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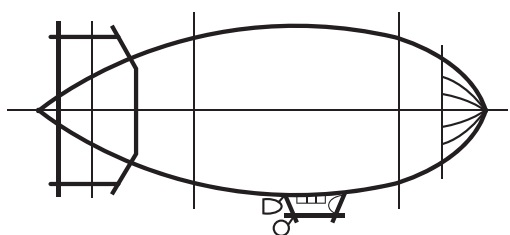


WOMEN IN FOCUS

Mothers and Daughters

18+

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A Long Way to Go

By **The Moscow Times**



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Last year on March 8, while women were being showered with flowers — as is custom on International Women’s Day in Russia — the country’s Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev had prepared an altogether different “gift,” or so ran the headline at the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

In an 18-page “national action plan to promote women’s interests,” the government laid out a five-year strategy to improve women’s prospects in life and society.

It was an illustration of how, publicly at least, officials are paying lip service to gender issues. At the second Eurasian Women’s Forum in St. Petersburg this year, President Vladimir Putin himself gave the opening speech.

“Russia has always paid special attention to protecting mothers and children as well as supporting women,” he said.

“I would go as far as to say our country has a special attitude toward women. Touching, warm and sincere.”

Russia is right to credit itself for having been a pioneer in gender equality. Soviet women were among the first to work, vote and gain the right to end unwanted pregnancies. It was the Soviet Union’s Alexandra Kollontai who became the first ever female diplomat in 1923.

Soviet-era laws continue to dictate much of women’s position in society. “Paradoxically that’s a good thing,” says political scientist Yekaterina Schulmann. “Changing them in the current political climate would probably make it worse.”

Today, Russian women are well represented in some spheres, including scientific research, retail and finance. More women have university degrees than men. Both the Central Bank and Magnit, one of Russia’s largest retailers, are run by women.



Mikhail Metzel / TASS

Vladimir Putin giving a speech at the second Eurasian Women’s Forum in St. Petersburg last month. Behind him, are the head of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko and her deputy Galina Karelova.

In September this year, the RBC outlet calculated that six percent of CEOs at Russia’s biggest companies were women (compared to around five percent at S&P 500 companies).

“Contrary to the stereotypes, Russia always looks somewhat more progressive than the West when it comes to gender equality,” RBC wrote.

That conclusion, however, may be somewhat hasty.

In 2017, Russia ranked 53rd out of 189 in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index, behind Saudi Arabia and Albania. And it ranks 71 out of 144 in the World Economic Forum’s gender gap report, below neighboring countries like Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Mongolia.

The average wage for women is still 28 percent lower than that of their male peers, according to official estimates.

Women also still constitute a minority in diplomacy and politics. Russia only has one woman ambassador out of 173, and just 16 percent of State Duma deputies are women. And while women in large cities might feel relatively safe — Moscow ranked the fourth best megacity for

women in a recent Thomson Reuters Foundation survey — they are less so at home.

Shortly before Medvedev presented his action plan, Russia decriminalized domestic abuse, which some rights activists say has already led to an uptick in battery reports.

This is hardly a picture of utopia. As one of the stories in this issue shows, the country’s brief window of opportunity for a reckoning in the style of the #MeToo movement resulted in resounding silence or dismissal.

For our “Mothers and Daughters” project (available in full online), we interviewed three generations of women across the country. They described women as strong, ambitious and resourceful.

But even among the most progressive, gender stereotypes still exist. “The man needs to earn the money and the woman needs to put her family first,” one interviewee insisted. “Otherwise, she’ll be alone in her 50s.”

As long as that is the consensus in Russia, including among women, progress may well have to come in the form of top-down “gifts.” **TMT**

The View From Russia: From Kavanaugh to Domestic Abuse

Op-Ed by **Anna Rivina**
Director of Nasilye Nyet
(No to Violence) Center



Major changes are occurring in the world of women’s rights, which are becoming analogous with human rights — albeit slowly and in spite of great resistance.

Most recently, the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court has stirred up intense controversy.

Once it became clear that Kavanaugh could be appointed, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford decided to come forward saying that he had once attempted to rape her. She recognized that his character and past conduct were now a matter of concern not only for her, but for every U.S. citizen.

Her decision seemed to be in line with the spirit of the age. Women have found the courage to speak out about a subject that had been kept hidden for years, and U.S. society is learning to discuss these pressing problems and find solutions to them. This case sparked a strong reaction not just among the Republicans and Democrats locked in a power struggle or their constituents, but also from every segment of Russian society.

“The Feminist Terror on the American Political Scene” was the headline Russian journalist Yulia Latynina chose for her article on the Kavanaugh case. In a sense, this was not surprising.

Take, for example, the story of Oryol resident Yana Savchuk, who was beaten to death in 2016 by a former partner. The police-woman who answered one of her many phone calls for help said: “Don’t worry — if there’s a corpse, we’ll come and write up a re-

port.” In response, Latynina wrote: “The way that [police] woman replied was terrible, but it wasn’t so terrible.”

“If you ask any cop,” she argued, “he’ll tell you, ‘You know, when we respond to such calls, we find that both the woman and the man she’s living with are drunk.’ Only one out of many thousands of such calls results in murder,” Latynina concluded.

Russia is among the only countries in Europe without a law against domestic violence, and battery is still not a crime here. This October, a Perm resident named Marina was murdered. On 11 separate occasions, she had called the police requesting help against an aggressive neighbor. Each time, the police had answered, “We’ll take care of it.” Her husband claims, however, that the police never took any action and refused to press criminal charges against the neighbor.

Apparently, they believed that the situation wasn’t “so terrible.” Many people in Russia think that way, including the State Duma deputies who voted in favor of the initiative by lawmaker Yelena Mizulina to change battery from a crime to a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of 5,000 rubles (\$80). For now, we can only dream of having a law against sexual harassment in Russia.

According to Tamara Pletnyova, head of the State Duma committee for women’s affairs, “The women who are being harassed probably wanted it in the first place. If we pass a law like this, we will be like those European women whom no one is allowed to

touch, who see harassment in everything, and who might even dream about it happening to them.”

In Russia, even people on opposite ends of the political spectrum — Latynina, who is an opposition columnist, and Pletnyova, who is ardently pro-Putin — are united in their unwillingness to see the real problems women face and recognize their rights.

Misogyny is widespread in Russian society, even among liberals. Kremlin critics regularly ignore women’s issues. They often look only with passing interest. The harassment charges against State Duma deputy Leonid Slutsky, who was accused by journalists earlier this year of misconduct, is a good example.

The media boycott against Slutsky was the first high-profile Russian scandal in which opposition politicians and public figures chose to support women. But were they truly concerned about women’s safety? Unfortunately, not. The issue was fodder for their political confrontation.

The topic goes beyond the debate conducted by warring political factions in Russia and the United States — none of which seems to care about the real problems women face. Who among them is genuinely concerned about women’s personal safety at home and in public?

They should not change the subject by discussing the personal qualities and conduct of the victims. Rather, they should propose measures that bring the perpetrators to justice. **TMT**



Maria Wagner

Born in Bolshoi Izyum
(Big Raisin), Kazakhstan

93
yrs.



Pensioner | Widowed with four children

We lost my mother when I was 12 — she died in childbirth. Six months later, my youngest sister died, too. It seems my mother couldn't part with her. She was incredibly kind. No one could replace her. She left behind five children: two sons and three daughters.

When World War II broke out, one of my brothers was killed in combat. The military commissariats had been instructed to select a certain number of children from each kolkhoz [collective farm] to be sent to labor camps. I was about 16 when I was taken to a children's labor army in Astana together with another girl. To this day I still don't know why they picked us.

All I had to wear was a dress. I had no winter clothes, and I became very ill. One of my friends suggested we run away from the camp and so we escaped. We walked for days on end without any food or proper clothing. Then we saw a potato farm, and asked if they could feed us if we helped them around the farm. They agreed, and we continued on our way.

When I returned to the village, only my sister was at home. It was a punishable offense to defect from a labor army, so I hid there for several weeks. I would only leave my room after dark.

But somebody must have spotted me, because one day the local commander came to my house and interrogated my sister. He told her that if she confessed to hiding me, he would help me in return. I was terrified as my aunt had spent a year in prison. But he promised he would help me find a job and swore I would be safe. I'll never forget what he did for me.

Back then life was simpler, we had fewer things. My mother sewed our school bags by hand. When I look at my children now, I tell them with tears in my eyes how grateful they should be for everything they have.

There was never anything to do after school. Nowadays children are always doing something: studying, ballet. In my time, we'd come home and help around the house.



I fell for him

The first boy I fell for was a classmate of mine. He walked me home every day, but only halfway because he was afraid of my father. We were all just so shy back then!

The man I eventually married was a Crimea German whose family had been displaced by the Soviet authorities. He was serving as a brigadier, and I was sent to his outpost to work as an accountant. We'd glance at each other from a distance. When the time came, he proposed. He said: "Let's get married." I agreed. Why? I don't know. I must've fallen for him!

Before we got married, he told me he would provide for me. "I will feed you, I will clothe you, and our kids will study," he said. He was an incredibly hardworking and kind-hearted person who lived through very difficult times; he lost his father and brothers at an early age. My daughter is a carbon copy of him.

Everybody, from the authorities to the locals, respected him despite his German roots. He quickly rose the ranks to become the head of

“Pregnancy was a miracle back then, really. When my belly began to grow, I asked my granny: ‘What’s going on?’ I gave birth to my child at home and my granny was my midwife.

a local kolkhoz and under his leadership, they built new roads and homes. Today, the village is in a worse state than it was after he finished with it over 60 years ago!

In the village everyone was too shy to talk about sex. Sometimes we'd discuss it with friends, among ourselves. But with your mother? No, that was shameful! How can you even ask about such things? Pregnancy was a miracle back then, really. When my belly began to grow, I asked my granny: "What's going on?"

I gave birth to my child at home and my granny was my midwife. My husband was at work. He came home and there was the child!

Family life

My first daughter was an accident. Soon enough another child popped out, then another, then another. My husband told me that we would have eight children, but I refused. While I was at work, my mother-in-law, a very strict German woman, would help out with the children.

All I could do was work at a store, because I only ever went to elementary school. But that's OK. I worked for about five years, then my husband forbade it. "Do you think I can't provide for the family?" he'd ask.

"There are so many children, go raise them with grandmother."

Later, I would herd and milk the cows in our village until one day my husband told me to stop that, too, since you could buy milk in the stores. Now I live in Germany, and the pension they give me is more than enough.

My husband worked from sunrise to sunset, and the kids hardly ever saw him. Those poor women who lost their husbands during the war and had to provide for their families on their own. I was lucky. We lived a wonderful life.

Our children were always well-disciplined, and they all graduated from university, except for one. I remember when my daughter Lyudmila told me she wanted to be a doctor. I supported her decision. When you see a child with talent and abilities, why limit them?

My husband suffered from diabetes and eventually died from it. It was incredibly difficult. We had a wonderful family that never argued.

A real woman should respect her husband. If she respects him, she'll never say anything to upset him. If she says something insulting, it'll destroy the whole family. A woman should keep her emotions under control, and couples should love and respect each other. **TMT**



Lyudmila Bondarenko

Born
in Bolshoi Izyum,
Kazakhstan

66
yrs.



Works as a pediatrician | Widowed with two daughters

As a child, we lived in several villages in Kazakhstan. My father was 13 years old when his family was detained for being German and exiled there. The first village we lived in largely consisted of persecuted minorities: Chechens, Poles and Germans.

