Esping- Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996). These findings indicate that a solid network of social services, supporting working mothers, may be a necessary precondition for gender equality in the labor market.

The worsening socio-economic status of females in Russia may help us understand why at the end of the 1990s opinion polls showed weak female attachment to the institutional bases of democracy, including freedom of speech, political pluralism, market economies and freedom of conscience (Aivazova & Kertman 2001). The data reported in Table 4 illustrates that 43% of women were in favor of more state control compared with 38% of men.



**Table 4. Attitudes toward state control of information by gender in Russia, 1998.**

	<b>Total Russians</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
I agree	40	38	43
I do not agree	49	55	45
I don't know	11	8	13

*Source: Aivazova & Kertman 2001.*

*Question: Sometimes the opinion is expressed that the state should establish control over the press, television, radio, to determine what information should not be made public. Do you agree or disagree with such an opinion? (09/19/98).*

Research findings indicate that in general, and more frequently than men, women revealed a willingness to renounce democratic values in favor of state protection and the regulation of social relations, showing a weaker inclination toward the assimilation of democratic values (Aivazova 2001). It is disturbing to learn that women gave less importance to civil rights and political freedom than men. Arguably, this weakening of democratic legitimacy may have stemmed from a widening of the gender pay gap, unequal work opportunities and from new social risks women had experienced in the post-Soviet political economy of Russia.

## **5. Conclusions**

This article contributes to academic debates by investigating the gender implications of the Russian neoliberal political-economic model, propelled by processes of globalization, democratization and economic liberalization under Yeltsin. Russia became a new global player but the political-economic reforms revived and confronted powerful societal norms and beliefs regarding gender roles. The dismantling of Soviet state sponsored social services allowed for a conservative turn in social attitudes, legitimizing institutionalized inequalities in the legislature and in the labor market and marginalizing women both as political and economic actors.

At least three aspects of women's role in politics in the 1990s should be highlighted. Firstly, the institutional activity represented by the high-level State au-

thorities saw very low female participation rates. This legislative aspect, which reflected the will and commitment of the central state to deal with women's issues, could be defined as superficial but not actually effective. Rather, activities initiated by women to refocus attitudes in the country towards more political, economic and social rights for all women were more fruitful. Especially in terms of growth and development of the civic community. Unfortunately, such enthusiasm apparently was not shared by most Russian women, as they were too preoccupied by their daily struggle to make ends meet.

The transition toward a democratic, market oriented political economy severely hit women's economic opportunities in the labor market. Women often took up poorly paid jobs with no promotion prospects. The introduction of neoliberal policies and the cutting back of public social services increased gender discrimination in the workplace, penalizing women with children, thus contributing to a dramatic demographic crisis. As O'Connor et al (1999) maintain, the availability of public childcare services is a significant factor for mothers in employment. This is related to gender divides in the public and private sphere, and to gendered ideologies about mothering and its potential compatibility with paid employment. Against this background, in post-Soviet Russia the retrenchment of public social services represented a new social risk to women, created by the transition process to the new political economy. Although being a woman in a developing country may always be a social risk, due to dominant male power structures, the Russian transition from a command economy (where social services were free of charge and available), to a market economy, (where these services were downsized if not privatized), created a new social risk by pushing more women out of work or into part-time and temporary work.

Our analysis is focused upon Russia, but similar pressures are likely to exist in other post-communist countries. Research suggests that the advent of liberal democracy and market economies in 1989 did not challenge the underlying norms and structures of gender inequality in those countries (Galligan, Clavero, Calloni 2007). On the contrary, the growth in new forms of discrimination along with the re-

emergence of patriarchal attitudes highlight the surge in a new masculinism accompanying the process of democratization. This remasculinization of the civic, economic and political arenas is characterized by men's occupation of key positions both in politics and in the marketplace, in conjunction with a revival of a conservative discourse calling for the return of women to the private world of tending to family and household duties (Galligan, Clavero, Calloni 2007, 12). This seems to be a paradoxical outcome in countries where high female education and employment rates should protect women's socio-economic and political status. Future research comparing post-communist countries will allow us to identify continuities, similarities and differences in the gender distribution of costs and benefits in the political economy of transition toward democratic capitalism.

More generally, our work shows that an approach of political economy generates novel insights into the feedback effects produced by interactions between the economic and political spheres. It suggests that social and economic policy should not be designed and researched separately, as if there were no related feedback effects. Most notably, the Russian case indicates that overlooking the interdependence of social needs and economic activities may ultimately weaken the legitimacy of democratic values.

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