Those were very difficult years of poverty. We were called “fascists” or “Hitlerites” by the locals. Everything changed when my father became the chairman of a local kolkhoz. He gained authority and a reputation as a self-made man with unmatched organizational skills.

At school, there was no sex education. But there were always whispers: “God forbid you get pregnant before marriage! You should be a virgin!” Girls who had many boyfriends were judged. Nobody cared about the boys.

There was a girl in our final years of school, her name was Inna, who was raped by an older man. She stood out and had a sort of flirtatious personality. Maybe it’s fair to say that she provoked it, but she didn’t understand that at the time. We were naive; she was 13.

The whole village just sort of heard about it through the grapevine, but nobody dared talk to her about it. Not even the other girls, who should’ve been there for moral support.

You see, I spoke to her several years down the line, and for her it was a real trauma. There weren’t any psychologists. She just had to bottle it up, and she left the village. The man who raped her was eventually found and jailed.

Only later did I realize the whole situation had been a facade. It was women who suffered most from this. Nobody would marry Inna and that’s why her family left. She was “spoiled.” I like that this subject has become more public now – there shouldn’t be anything shameful about this.

Most of my friends at school were boys – the girls were huge gossip queens. At 14 I met my first love and we would write letters to each other. He was a bit older than I was and a wonderful singer. We met at a dance class.



My mother was categorically against our relationship, even though it was purely platonic. She was very strict. We had a 7 p.m. curfew so he’d come and serenade me under my window. There was never any real touching. The most we did was hold hands.

The man who eventually became my husband was a classmate from school. He said he remembered very clearly the moment I first walked into the classroom, but I didn’t notice him at all.

During my first year at university the receptionist told me one day that some “military guy” was waiting for me outside. I was so busy that it slipped my mind and I didn’t leave the building until the evening. There he was, Sasha Bondarenko. He had traveled to see me from Orenburg, where he was studying at an aviation school, and had waited for me all day.

From then on we wrote each other letters and sometimes we met up. We’d kiss, and then, when I turned 21 and he 20, we married.

I didn’t plan on marrying at that age. I had high expectations for myself: get a doctorate, and only then have five children. All of a sudden he proposed, and so I was a bit rattled. But the love was too overpowering, so I agreed.

As a child, I knew that I would go to university and have a career. I always hoped to extend my grandmother’s life. My father had diabetes and I was certain that I’d find a cure.

During my first years of university, I studied general medicine. Then I switched to the pediatric faculty because I wanted to work with children. I was part of a team that founded the first emergency wing in the Urals. Later, I became the leading pediatrician of Krasnoturinsk.

The head of the surgery department there was a woman named Maria Georgievna Kabanovna. She was an “Iron Lady.” A real surgeon from God, but she was a manly woman. There was nothing feminine in her. She couldn’t stomach women. All her assistants were men, who were always on high alert. She was very selective about her team. Her department was the best of the best.

There is a huge gender divide in medicine. Pediatricians and gynecologists are more likely to be women, but most surgeons are men.

“I only found out later that he was the hospital’s head surgeon. Skeptical of my skills, the nurses had called him behind my back.”

I remember that during my first night shift as a qualified doctor, a patient who needed emergency surgery was brought to our hospital. I told the nurses to get the scalpels ready. But before I could even begin, a man dressed in civilian clothing walked in and ordered me to step aside.

I only found out later that he was the hospital’s head surgeon. Skeptical of my skills, the nurses had called him behind my back.

To me he was just some guy, so I snapped at him. He was furious! Imagine, you’re the head surgeon and some young woman you don’t know begins to order you around.

Later on, the same man ignored my recommendation for the treatment of a boy with an injured leg who’d come to see me during the day. He just pumped him full of painkillers. By the morning, it was too late to do anything. The boy died of sepsis and this is one of the biggest regrets in my life. I thought that they’d taken care of it, but they hadn’t.

In the villages where I grew up, there were unofficial midwives who performed abortions. At the time, abortion was considered murder, so these women were always shunned. They lived on the outskirts of town, but women knew how to find them anyway. If they had gone to a hospital, they would have been scorned.

When I was in my 20s, contraception was not widely available and abortions were common. While it was legal, the procedure was still very dangerous as there was no anesthesia. As a doctor this killed me. I always asked myself why this was happening.

‘How could you leave me?’

To be respected as a female surgeon, you really have to be exceptional and combine good hands with a sharp mind.

If you want to give the career your all, you shouldn’t have a family. In my life, it just worked out in tandem with my husband. But our older daughter spent most of her childhood in her father’s office, or in his car, because I wasn’t there. She often tells me, “I don’t remember you from my childhood.”

I became pregnant with my oldest daughter Ksenia during my last year of university. I couldn’t take any time off and left her with my mother for two years.

Now she asks me: “Mom, how could you leave me when I was so little?”

To this day, my biggest regret is that I separated myself from her. But I would’ve had to sacrifice everything, and I guess in hindsight you can say that I chose my career over my child. Although at the time I didn’t see it that way. Times were different back then, you couldn’t hire a nanny.

My husband was very supportive of my work. But when our second daughter was born, I scaled back my work to give my husband some room to advance his own career.

I never did have five children. When I was 38, I suddenly wanted a third child. Ksenia said: “How can you? You’re so old!” So I didn’t.

I always tell my girls to have at least three children – let the lineage continue! **TMT**

Olessya Bondarenko

Born
in Krasnoturinsk

36
yrs.



“I’ll meet with some local businessmen for the first time and they’ll belittle me and call me a ‘devochka.’ But when you show you know what you’re talking about they listen.

Works in urban planning | Married with two children

As a child, I was a Mowgli-type tomboy; open-minded and running around barefoot all the time. My older sister was very different: While I walked around the city in my underwear, she was a “proper girl.”

My father was a city official and my mother a leading doctor, so our family was always in the spotlight. But I still had a very free upbringing.

Most of my friends were guys, and it was never a problem for me to bring them home or have them stay over. Every summer we would go to our dacha outside Krasnoturinsk where I’d get in trouble with a whole gang of local children, most of whom were boys.

I remember the summer when puberty hit. My body was beginning to change and one of the boys said: “You’re not one of us anymore.” I was very hurt by this because I felt that I was still the same person.

I spent my teenage years in Yekaterinburg. It was the era of raves and nightclubs, and I frequently went out, sometimes even on my own. Gangsters would shoot each other in the streets in broad daylight. But I was never afraid, I’d often walk home alone at night. I guess this was because there was a strong community there and you always knew people around.

Drug abuse was everywhere. Many people I knew quite well became addicts, including an ex-boyfriend of mine who I was deeply in love with. One time I invited him over to my house and a syringe fell out of his pocket. I immediately realized what was happening.

For years, I wore a school uniform. But outside school I could wear anything and everything. Wide pants, crazy colorful shirts – I’d dress like a freak through and through and my mother actually stored all my clothes in our attic as a memento. A huge thanks to my parents who tolerated all of that, because looking back the clothes were quite ugly!

I never spoke much to my parents about the clubs and drugs, but because my mother was a



doctor, she already knew it all. They also knew my friends – musicians, artists, openly gay people – and so they had a hunch about what we got up to. But there was never any judgement or probing. As long as everything was transparent, as long as they knew who I was spending time with and what I was interested in, there were no questions.

At 19, I moved into my own apartment for the first time. I was unpacking my bags when I noticed a pack of condoms. I immediately knew my mother had packed them.

She actually gave me a book on where babies come from when I was six. The next week I went to school and began telling my classmates how it all worked. This obviously upset the school administration. They called my father and said: “We understand your family lives a certain way, but could you please spare the other children?”

At 26 I met my husband in Moscow, and we got married three years later when I found out I was pregnant. We ourselves never felt the need to tie the knot but it was important to his par-

ents. My mother said that she’d support me in any decision I made but she has always stressed the need to compromise.

At first, my husband was the one sort of pressuring me, but eventually I thought to myself, “Well if this person loves me so much, why don’t I do something good for him in return?”

I don’t regret it one bit now. Our wedding was amazing.

My first child wasn’t planned at all. I think you can never really plan a pregnancy, and that’s the beauty of it. Having a child strengthens the love between two people; childless couples often break up.

I was the first of my group of friends to have a child but I didn’t mind. I really blossomed during both of my pregnancies – it felt like a re-incarnation. There was a strong influx of productivity and energy. And children are the best teachers for parents; they teach you patience.

I have often seen how pregnant women are treated by their surrounding, like sick people. As if they have a real disease. There’s a strong feeling of disrespect and disgust towards them. We need some rules. If somebody gives up their seat on the bus for you, or helps you carry your bags in the grocery store or even stops staring at you. That would already be very nice.

Generally in Russia anyone considered to be weaker, pregnant women or disabled people, is treated with aggression. Surprisingly often this aggression comes from women. It should be the



opposite: women should understand each other through these shared feminine vibrations, but in Russia it seems many women are motivated by spite or jealousy.

The first time I ever felt I was being treated differently for being a girl was at my first job. I was 16 and MTV Russia had opened an office in Yekaterinburg.

MTV was a symbol of the 90s and Western-style freedoms. But me and another girl working there weren’t allowed to take part in the cooler and more experimental projects. They thought we were incapable of conducting interviews, for example. I was shocked because I’d never felt discriminated before.

Now I run an urban planning consultancy together with my sister and our best friend. Major clients often struggle with that idea, especially in the Urals. I’ll meet with some local businessmen for the first time and they’ll belittle me and call me a “devochka.” But the second you sit down with them and discuss the project, and show that you know what you’re talking about, they listen.

No matter what happens, I want to remain a girl. I don’t want to have to “hang balls” on myself and have to act all masculine.

There are plenty of cases of harassment in the professional sphere – we seemingly can’t live without them. Women keep silent about these incidents because they know that if they take action, their careers are over.

In Russia, victims of harassment are afraid of societal stigma. And, sadly, that is what our society does. It judges, and judges harshly.

But the American #MeToo story, let’s admit it, it’s simply too much. There needs to be a balance between the truth and symbolism, which seems to be snowballing over there.

A few years ago, Russia passed a law that decriminalizes domestic abuse. What can I say? I believe that it’s murder. It simply gives license to kill. See, for centuries, a Russian man could easily beat his wife. He could even kill her. And it was not considered shameful or even criminal because the man was the head of the family and what he said was law.

I can’t see how we can live with this law in our modern society. Our country is incredibly unstable and the Russian regions are full of heavy drinkers. We have to take this into account.

This law unties the hands of those who don’t just struggle to control themselves but who are also not in their right minds. TMT

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The Ambassadors Club

By **Eva Hartog** | @evahartog

A small group of women diplomats are paving the way to Moscow

For a couple of hours, the reception room in the Embassy of the Netherlands in central Moscow is a microcosm of the world — or at least its female half.

Ghana's ambassador is wearing a shirt with an orange ruffle collar and her Gambian counterpart dons a silver-embroidered purple headscarf and matching dress. With others, it is their demeanor that betrays their roots.

A petite woman with twinkling eyes gives me a tight hug and a kiss, as if she were my favorite aunt and not the representative of Honduras.

"We women always have plenty to talk about," declares Dutch Ambassador Renée Jones-Bos a little while later, once everyone has sat down to lunch.

Jones-Bos founded the women ambassadors club shortly after arriving in Moscow in the fall of 2016. The women gather every couple of months to socialize and listen to a guest speaker on a topic of interest. "It's an informal club, there are no rules," she says. "It's mostly about information sharing and support, but of course it's also fun!"

And fun it is. Someone calls a toast for "our mothers," and when another confesses she has been married for 30 years, there is applause and even a cheer. For a room full of diplomats, the atmosphere is notably relaxed. Perhaps because this is the most women they have been in a room with since, well, the last reunion.

"There's no pretense," Iceland's Ambassador Berglind Ásgeirsdóttir would tell me later. "There's nothing to pretend about."



At the Eurasian Women's Forum in St. Petersburg in September, first from the left Mexico Ambassador Norma Bertha Pensado; third from the left Iceland Ambassador Berglind Ásgeirsdóttir; sixth from the left French Ambassador Sylvie Bermann.

Of 154 resident foreign ambassadors in Moscow, only 12 are women. Many are the first women to occupy the posts.

Their arrival in Russia, a country whose image is one of chest-beating masculinity, signals how far the diplomatic world has come — and how far it still has to go.

Ásgeirsdóttir knows this better than anyone. Thirty years ago, she was one of two women to be accepted into her country's foreign service.

From there, she went on to become the first female Secretary General of the Social Affairs Ministry and later the Nordic Council. In 2016, she checked yet another "first" box when she was appointed ambassador to Russia.

"This has been happening for so long with me," she says during a meeting in her office, with a vitality that defies the early hour. (She used to drink 14 cups of coffee per day, she says, but now tries to stick to decaf.) "I'm 63 years old and, again, I am the first woman."

In part, the gender disbalance mirrors a broader trend of underrepresentation of women in foreign policy, especially in its upper echelons — there are only about 30 female foreign ministers worldwide — which goes back centuries.

"Men were going to foreign lands and women were waiting for them at home," says Gambian Ambassador Jainaba Bah.

"I think women are considered, with few exceptions, the weaker gender," adds Norma Bertha Pensado Moreno, the Ambassador of Mexico, which has 28 women ambassadors out of a total 104. In her country, women outnumber men at lower levels, she says, "While decision-making posts tend to be more for men."

Even countries considered pioneers in advancing women's rights have struggled to buck the trend. In 1980, Iceland got its first woman president, but then took 11 more years to get its first woman ambassador.

"It's as if women were advancing in politics and everywhere [else in society], but foreign service was still clearly seen in Iceland as a man's job!" says Ásgeirsdóttir.

No newbies here

In Russia, however, the gender imbalance in the diplomatic community is glaring.

"Russia is a big power with a strong military-industrial complex," says Jones-Bos, the Dutch ambassador, by way of explanation. "That is seen as something that men are good at."

Notably, Jones-Bos and the Ambassador of France — the only two women ambassadors from EU countries in Russia — previously held positions in other United Nations Security Council

member states, the United States and China, respectively. (Both as the first women of their countries to take up those posts.)

Some of the ambassadors say they were sent to Moscow with the explicit goal of building bridges, a task maybe seen as more suited to women. "We have to reactivate the relationship, so that's why we want you to go there," Pensado Moreno remembers being told.

Ásgeirsdóttir recalls how the prime minister announced her latest appointment in a public speech after the European football championship in France, where she was ambassador at the time, and ahead of the World Cup. The Icelandic team and its fans went on to become widely adored in Russia for their "Viking clap."

"They call me 'the football ambassador,'" says Ásgeirsdóttir, with a big smile. "Football, football and fishing technology and a little gender equality every now and then, that's what I've been doing in Russia."

That proves the rule

Accounting for five of the 12 ambassadors in the group, African countries seem to be doing moderately better. Perhaps, suggests Gambia's Bah, because since the Cold War, Russia has been seen as a friend rather than a foe there.

"West Africa has long been dominated by Western powers," she tells me at her embassy, sitting beneath two framed photos: one of President Vladimir Putin, the other of her own country's President Adama Barrow. "It was Russia which came to help to liberate Africa. It was Russia who named the university after [Congo's independence leader] Patrice Lumumba," referring to the Moscow institution now known as the People's Friendship University.

Bah's passion for Russia goes far back. As a student, she says, she was detained and tortured by intelligence officers of Gambia's previous government for espousing Communist views. She has named her son Bolshe, after the Bolsheviks.

Women's role in the struggle for independence has amplified their voices, Bah says, naming Titina Silla and Winnie Mandela as examples. "In Africa women are not seen as weak."

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Who’s the husband?

One of the most noticeable differences with many male diplomats is that the women have personal lives — or, at least, that they admit it. Ásgeirsdóttir, beaming, scrolls through her phone to show off photos of her baby grandson.

It wasn’t always that way. She became a widow when her youngest of three children was only two years old, but kept her private life largely hidden from her colleagues.

“We were so determined to be like the guys, so we never talked about it. Some people didn’t even know I had children,” she says. “Maybe because my generation was working against the glass ceiling every day.”

And while, since then, it has become more accepted for women ambassadors to be open about their offspring, there is still a lingering stigma over their spouses.

“Some younger female colleagues frequently get asked: What does your husband do?” says Mexico’s Pensado Moreno. “But if it were the other way round nobody would ask, ‘What does your wife do?’ because that’s taken for granted. That’s something we have to change.”

Like it or not

Discussing gender with the ambassadors is not without its pitfalls. On one hand, they want to emphasize that their posts are gender blind. Or, as the Dutch ambassador puts it: “There is only one representative to the Netherlands in Russia, and that’s me. Female or male, like it or not.”

On the other, some of their concerns will be recognizable to women in all walks of life. “I really don’t feel very comfortable inviting a male representative from another ministry or company



ALEXEI DRUZHININ / TASS

for a drink,” says Pensado Moreno. “You always think: ‘He could misinterpret my invitation.’”

Bah, from Gambia, has found her informal style of leadership has led to some misunderstandings with her staff who, sometimes, can get a little too comfortable. “I feel like they wouldn’t act like that if I were a man,” she says.

Regardless of Russia’s reputation, the ambassadors I spoke to for this article said they had felt welcome and they had not encountered any gender discrimination. In fact, being a woman in a country like Russia also presents a unique opportunity to make yourself seen.

Excited, Bah tells the story of when she went to present her credentials at the Kremlin — a rite of passage for all new ambassadors.

Gambia’s Ambassador Jainaba Bah and Ghana’s Ambassador Lesley Akyaa Opoku Ware at the Kremlin to hand in their credentials in April 2018.

in the French Quai d’Orsay are women,” French Ambassador Sylvie Bermann says.

Russia, too, is taking steps, the ambassadors say, pointing to the government’s national strategy plan for women and its hosting of the second Eurasian Women’s Forum in September in St. Petersburg — attended by Putin — as positive developments. “It’s a step in the right direction, which also opens space for more cooperation between our two countries,” says Bermann.

But Russia could still learn from other countries. “I have noticed that gender equality works very well until the first child is born,” says Ásgeirsdóttir. “Then women often start to cut down on their careers.” She notes Iceland’s law on parental rights, where both men and women each get three months of non-transferrable leave and three more months to divide among them.

Russia also has only one woman ambassador, in Indonesia, despite owning the bragging rights to having appointed the first ever female ambassador, Alexandra Kollontai, in 1923.

Ultimately, at a time when international relations with Russia are fraught, appointing more women ambassadors could be a bet on peace, some of the ambassadors suggest.

“Women are not only often the first victims of armed conflicts around the world; they are also part of the solution,” says Bermann. “In this sense, I hope that [being a woman] is an advantage in this period of tense relations between the EU and Russia.”

“Women are mothers, wives, this is embedded in our biology and it’s in the way we were raised,” agrees Bah. “Women assess the consequences, we have a more holistic picture.” On my way out of her office, I get a big hug. **TMT**

After the official ceremony was over, she got chatting with Russia’s often stone-faced foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov. (“He told me: ‘Your excellency, you look dazzling, you look beautiful.’”) Then, she says, she went over to Putin and gave him a hug. “I don’t think a man would do that,” she chuckles.

Back in Russia

Nevertheless, the women ambassadors insist, their home countries are making progress. Mexico now has special liaisons to advance women’s rights, including one in Moscow. And many countries have made gender equality a central tenet of their foreign policy strategies.

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Mothers Are at the Forefront of Russia's Anti-Vax Movement

By [Evan Gershkovich](#) @evangershkovich | Illustration by [Bojemoi](#)

For some women, saying no to the needle is an expression of agency

The problems began after Anastasia Dvoretzkaya's son turned one.

Before, she says, he had been a healthy child. But during his second year, a nagging cough was followed by recurring throat infections and then the flu.

Until then, Dvoretzkaya, 30, had vaccinated her son on schedule. After talking to other parents and researching online, the architect, who lives just outside of Moscow, decided to stop.

"Now he's back to being a healthy kid," Dvoretzkaya said. "And my younger son has never really been sick."

Like in most Russian families, Dvoretzkaya, as the mother, makes the decisions when it comes to her children. And like a large contingent of Russian mothers, she has doubts about vaccines.

In 2017, the Federal Center of Hygiene and Epidemiology reported that 48.7 percent of Russian children born in 2016 had not been vaccinated comprehensively and on the medically prescribed schedule.

As a result, Russian medical experts say the country is struggling to maintain herd immunity — the threshold percentage of the population that must be immunized for a disease to be kept

at bay, generally considered to be between 92 and 95 percent — for diseases like diphtheria and measles, among others.

The latter, for instance, is making a resurgence: So far this year, Russia has seen a 13-fold increase, following a trend in Europe and in the United States.

This state of affairs has the Kremlin's attention. In March, President Vladimir Putin said on national television he was considering taking measures because "it has become trendy not to vaccinate your kids."

In the West, the return of diseases like measles has been attributed to recent populist movements, which have eroded trust in authority, and, most recently, Russian trolls, which have spread misinformation on social media.

But back home in Russia, a deep-rooted distrust of authority has resulted in the phenomenon of parents choosing not to vaccinate their children as almost an expression of agency.

"This doubt towards any authority has been building up over many generations in Russians," says Sergei Butry, a pediatrician. "If our government has been controlling people for many decades, here is one sphere of life where a person can stand in opposition. The anti-vaccine sentiment is in the air in Russia and it is easy to catch."

Newfound agency

Up until two decades ago, medical experts say that Russians did not decline vaccines en masse like they do today.

While parents could refuse to vaccinate their children in Soviet times, they were generally more obedient, says Alexei Rtishchev, who specializes in infectious diseases among children at the Russian National Research Medical University. "The Soviet way was: If a doctor told you to do something, you did it," he said.

That began to change as Russia moved to democracy in the early 90s and Russians started to become more conscious of their rights, says Sergei Kolesnikov, who studies Russia's healthcare system at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

In 1998, legislation was passed requiring parental consent before any medical procedure — including vaccinations — was carried out. The new law, medical experts say, planted the idea in Russians' minds that they could decide not to vaccinate their children.

"This is the tragedy of democratization," says Kolesnikov. "If, before, a doctor would say, 'Yes, this needs to happen,' now a parent will say, 'We don't want this and we'll take you to court.' Does a doctor want to sit behind bars?"

Declining vaccines is also particularly easy in Russia. In the United States, for example, par-

ents must obtain religious exemptions, but in Russia, "all a parent has to do is say no," says Rtishchev.

For Dvoretzkaya, the decision not to vaccinate her children was ultimately about agency. "I subscribe to a healthy lifestyle, which is all about being conscious of your life choices," she said. "You figure out why people do certain things and then make your own decision."

That desire to take control of one's personal lifestyle choices is one that has trended upward in Russia in recent years. Movements like yoga, vegetarianism and veganism are increasingly popular in large cities. For those who continue to eat meat, supermarkets and restaurants now feature less fatty options like turkey. In a country with low life expectancies and high smoking and drinking rates, the wellness movement, in many ways, is a positive, says Daria Sarkisyan, health editor at the Meduza news outlet.

But it also has a darker side, Sarkisyan notes, with people turning to osteopathy and homeopathy — which she describes as "synonymous with anti-vaxxing" — over traditional medicine, shirking anything they see as unnatural.

"There's a lot of misinformation out there," Sarkisyan says. "And those that speak out against vaccines are the loudest."

Cosmopolitan anti-vaxxers

Type “vaccines are” in Russian into Google and the search engine will autofill: “evil,” “poison,” “a business,” “genocide” and “painful.” On social networks like Facebook and VKontakte, groups that speak out against vaccines abound. “The truth about vaccines” — one of the most prominent groups, which carries the tagline “There are no safe vaccines!” — has nearly 92,000 members.

On Facebook, one prominent group, “1796 - homeopathy and vaccines,” is run by Russia’s leading homeopaths and one of its most outspoken anti-vaxxers, Alexander Kotok. (Kotok declined to comment for this story, citing a personal rule of “not working with the media.”)

His writings were a big influence on Maria Romanova, managing editor of the Russian Yoga Journal magazine. Her belief that pharmaceutical companies are just big business selling the public on vaccines combined with her doubts about the medical system, led her to decide that vaccines weren’t necessary for her son.

“There’s a tendency to look at people who choose to not vaccinate their children as trying to take a stand against authority,” she says. “But at the end of the day, it’s a health issue.”

Tatiana Ivanova, 36, a manager in publishing, stopped vaccinating her son when he was three. “He had chronic bronchitis and ear infections,” she says. “And at some point, I started talking to my friends and reading about homeopathy.”

After meeting one homeopathic practitioner in person, who suggested that Ivanova stop vaccinating her son, Ivanova followed her advice, and hasn’t immunized her second child either.

“The important thing for me was that she had a 15-year background in traditional medicine before turning to homeopathy,” says Ivanova.

“Homeopathy opened my eyes,” she added. “I didn’t even realize you could avoid vaccines. My mother never thought to question them.”

Yelena Manchinskaya, the general director of a Moscow-based IT company, says she is “astounded” by the number of people in her social circle that don’t vaccinate their children. “It’s very common among my acquaintances and mothers at my daughter’s school,” she says. “And these are well-off, educated people.”

One recent experience, she says, opened her eyes to how widespread the sentiment is. After her daughter turned 12, Manchinskaya took her to a local gynecologist to get the HPV vaccine.

“The doctor told me she was shocked,” Manchinskaya recounted. “She said, ‘I’ve been offering it to everyone that comes in and have been touring schools to hand out information about the vaccine, and you are the first to have shown any initiative.’”

It’s not just middle-class Russians that have an anti-vaccine tendency: Some of the most



prominent dissent has come from a number of high-profile, female celebrities.

There is Sasha Zvereva, a pop singer with 916,000 followers on Instagram on which she periodically speaks out against vaccines. (She also hosts seminars titled “Smart Mommies.”)

There is Yulia Samoilova, who represented Russia at the 2017 Eurovision Song Contest, and who has said her disability — spinal muscle atrophy — was caused by childhood vaccines.

And there is Ksenia Borodina, a co-host of the popular Dom-2 reality television show. In an interview with the Russian Cosmopolitan last fall, she said she doesn’t vaccinate her daughter, adding: “Almost all of my friends do not vaccinate their kids either.”

Shouldering the blame

Easy access to misinformation and prominent voices spreading it, though, are not the only factors that lead mothers to decide not to vaccinate their children, medical experts say: The medical system itself must shoulder some of the blame.

Tatiana Kulichenko, who heads the Department of Emergency Pediatrics at National Med-

ical Research Center for Children’s Health, says that even some doctors have their doubts about vaccines, which she described as a “recent phenomenon.”

She pointed to research done by Russia’s Union of Pediatricians which showed that 72 percent of neurologists and 49 percent of immunologists had written exemptions for vaccines if a child had recently been ill. Scientific consensus, though, disagreed in nearly all of the cases that an exemption was necessary.

“And unfortunately, there’s no after-the-fact review of why an exemption was given, even if it wasn’t by a specialist,” Kulichenko says.

One of the main reasons non-pediatricians doubt vaccines, Kulichenko says, is that Russia’s medical schools don’t place a focus on immunization in general studies before students specialize. And rather than deal with parents who then claim the vaccines led to malignant effects, the causality of which the doctors themselves do not understand, doctors fill out exemptions.

Medical experts who spoke with The Moscow Times also noted that, in Russia, locally made vaccines often result in more severe side effects, including redness and fever.

Children also have to get up to five separate vaccines to every one a Western child would get, experts said, because Russia does not have combined vaccines — single shots that can protect against multiple diseases. By the end of their first year, Russian children, on average, will have received 11 to 14 separate shots.

Medical experts noted that Russian doctors are also lagging in doctor-patient communication, not taking the time to calmly and carefully explain medical reasoning to new parents.

“Many genetically predisposed diseases only show themselves during and after the first year,” says Fyodor Katasonov, a pediatrician with the GMS Clinic. “Parents, needing a clear reason to explain why their child is now sick, point to vaccines. It’s a very understandable psychological reaction. But it’s mistaken.”

Taken together, medical experts say, these factors — doctors’ own doubts, vaccine quality and communication — leave already nervous mothers looking for alternatives.

Someone to trust

Not all mothers who have caught the anti-vaccine bug have remained opposed.

In June, an author who identified herself as Maria P. wrote an essay for the Orthodox Church outlet Pravoslavie i Mir in which she explained why she had changed her mind about refusing to vaccinate her child. Doctors’ “fear-mongering, threats and rudeness practically always,” she argues, lead mothers simply striving to protect their children “to become more stubborn.”

What worked for her, she writes, were nurses who supported her belief that she knew what was best for her child, and told her she could change her mind when she decided the time was right. After doing her own research, Maria P. saw how much “occultism, mysticism and unfounded fears” surround the anti-vaccine movement. Ultimately, she decided it was a matter of hedging risk: “We consider the same question when we buckle our seatbelts or when we lock our front doors.”

Like Maria P., Oxana Burova, a 37-year-old housewife in Ivanovo, a city north of Moscow, had oscillated between being for or against vaccines. She vaccinated her first child, partially vaccinated her second and, for the first three years of her third child’s life, stopped vaccinating altogether. Then she stumbled across a new pediatrician. “He was very patient with me,” Burova says. “He took his time to explain and didn’t scold me.”

“I was a scared mother who wanted to protect my kids,” Burova continued. “What I needed was someone who was honest and kind. Someone I could trust.” ТМТ

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TOM MALIKO

While roller derby is becoming more mainstream in many countries, the sport has yet to pick up in Russia, where the idea of women in contact sports is still something to get used to.

On Their Own Track

By Loretta Marie Perera | @rettperera

On a chilly Sunday afternoon in late September, twenty women assemble in a gym in an industrial district in southwestern St. Petersburg. They flood the gray hall with colorful leggings, ripped T-shirts, bawdy banter and plenty of tattoos.

Zhanna Yuriyeva, co-founder of the St. Petersburg Roller Derby League, drops her jeans to show off her latest two, still raw from the night before. One reads “F-ck,” the other “Kill.” Her team howls with delight. This is roller derby, after all. No one is here to play nice.

Originally a skating race for women, roller derby evolved in the 1930s into an aggressive team racing spectacle, complete with hair-pulling and tripping. Since the 2000s, the sport has been regulated and players wear a full set of safety gear. Today, two teams skate around a track. The “jammers” — one designated racer in each team — score points by passing members of the opposing team.

Since its onset, the sport has attracted women keen on breaking down gender norms. Overseas, it is moving beyond its mission of women empowerment and becoming more mainstream. In Russia, however, it has stayed close to the small and marginal feminist and LGBT communities. Since 2013, two roller derby groups have emerged: a league in St. Petersburg has three teams, while Moscow is home to one. Many participants identify as outsiders in a society that insists on traditional gender norms, and say they have



MOSCOW ROLLER DERBY

The hardest part is finding a suitable location to skate and enough members to play. After that, it's all out for Russia's roller derby teams.

finally found a sense of belonging. “What’s most important is being yourself, and roller derby affords that,” Yuriyeva, 30, says.

On the fringes

With a lack of awareness about the sport in Russia, there are a number of obstacles that need to be overcome — beginning with finding a location. The Moscow team alternates between an indoor public skating rink in winter, and Sokolniki Park in better weather. Skating on a public track, however, means sharing a space with children and recreational skaters. It's not ideal.

In St. Petersburg, Marya Mrakova, a founding member of the league there, had to “Google, and Google, and Google, and make lots of phone calls,” before she found the hall. “Everyone’s afraid you’ll damage their floors,” she says.

Recruiting new members is an even bigger challenge. While both teams want to bring the sport to greater numbers in Russia, exposure can come at a price.

“Every year, our recruitment posts on social media generate a discussion,” Yuriyeva says. “In some groups they still say ‘Oh, those lesbians, those feminists, what are they doing?’”

To avoid online harassment, the St. Petersburg league decided to advertise within communities they deemed safe including LGBT, feminist and female athletes’ groups. “It is always men [who respond negatively],” says Yuriyeva. “Never women or kids.”

The aggression has some parents concerned. Yulia Borets, co-founder of the Moscow team, remembers what one mother said to her daughter at a training session. “Are you ready for this aggression and pain?”

Parents aside, Borets says most of the women who join roller derby are already on board with feminist principles. As such, they are used to pushback from society.

Ulrike Ziemer, a senior lecturer of sociology at the University of Winchester, says that it “goes against lots of ideas of femininity” with its hits and falls. “It’s still about women’s empowerment. Your whole idea of your body changes.”

The sport impacts lives off the track, too. “My legs are bruised often, so you can’t wear mini skirts!” jokes Ziemer, whose roller derby alias — everyone has one — is Nina Nunchucks.

Despite the obstacles, the women are undeterred. “At least we will be strong lesbians and famous ones,” laughs Yuriyeva, known by her teammates as Hulk, though she is quick to add that the team isn’t entirely gay. “Some of our players even have husbands,” she quips.

Abroad, roller derby has seen more men getting involved both off and on the track and in 2007 the Men’s Roller Derby Association was founded. Could men’s derby make it big in Russia? Ziemer, who has hosted roller derby training camps in Russia, isn’t so sure. “It’s not a complete no. But the time frame might be longer.”

Pavel Fyodorov, whose girlfriend is a regular player, is one of three men who helps the St. Petersburg team with scorekeeping and refereeing. “It’s a great, interesting sport,” he says. “But it’s unusual and hard to understand. And if it’s a woman’s sport, [Russian men] don’t want to.”

While men are welcome, “we watch [their behavior] very carefully,” Yuriyeva adds.

Here to stay

Among the most passionate members of roller derby in Russia are two expats.

“The plan was to leave Russia after I finished my Masters,” says Talia Kollek, a Canadian kindergarten teacher in St. Petersburg. “But I decided to stay. Sometimes I forget why I’m here, but then I come to practice and I remember.”

Larissa, an African-American skater from Tennessee who skates with the Moscow team, echoes that sentiment. “I’m usually hesitant to try new things in Russia,” she says. “People laugh and stare and yell things at me in public places all the time.” With roller derby, “I could feel like everyone else and not be treated like a freak.”

Beyond regular training sessions, both teams want to bring their game to the next level.

St. Petersburg is focused on meeting higher international standards. Moscow, meanwhile, is working on becoming a better match for the St. Petersburg teams. Plans for inter-city bouts are already in motion for next spring.

But Yuriyeva also wants the sport to stay grounded in its core principles. “It’s half fun, and half competition,” she says. “But most of all, it’s a safe space.” Keeping that space alive, she says, takes a lot of work. “And a lot of hugs!” **TMT**

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Pensioner | Widowed with four children

When I was growing up, the boys and girls in the village were friends. Some activities were segregated: Girls learned how to sew and the boys how to build things.

I didn't pay attention to anything except for my studies. Then, one day in tenth grade an older man came to my home to consider me as a match. I was scared. "Wow," I thought, "Now I'm an adult!" He sort of rated me, like in a film.

My grandmother gave me advice on suitors — she filled me in on their family backgrounds and characters. But no one spoke about sex. I got married without knowing what it was.

I think this is wrong. When a woman reaches the right age, she needs to be taught. We didn't understand anything. That's why our parents wouldn't let us go to the city. They were worried that the city folk would trick us, because we village girls were so naive. They were afraid of rumors that we were wearing make-up or short skirts. Girls were given the stink eye for that.

I was an A-grade student in math and chemistry. After school, I applied to a university in Vladikavkaz to study biochemistry, but was rejected over a bad grade in one subject. For a year, I prepared to resit the exam, but then my parents forbade it.

The courses were free, but I still had to pay for my own housing and food, and they couldn't afford it. The dean, who was a woman, even offered to take care of it, but my parents said no. It is one of the most bitter moments in my life. I could have been a chemistry teacher.

A year after finishing school I got married. My parents told me that he was alright. I was lucky to have him as a guide in my life.

When I was growing up, girls were married off by their families right after school. Whether we wanted it or not, we didn't have a choice. At 18, girls are mature and ready to become mothers.

If my husband had allowed it, I would've continued studying. But he couldn't leave the village



because he had to take care of his mother and I had to help him. Here, once you are married, your in-laws become your parents.

We lived in poverty. There were many hardships, financial troubles. We even had problems in bed. Two years after marrying, we had our first child.

There was a mutual understanding. He worked at a sovkhos, I looked after the house and disciplined the children. We built our home and planted the garden from scratch.

Bride kidnapping still exists in some parts of Dagestan. I remember when I was in Vladikavkaz, I met a woman who told me she'd been kidnapped. "My parents are still looking for me to this day!" she said. I'm completely against it.

Some of our customs have been lost. When I was growing up, a woman wore a red veil over her face during her wedding. Dating was strictly forbidden; it was very rare for someone to meet their future husband before marrying. The parents decided.

“ Girls were married off right after finishing school. Whether we wanted it or not, we didn't have a choice. At 18, girls are mature and ready to become mothers.

In Soviet times, my grandmother would pray in secret. Sometimes, she would walk around the village during Eid al-Fitr and hand out gifts to our fellow villagers. The following day my father, who was a member of the Communist Party, would be called in by the local authorities to answer for her actions.

I only go to the mosque on holidays. I could never pray regularly because I had to take care of all the children. Now I'm just not fit enough. I can't not believe in God. But it would be absurd to force somebody to be religious. If you want to pray, pray; if you don't, don't!

Patriotic upbringing

We need to help women to be mothers and work if they want to. That's what I think.

Raising children is difficult. You need to raise them in a patriotic, spiritual way, so that they can be useful to their community and family.

Here in our village in Dagestan women don't drink or smoke. It is forbidden, unthinkable. We raise our children to work, to respect the elderly, to keep the family together, and to look presentable in public.

I had three daughters. Every morning when they went to school I'd sit with a stick by the door. If I didn't like what they were wearing, I'd show them the stick.

I'm demanding of my granddaughters, too. I don't let them wear dresses that are too short, too transparent, or too revealing. I forbid it.

A woman's wisdom and kindness come from God and they are passed down from generation to generation. My grandmother was my role model. She was one of the first students at our village school when it first opened. There, she learned how to read and how to count.

She lost her husband at an early age, but by then already had six children. She outlived them all — only my father survived.

I have seven siblings. My grandmother would discipline all of us, too. What kind eyes she had! She would pray five times a day: for the children, for her grandchildren, and for a peaceful life.

My mother worked at the local hospital, so we didn't see her much. But my grandmother was always home. I helped her milk the cows, and make cheese and butter. I was always next to her. She was the main female authority in the home. Now I have taken her place.

Dagestani women are proud like mountains. They stand up for their work ethic and strong characters. I love my Dagestan. **TMT**



Anzirat Akimova

42
yrs.



Works as a schoolteacher | Married with two children

I believe in God very much, in Allah, in Jesus Christ and in the Virgin Mary. I have a lot of faith in our local priests. I may not pray five times a day like most Muslims do, but I'm a fervent believer.

We have two mosques in our village, but I've never visited them. Only men go there regularly to pray. Sometimes, for example during special holidays, women also go. But for the most part the women in our village don't go.

The rules are not set in stone, but there are many things which are reserved for men. For example, only men go to the local café and, during village meetings, it is the men who voice their opinions and make the final decisions. When we have people over for dinner or a celebration, the men sit at the table and converse, while the women serve them food and drinks.

In my time, it was custom for girls to be wed immediately after finishing school. If she was still unmarried after five years, everyone would say, "Nobody has offered her their hand in marriage, something must be wrong!" Also, if a woman did not give birth by the age of 23, it was seen as a serious problem. She'd be taken to see doctors and specialists.

Here, marriage is forever. Dating is pretty much forbidden, so you have to trust what your family tells you and your instinct.

Love at first sight exists. It only takes one look in each other's eyes to figure out if you're meant to be together. A girl can't just be forced into marriage; she has to be able to see it with her eyes and feel it in her heart.

In my parents' case, they just brought my father to my mother one day and said, "You're going to marry this man." She exchanged a few words with him in the other room, and then said, "Yes, of course!"

Right after my wedding, my mother said, "Look, daughter, this used to be your family home. Now you have a new mother, listen to her, and to your husband. Don't offend their relatives. When you host guests, always wear a smile on your face, be respectful.



“Right after my wedding, my mother said, ‘Look, daughter, this used to be your family home. Now you have a new mother, listen to her and to your husband.’

This is the advice which has been passed down to newlyweds for generations. They say, "Once you leave, you better not come back." The point is for you to get settled so that you don't come back with your head hung low.

Ideal men don't exist. Girls, I swear. A person who wants to become perfect, is someone who wants to be above Allah, above God. That's what I think.

I can't be perfect; I'm not a saint. Even saints aren't perfect. A man is always going to have flaws that those surrounding him will have to endure.

For example, if he's hard-working, maybe he drinks a little, smokes a little. Maybe he has a sharp tongue, or smelly feet, or he's too hairy. Or maybe he lacks somewhere else, can't say where! The ideal man doesn't exist.

When I was a teenager, my mother would give me advice on suitors. She'd tell me about their family backgrounds and who would be good for me and who wouldn't.

"If you pick a man I warned you about, and you end up hating him, don't come crying," she would tell me. I was told my husband came from a good family, and he looked after them and his livestock well. So, I went for him.

Back then, getting married and having children was the only way out. The new generation has so many options, so many prospects; nobody forces them to do anything. If my daughter wants to get married, it's her decision!

But personally I think getting married after 30 is leaving it too late. How can a woman adapt to living with a family if she is used to living alone?

Born in Khryug, Dagestan, Russia

In Dagestan, once a woman marries she must live not only with her husband, but also her in-laws and her children. Women who marry at an early age haven't formed their own ideas or opinions yet, so they find it easier to adapt.

We had children soon after the wedding. I was 18. Why else would we marry? What other options do you have? Look at what a big home my mother has — she has all of this because she gave birth to so many children.

Sex is never discussed in schools or at home. It's very much taboo to discuss these subjects openly here. Girls are only warned against being promiscuous and if they break the norms, they'll be used as an example to other girls about how not to behave if they don't want to ruin their lives. Contraception? What is that? I don't know what that is.

Dreams of the 'Foggy Albion'

As a child I wanted to become a detective. My father brought home this Soviet magazine called "Man and the Law," and I would read the crime stories in it.

I couldn't just be a stay-at-home mother, so when they opened a new pedagogical institute in the Akhty district, I went there to study. I got a Bachelor's degree, but couldn't complete an MA because my mother-in-law got Parkinson's disease and I had to take care of her.

Since then, I've taken several courses in Makhachkala to qualify as an assistant teacher and then as a teacher. Finally, at 40 years of age, I was given a diploma! I really love my work, and the school head often lets me take over whenever she's absent.

In high school I used to read a lot — Walter Scott, Alexander Duma, Honore De Balzac. I've always dreamt of seeing the "Foggy Albion" described in English literature or the wheat fields described in Russian literature.

Two years ago, I finally got to see a Russian village, because my sister moved away to the Russian provinces. Here it's always noisy because we live in a valley and the houses are built close to each other. Out there, there's just silence. But despite the beautiful landscape, many of the villages looked abandoned. I don't know, maybe there are also half-abandoned villages in the "foggy Albion," but I really felt sorry for the country after seeing this.

A hero for me is anyone who manages to overcome hardships to reach success. Someone who takes risks, sometimes even risking their family, to become important.

Take the first woman in space, Valentina Tereshkova. She couldn't accept just being a physicist or a teacher and starting a family at an early age — her goal was to go into space. After, she still managed to have a family.

It takes a lot of courage to leave your family and your home to pursue other goals. To go far, you have to leave Dagestan and move to Moscow or St. Petersburg. But if a woman leaves her family she must have no heart. In Dagestan, family is the most important thing.

A wise woman can work as a doctor or she can stay at home and sew, but the most important thing is to keep the home together.

Husbands need to stand behind their wives as though behind a mountain, because without a strong woman, men can't survive.

The man might be the head of the family, but the woman is its keeper. **TMT**

Alisa Akimova

10
yrs.



Born in Khryug,
Dagestan, Russia

“We are Muslims. We need to wear long skirts, not short ones. Girls should always be modest. They shouldn't do what boys do. That's what's most important.”

High-school student

Boys and girls definitely behave differently. If a young girl falls, an older girl will help her up. A boy wouldn't do that. Girls are also very good students at our school; the boys not so much!

Football and wrestling are popular sports in our village. There's not a single girl that practices wrestling and girls will only play football during gym class. The boys play it all the time.

We're all still close friends, though, the boys and girls in my class. Our teacher tells us that we're all siblings.

Because we're still young, our parents don't let us visit boys at their homes unless it's a special occasion like a birthday.

I would never become friends with any boys outside of school, this is bad. If a boy I don't know tries to approach me, I'd immediately tell my brother. I can always rely on my brother for this kind of help.

In our village, brothers are like cliffs that support the backs of their sisters.

As we get older, our brothers will always stay by our sides and help, just like my uncle is always helping my mother.

He's always there for my aunts, too, and my father is there for his sisters. I think my brother will always be by my side, because we're younger and we're taught to respect our elder brothers and sisters. I like being a younger sister.

I'm still very young, and I have many years left to study, and figure out which gifts Allah granted me.

We should all believe

I have many dreams. To become a doctor, a singer, a dancer, a teacher...

If I can, I'll be a teacher. That is what my grandmother wants because she never had the chance.

Maybe in the future I'll be a doctor or a teacher. I really love to sing and dance. But I'll



do what my parents tell me to do or what my grandmother wants.

It doesn't matter whether you're a girl or a boy, you still face the same difficulties. Both have to work hard and study, so they can support their families in the future. Without a degree or other qualification, you're just an ordinary person who doesn't do anything. In our village, most of the children excel in their studies.

We all believe in Allah here. To not believe in Allah is very bad. Maybe there are people who don't believe, but I personally do.

I believe because I see my grandfather pray every day. It is difficult to do all of this, but Allah helps him and guides him.

He does Salah. He does it in the corner at home and no one disturbs him. We should all

believe in Allah. It is not possible for someone not to.

Men and women have different rules for the Salah prayer. My mother doesn't pray Salah regularly. She only does this during holidays. It is very demanding, and she works all the time. She also tried to fast during holidays, but it was too difficult because she was working as well.

Family rolemodels

My father is an example of the ideal man.

Since he didn't have an education, he didn't have a career. But as soon as my mother became pregnant with my sister, he sold cabbages day and night to support us.

My mother gave birth to her first child at 20, and then she went out to work, too. My grandmother took care of me at home when I was born, as did my elder sister, which I'm very grateful for. My sister would help my father sell cabbages, and then feed me at home. Back then there were no phones in the village.

My mother is very kind, my grandmother is also very kind, and I try to be like them.

I don't think we're that different, we have the same blood flowing in all of us. I don't get up as early as my grandmother to work, I'm



still young, but I don't see any differences between us.

My grandmother had a very difficult childhood. When she wasn't studying hard, she was helping her mother. Now we have access to Wi-Fi and to computers. But you can't learn everything from computers! I have time for extracurricular activities.

As a woman, I need to study hard and work to sustain my family in the future. I'll have as many children as Allah gives me. He decides my fate.

I will tell my daughters what my grandmother always said: "Don't dress in short clothes. You shouldn't dress like that."

We can't have that in our village. We are Muslims. We need to wear long skirts, not short ones.

Girls should always be modest. They shouldn't do what boys do. That's what's most important.

It is a sin for girls

If I were to have a daughter I would tell her: Boys are boys, they are allowed to. Girls can't, they should be modest. They should look after the home. That's a must.

Girls should be told, "You're going to get married. You need to earn money. Then, look after the home. That is the most important thing."

What's an example of something boys can do and girls can't?

For example: when you grow up, men drink. A girl should never do this. It is a sin for girls.

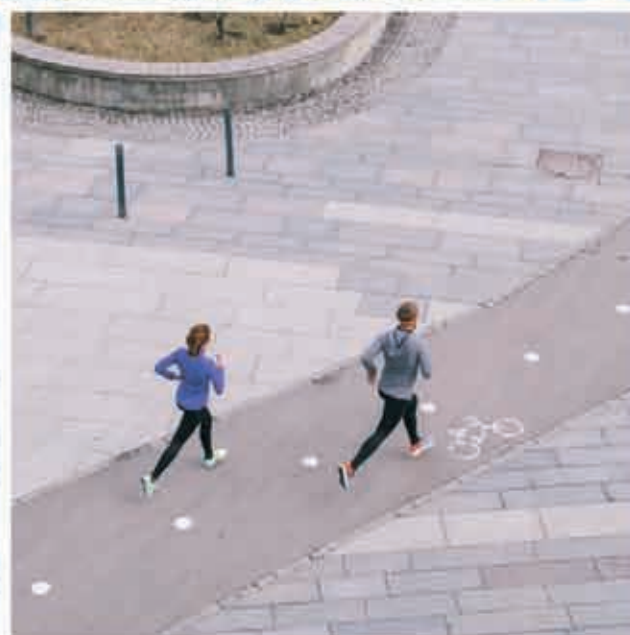
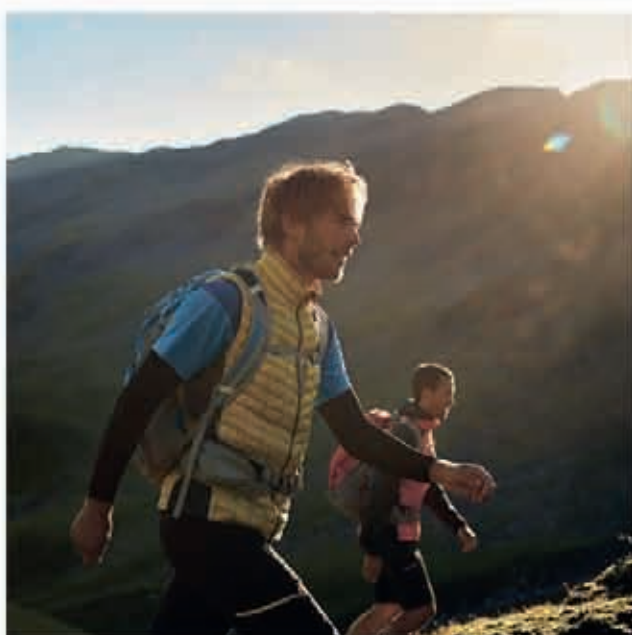
She shouldn't ever drink alcohol. You can drink juice, but to drink that filth, that smell, is unthinkable. You can't drink that.

I have never thought of leaving Dagestan, no way! You always hear that Moscow has problems.

In our village everything is perfect. Look at the mountains! Maybe I would move to Makhachkala with my mother.

Otherwise, I don't want to leave. The air here is so clean. Out there, there are gases in the air.

What it means to be a girl? At the moment I'm young. I should get an education and do whatever I can. Then you get married; you need to start a family. And have children. That's it. **TMT**



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Women to Watch

By **Pjotr Sauer** | @pjotrsauer

Russian women are making their mark at home and abroad. Look out for these upcoming stars in music, business and politics



KATRIN NENASHEVA / PERSONAL ARCHIVE

Politics

Katrin Nenasheva

Through a series of daring art performances, Katrin Nenasheva has brought attention to issues around torture and mistreatment in Russian prisons and mental institutions. In the summer of 2018, Nenasheva, who is 24, says she was kidnapped and tortured by militants while visiting her grandparents' grave in the Donbass region of Ukraine. In September, her semi-immersive exhibition in Moscow dedicated to torture victims was banned by the authorities.

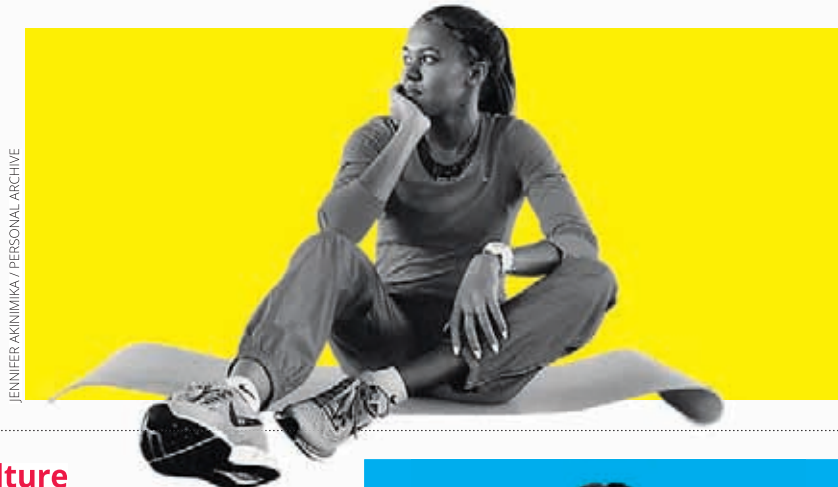
"Radical political performance art in Russia is often considered a masculine, male domain," she told The Moscow Times. "I try to challenge that image with my art dedicated to the everyday person and their struggles."

Sports

Jennifer Akinimika

One of Russia's most talented young athletes, Jennifer Akinimika, 17, is currently the Under-18 national champion in both 100-meter and 200m sprint distances. Born and raised in Krasnodar, Akinimika's father is Nigerian and her mother Russian. She has spoken publicly about her aim to break Russia's current 100m record held by the legendary sprinter Irina Privalova.

On being a mixed race woman in Russian sports, Akinimika told the Sports.ru outlet, "I realize that I stand out on the track in Russia, but running helped me deal with all the insecurities I had about my skin color."



JENNIFER AKINIMIKA / PERSONAL ARCHIVE

Arts & Culture

Olga Koch

Olga Koch, 25, is probably Russia's funniest stand-up comedian working in English. This year she was nominated for the Best Newcomer Award at the prestigious Edinburgh Fringe Festival for her debut show called "Fight."

Koch is the daughter of former Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alfred Koch, one of the masterminds behind Russia's turbulent privatization in the 90s who now lives in exile. Much of Olga's comedy is based on her unusual upbringing.

On being a woman in the comedy business, Koch told The Moscow Times: "You never see yourself as a Russian female stand-up until somebody points out to you that you are. To you, you are just you."



TAUS MAKHACHEVA / PERSONAL ARCHIVE

Arts & Culture

Taus Makhacheva

Taus Makhacheva, 35, is a visual artist from Makhachkala in Dagestan. Her video art has won accolades for its commentary on the complex cultural and political realities in the North Caucasus region and has been exhibited in the Tate Modern in London and the Moscow Museum of Modern Art. Artistic sensibilities run in the family: Her grandfather is Rasul Gamzatov, one of the Soviet Union's most praised poets.

"Culture is underfunded in most places in the world, and Dagestan is no exception," Makhacheva told The Moscow Times. "Ministries and museums are understaffed, but I love and admire the persistence with which women working in the cultural sector try to break through walls."



YEVGENIA KUYDA / PERSONAL ARCHIVE

Business

Yevgenia Kuyda

Yevgenia Kuyda, 32, is the cofounder of the groundbreaking app Replica, which creates an artificially intelligent copy of whoever uses the app. Originally, Kuyda built Replika to digitally recreate a friend who had died in an accident in 2015. Born in Moscow, Kuyda was previously a magazine columnist and founded Bribr, an app that could secretly record someone if they were asking for a bribe.

On being a woman in business, she told The Moscow Times: "In Russia, people don't want to give you a second chance when doing business. If you fail, they say you are a loser."

Advertorial

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Caviar Season in Vladivostok 3000

"Black caviar, red caviar, imported eggplant paste ...". Few people know that in this cult film there was a mistake in the scene of the royal banquet: in the times of Ivan the Terrible there was no red caviar in Russia! This delicacy first appeared and soon gained its popularity only after the Far East was made part of Russia.

As the fishing season recently ended in the Russian Far East, caviar was freshly harvested: it has a special taste and texture, mildly salty and not bitter. Now such seasonal and fresh

caviar has been brought from Vladivostok to the eponymous restaurant located on 7, Tverskaya.

Throughout the month of October guests of Vladivostok 3000 will be treated to a tasting of 3 types of caviars: sockeye, chum and coho salmon.

For the "Caviar Season" chef Givi Khatsov has come up with a special menu. It turned out to be a little rustic with no pretension at all.

In these cozy homemade dishes that are familiar to the Russians it is caviar that is the real star.

Givi chose to make caviar the main ingredient in this seasonal menu. It has a soft creamy taste, tender and not bitter. The shells are so delicate that they melt right away in your mouth.

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Sports
Nadezhda Karpova
The future of Russian football is female and Nadezhda Karpova, 23, is arguably its biggest star. In 2017, Karpova was bought by Spanish club Valencia in what was a rare move abroad for any Russian football player. Karpova is an outspoken advocate for women in football, while her distinct aesthetic style has seen her featured in magazines likes Tatler, ELLE and Esquire.
On being a Russian woman in sport, she told Harper's Bazaar, "I want there to be equality, and I don't think it's weird when girls play football. Take me to any backyard, I'll beat all the guys there, and then we'll see if they say football is a male-only sport."

Business
Gulnaz Khusainova
Moscow-born Gulnaz Khusainova, 29, founded the start-up Easysize which assesses customer shopping preferences and predicts whether they will return purchases. The startup has reported it has helped save online stores up to 7 percent in revenue. She was featured on the "Forbes 30 Under 30" list this year.
On being a Russian woman in business, she told The Moscow Times: "When people first see me during meetings in Russia, they think I'm the marketing girl. In Europe it's a bit better. Maybe they think I'm responsible for business development."



Arts & Culture
Nina Kraviz
Born in Irkutsk in Siberia and with a degree in dentistry, Nina Kraviz is an unlikely ambassador for Russian techno. Kraviz, 29, has headlined countless prestigious festivals throughout the world since she rose to prominence and last year she was named the world's best DJ by the British Mixmag magazine.
On being a woman in the music industry, she told the Guardian: "People were suspicious of a pretty woman making music on her own, with a vision. They couldn't handle me."



Politics
Lucy Shtein
At just 22, Lucy Shtein's CV resembles that of a political veteran. In 2017, Shtein was elected a Moscow municipal deputy, where she made headlines by placing plaster casts of her breasts on Soviet-era apartments listed for demolition in her Moscow district.
An outspoken advocate of legalizing drugs, Shtein also headed Ksenia Sobchak's Moscow campaign offices during the celebrity journalist's run for the presidency in 2018. She currently hosts a popular political talk show on YouTube and pens a weekly column for the Ekho Moskvy radio station.
On being a Russian woman in politics, she told The Moscow Times: "Russian politics, like many spheres, is dominated by men as a result of prolonged female marginalization in society. I envision a country where gender does not play a role in politics."

Arts & Culture
Liza Gyrdaymova (a.k.a. Monetochka)
With the release of her latest album "Coloring for Adults" this year, Monetochka has cemented her place at the helm of a new wave of electro-pop taking over Russia.
Monetochka, 20, whose stage name might be best translated as Lil' Coin, rose to fame in 2016 after putting out her first album on Russian social media free of charge. The record made waves by tackling issues as diverse as heart-break and the conflict in Syria. Her latest release was an instant success for capturing the Russian youth's sense of humor and angst.
On being a woman in the music industry, Monetochka said in a July interview with the Vpiski internet show that, "As long as there are bosses who grab girls' butts and harass them, we have something to fight for."





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Russia Had a #MeToo Moment

By Marianna Spring | @mariannaspring

Six months after journalists brought allegations of harassment against a lawmaker, the future of the anti-sexual harassment movement looks uncertain

“Most people have a different way of thinking here and are not used to sharing stories like this,” Daria Zhuk says from her flat in Moscow.

“We need to keep talking about sexual harassment in Russia, and show people that it isn’t scary, but enormously important, to speak up,” she adds. “Only then can we really change the current situation.”

Zhuk is a producer and reporter at the opposition-leaning television network, Dozhd TV. She works, among other things, on the channel’s women’s program, “Women on Top,” where she hosts discussions on topics like sexual harassment, domestic violence and other problems women face in Russia and around the world.

She is also one of three women who went public with claims of sexual harassment against State Duma Deputy Leonid Slutsky in February. The allegations sparked an unprecedented public debate in Russia, drawing comparisons to the Harvey Weinstein scandal.

Yekaterina Kotrikadze, who is now deputy chief editor of RTVI television based in New York, was among Slutsky’s accusers earlier this year. Women in Russia do not typically speak out about harassment because they are afraid of backlash, she said.

“What my colleagues and I did was to try and change the society surrounding them, so that they are no longer afraid of behavior like Mr. Slutsky’s,” she says.

Six months after the allegations, however, the #MeToo movement — which has seen scores of men removed from top positions in the West — has yet to take off in Russia. At the same



“My hands don’t stray, and when they do, just a little,” said Popova’s cutout of Slutsky.

Zhuk’s channel Dozhd, for instance, has reinstated its Duma correspondent to report on “the most important events,” according to its chief editor Alexandra Perepelova.

“Dozhd has decided that it is vital to cover social issues discussed in the Duma, like pension reforms and changes to domestic violence laws, because our channel offers a different view on these problems,” she told The Moscow Times. “However, we still try to avoid Slutsky.”

She also insisted that the decision to report from the Duma again had not “taken the pressure off Mr. Slutsky,” who she said is “suffering” the consequences of the boycott.

“I don’t think anything has fundamentally changed in how men like Slutsky think, but our boycott made them realize that they can’t get away with their behavior, especially since we can now talk about these topics more openly,” Perepelova added.

Kotrikadze echoes that sentiment, saying that “the fact of the boycott is much more important than its continuation.”

Women’s rights activist Alyona Popova, however, is less optimistic about Russia’s brief experiment with the #MeToo movement. In March she found herself in the back of a police van after protesting sexual harassment with a cardboard cutout of Slutsky at the Duma. Popova was later found guilty of having organized a mass event without permission and handed a fine of 20,000 rubles (\$300).

Since then, the situation has “only got worse,” Popova says. “Everyone has seen how Slutsky has been defended by his political pals. He remains the head of the Duma committee on international affairs. He calmly meets foreign delegations and travels to various countries, where he is still very welcome.”

Most recently, Slutsky liaised with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg at the United Nations General Assembly at the end of September. He also met with European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini to discuss sanctions, which he himself has been subject to. In August, he met with U.S. Senator Rand Paul, who invited him to Washington with other Russian lawmakers.

“If anything, Slutsky’s career has improved since the scandal — at least that’s how it looks to me,” Popova told The Moscow Times.

#MeToo needs more time

Despite the absence of reflection at the top, Kotrikadze believes that young Russians will gradually force a change in attitude towards sexual harassment.

“Here, human rights are not as important as they are in the United States or Europe, so of course the #MeToo movement will be different here, and it needs to be fought for,” she says.

“I received a wave of support from all over Russia. Women from Yekaterinburg wrote and thanked us for our courage, saying they wouldn’t do this in their city.”

Russia’s #MeToo movement just needs more time, she says. “This is just the beginning. Russia deserves better and Russian women deserve better.

“There are so many women silently suffering in Russia because of the behavior of men in their own homes, offices, schools and universities. The silent suffering will stop. Not now, but soon.” **TMT**

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time, Russia’s political elite has denied there is a problem.

The Duma’s ethics commission cleared Slutsky’s name in March, and President Vladimir Putin has branded the #MeToo movement a “media conspiracy.” Meanwhile, the women who went public with their stories have faced harsh criticism — including from other women.

“[They] said nasty, terrible, embarrassing things,” says Kotrikadze. “They called me a liar, and questioned how I could remember what happened seven years ago.”

“One Duma member claimed that she’s 300 times more beautiful than those of us who spoke out against Slutsky, so she could not understand why he would abuse us and not her.”

Although Zhuk says she had been inspired by the support she received from viewers, colleagues and even some politicians, lawmakers still reproach the journalists for going public.

“For the most part, the Duma deputies continue to blame us,” Zhuk says. “They either do not believe us or claim that we ourselves were responsible for Slutsky’s actions.”

The BBC’s Farida Rustamova, who also accused Slutsky of harassment, declined to comment for this article. Slutsky was also contacted for comment.

Back to normal?

Some 40 media outlets initially supported the journalists by boycotting the Duma and refusing coverage of Slutsky. But in recent months, that boycott has fallen by the wayside.

Self-development, business, profit. Is that it?

Modern life is such that a successful person is someone who finds innovative solutions for problems and always keeps up with the times. This approach is appropriate not only in business, but also in the care of their health and the health of their future children.

There are about 15% of infertile couples in the world, and this problem is increasingly faced by successful people who strive for self-realization, building a business and achieving high goals. And men and women are infertile about equally. One of the important reasons is postponing the birth of a child for a later period, as the reproductive age of a woman deteriorates significantly after 35 years. However, we, the people of the 21st century, are extremely lucky - medicine has made huge leaps and allows you to competently plan the birth of children. It turns out that the popularity of IVF among the celebrities is not a show-business whim and a pursuit of fashion, but a pragmatic approach.

Russia is among the leaders

More and more people from other countries visit Russia in order to get long-awaited fertility treatment. There are several reasons for this. Unlike most European countries, in Russia such methods as donation of gametes (eggs and sperm) and embryos, as well as surrogacy, are allowed at the legislative level. But not only because of this is our country chosen for the successful planning of the birth of children.

Reproductive medicine does not stand still

Every year new technologies appear that help people who have identified problems with reproductive health.

Women who have undergone serious surgery on the reproductive organs, who have been treated for cancer, now have a high chance of pregnancy.

IVF at the present stage is used not only to overcome infertility, but also to reduce the risk of genetic abnormalities of the fetus in older patients and families who already have a child with a hereditary disease.

Due to the improvement of equipment and supplies for IVF, as well as the introduction of new



developments in the field of embryology and genetics, the statistics of successful pregnancies is constantly increasing.

What is the cause of the increase in IVF success rates?

Modern developments in the field of genetics allow you to choose the best medication for ovarian stimulation and its dosage, allowing you to get the maximum number of eggs in the IVF program through an individual approach based on objective data.

Since the average age of women entering the IVF program has increased significantly, IVF with double stimulation and pre-implantation embryo screening has been introduced into practice.

In addition, Nova Clinic's practice modified IVF protocols and other modern concepts of treatment that allow the patients to achieve pregnancy and at the same time, avoid possible complications both during the treatment and in the early stages of pregnancy.

Pre-implantation diagnosis-healthy baby

Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis of embryos is used in IVF procedures, which enables the identification of chromosomal abnormalities and gene mutations before the transfer of embryos into the uterine cavity. It is impossible to visually identify

such anomalies – they can't be detected even in embryos of very good quality. In Nova Clinic we carry out diagnostics which allow us to identify both the presence or absence of chromosomes, their possible doubling, as well as to determine hereditary diseases.

It is important that modern techniques allow the analysis to be carried out on all 46 chromosomes, and is not limited to the diagnostics of only the most probable issues.

According to statistics, the use of PGD increases the effectiveness of IVF by an average of 30%, as well as significantly reducing the risk of miscarriage in the early stages, and the likelihood of genetic disorders in the fetus.

Fertility preservation programs

Special programs have been developed for people who plan to postpone the birth of a child for the future and, at the same time, want to avoid problems associated with age-related decline in reproductive function. Delayed parenthood involves cryopreservation of oocytes and sperm at a young age (when there are no issues with their quantity and quality), long-term storage and further use in the IVF cycle.

Donor programs

IVF programs using eggs and sperm donors can be recommended for patients whose own sex cells

are absent, or cannot be used in the cycle of in vitro fertilization.

Surrogacy

The procedure of surrogacy enables the birth of a child, which is genetically related to the parents, in the presence of contraindications to pregnancy and childbirth (absence of the uterus, habitual miscarriage).

Nova Clinic implements a full-cycle program: from the selection of a surrogate mother from its own database to the registration of a newborn child in the registry office. Our center of reproduction provides comprehensive legal support and full organization of the medical part of the procedure.

What affects the effectiveness of infertility treatment?

The possibilities of modern reproductive medicine make possible the birth of a healthy child even in the most difficult situations. The task of the doctor is to conduct a thorough examination, which may include laboratory and non laboratory methods of diagnosis, and then on the basis of the data gathered, to develop the optimal treatment regimen for each individual case.

Only highly qualified specialists with many years of experience in the correction of reproductive dysfunction in different groups of patients are admitted to Nova Clinic. Most of them have PhD and doctoral degrees, and are the authors of scientific works and practical developments in the field of infertility treatment.

The effectiveness of therapy largely depends on the equipment of the medical institution, so the branches of Nova Clinic use only the most modern certified equipment necessary for the diagnosis and treatment of reproductive dysfunction.

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РЕКЛАМА

THERE ARE CONTRAINDICATIONS, PLEASE, CONSULT WITH THE DOCTOR

On the Frontlines

By [Anastasia Manuilova](#) | [@m_stasi](#)

Think back to the most high-profile human rights cases in Russia in recent years — Oleg Sentsov, Ildar Dadin, Oyub Titiyev — and they have concerned men. Away from the public eye, however, it is usually women who are working to free them.

Although women are underrepresented in almost all spheres of Russian society, they dominate one in particular: human rights.

There is certainly no shortage of work. In recent decades, the situation in the human rights sphere has steadily deteriorated.

During Vladimir Putin's first term as president, between 2002 and 2004, Freedom House described Russia as “partially free,” giving it a score of five on political rights and civil liberties (one being most free, and seven least free). This year, the same organization labeled Russia “not free,” scoring it a seven in terms of political rights.

Women, especially, have made it their duty to fight back. “The defense of human rights has a female face in Russia,” says prominent activist Zoya Svetova. “Anna Politkovskaya, Natalia Estemirova, Karina Moskalenko — they're all women.”

This was not always the case, says Alexandra Krylenkova, a human rights defender from the St. Petersburg Observers union.

“Back in the 1990s, human rights advocates were mainly supported by international foundations, so they could have a career and be well paid. It was prestigious,” she says. “In my view, that's why there were many more men involved.”

Unlike in many other professions, women are also advancing to the top positions. Natalia Taubina, the head of the Public Verdict foundation, which helps victims of police abuse, is just one example. “I've never felt any gender discrimination by either government officials or prisoners,” she told The Moscow Times.



ZOYA SVETOVA / PERSONAL ARCHIVE

Prominent activist Zoya Svetova says the human rights sphere is more democratic than Russian society overall, making it easier for women to climb to the top.

In fact, the sphere of political activism, Svetova notes, is more democratic than Russian society in general, which has allowed women to advance to more high-ranking positions.

Eva Merkachova, deputy chairman of the prison inspection group Public Monitoring Commission in Moscow, says in many cases inmates are more open with women about abuse they suffer.

“I was once part of a group of advocates visiting prisons,” she recalls. “My male colleagues didn't receive any complaints from prisoners. But when I spoke to them with some other women on the team, we got a lot of information.”

Krylenkova agrees women are seen as more approachable. “It's one way in which gender stereotypes work for the better,” she says.

Government employees also prefer to work with female advocates, says Merkachova. Women don't pose the same perceived threat

as men and civil servants feel they can learn more about the victim from women. However, this is not always the case. “In the past — and sometimes still — male activists get the last word at meetings with government officials,” Taubina explains.

According to Krylenkova, women are also less likely to be hurt or tortured in the line of duty. “Or falsely accused,” she adds.

“The data shows that human rights activists who have been falsely accused of bribery were all men. It is impossible to imagine a woman being accused of graft. No one would believe the accusation.”

Women, however, do run other risks specific to their gender, such as being threatened with losing custody of their children.

“Women talk about this every day, but I have never heard men complaining about it,” Krylenkova says. And according to Svetova, it is a cloud that hung over many well-known names such as Politkovskaya and environmental activist Yevgenia Chirikova.

There is no obvious way of mitigating for the threat, Krylenkova adds. “Some send their children abroad. Some leave the country entirely. Some didn't do anything and were just killed.”

The other consideration for female rights defenders is how to balance family life with work. But, according to Merkachova, the answer to that question varies from person to person.

“I went back to work — visiting prisons — three days after my child was born,” she says. “Activism is a freelance job. You can choose when to work and for how long.”

Ultimately, human rights activism in Russia has reached total gender equality in one important sense, Svetova quips.

Men and women “have an equal chance of being killed,” she says. “If their activism seriously threatens politicians, then gender won't make a difference.” **TMT**

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НА ПРАВАХ РЕКЛАМЫ



Anna Shishko

Born in Moscow

73
yrs.



“He said he wanted to give me this cooking pot. Inside it, was a leg of lamb. He had just returned from his village and brought me lamb. I fell in love instantly.”

Pensioner | Widowed with one daughter

I was born right after World War II into an aristocratic family. After the revolution, the Bolsheviks took away our country home and we moved into a communal apartment in Moscow.

My parents took up jobs at factories. Life was difficult at first: We were branded *lishenets* [people stripped of voting rights] and our neighbors were criminals.

I remember when Josef Stalin died we all wore black armbands and my father was in tears. There was this strange ambiguity: On the one hand, we felt a love for our country, but on the other, my family had been robbed of its property.

My first school was an all-girls school. I remember walking past Andrei Tarkovsky's home on the way there, and stopping to listen to the music playing from his apartment.

Eventually, we moved to a different neighborhood and I was sent to a mixed school. There were no social differences there: The children of train drivers and academics all studied together.

In my second year, a famous all-boys boarding school in Moscow shut down and the students – mostly the sons of military staff and diplomats – were transferred to ours. They swore and behaved like hooligans, but they brought with them an air of freedom and self-expression. They wrote us love letters and fought for our affection.

We felt like women for the first time.

Love and inspiration

From the eighth to the 11th grade, I had this literature teacher, Irina Bashko, who was an incredibly fascinating woman. She came from a respected family of Kiev academics and was a very independent thinker. She even spent time in a Ukrainian prison for her dissident views. Through her, I was exposed to a range of Russian literature.

I went on to study literary editing at a humanities university. My parents wanted me to study maths, but I didn't listen.



In my life, I've only ever had two loves. I met my first husband when I was about 18. I became acquainted with his brother at an Easter parade, and he invited me to their home for dinner.

That's when I first set eyes on him. He was ten years older than I was, but it was instant attraction. He was a wonderful person, and although he came from a simple background, he collected books, was a talented painter and introduced me to wonderful music. He worked as an aerospace engineer at Bauman University.

A year later we married. At 21, we had our first and only daughter, Olga.

A second chance

I'd always dreamed of having a girl, I don't know what he dreamed of. But there were no ultrasounds at the time so it was a surprise. We loved her to the moon and back. She was a quiet girl, a wise girl, a smiley girl. Our Olechka.

My husband always felt that I shouldn't work as much, and that I should be a stay-at-

home mother. He didn't care for my creative pursuits whatsoever.

He had a crowd of drinking buddies and spent all of his free time with them. I couldn't handle the drinking anymore, so when I was 30 I decided to leave him. A few years later he died – Olga was 12 at the time.

Almost ten years later, I met Anatoly while on a walk. He was 11 years younger than I was. Sometime later, he somehow managed to figure out where I lived.

One day, I heard my name being yelled over and over and I stuck my head out the window. He said he wanted to give me this cooking pot. Inside it, was a leg of lamb. He had just returned from his village and brought me lamb. I fell in love instantly.

He knew that I was an established editor, that I even had my own show. But this was the type of person he was.

Later, he brought me this Sarafan folk dress and I couldn't understand, where was he getting these gifts from? You won't even read about that in books.

He was, to say it simply, a jeweler, a former lathe operator. I thought, how can this be? I'm surrounded by film directors and here's this jeweler. He fell in love with me wholeheartedly; it was so unusual!

It was then that I realized that he had very serious intentions, and I thought: "Why not?"

Olga is already married and soon she'll have a child. Maybe I can allow myself to date him, and we'll get together. And so we became a couple.

He loved my daughter, and was a good father figure to her. He supported my creative ambitions and would help me write my screenplays. He really wanted to have children together, but I couldn't do it.

Nobody should have more than one family, it's not right. We never married. Eventually he left without a trace after a death in his family.

I never stopped working – even when I was seven months pregnant. My relatives would watch my daughter while I was at work as a schoolteacher. The thought of quitting my job never even crossed my mind.

I've always been very committed to my work, but deep inside I still feel I'm a person from the East.

I always had this feeling I should have stayed at home and looked after my small tribe. **TMT**



Olga Shishko

Born in Moscow

52
yrs.



Museum curator | Widow with two daughters

My school was pretty typical for the 1980s. The girls there were ambitious, the boys sort of just milled about.

I was friends with kids from a different school where teachers shared books that had been banned by the censors. We read authors like Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Osip Mandelstam. We weren't united against a common enemy; we were united through knowledge.

I always wanted to emphasize my femininity. So I was very upset when they introduced horribly tasteless, brown school uniforms.

One day, my mother bought me a black velvet dress to wear under the uniform's white apron. For the first time, I felt like a woman. I was called into the principal's office and they threatened to expel me. They joked they were going to start a fund to raise money for me to buy a proper uniform. School was a place where the freedom I felt at home was snuffed out.

In films, Soviet women look like mannequins. But actually, we had almost nothing. During my first pregnancy I had only one dress which fit — a grey-checked dress from a store for large sizes. For nine months I was happy to know that soon I would have Alisa, and unhappy for hating everything about myself.

Clothing is an expression of your identity, which we were constantly being forced to suppress. The 90s meant the freedom to choose what to wear and being able to afford it. Now we seem to be returning to the past. My daughter, for example, has to wear a uniform to school.

Lessons from youth camp

I was an ugly duckling at school: big ears, cross-eyed and I wore glasses.

Most of what I knew about sex I picked up at youth camps. The children there would share stories which they had heard somewhere or seen in movies. My friend Katya was ten years older and she told me about love and passion.



“A woman needs to be quiet, wise and bake pies. Families where women are more dependent on the man, have a better chance of surviving.”

There was no access to contraception, I didn't even know what it was! The topic felt almost as taboo as dissident literature. I was 17 when I first kissed a boy.

I always wanted three sons. But that was probably a form of selfishness. I wanted a loving husband and three sons and I would be this beautiful Olya, surrounded by men.

But life turned out differently. I had two daughters, which I am thrilled with. It's as if I'm seeing myself at different ages.

Back then, we didn't have diapers or washing machines, but I was still incredibly happy to have Alisa at 22. It's good that women now have children later in life, but Russia will never follow in Europe's footsteps with mothers who give birth past 30.

Absent men

In the 80s, all the men high up there — Brezhnev, Andropov — started dropping like flies and later all of the men around me were drafted into the Chechen wars.

Men in general have largely been absent in my life. My father died when I was 12. My second husband also died when Vasilisa was 12.

I left my first husband, Alisa's father, because the relationship never felt serious. I realized he wasn't a man, but a coward. He was raised like a girl, and it isn't right for a woman to live with a girl.

My daughter says I'm a feminist, and it's true. I have little respect for most men, especially those who feel superior.

I work at the Pushkin Museum. In Soviet times, the gender balance was pretty much fifty-fifty. Then, in the 90s, there was a surge of feminist ideas, especially in the art scene. But the current director is struggling to get more men. There aren't that many in the arts.

When I went to study art history, only 3 of the 25 students were boys. That is why in humanities departments all over Russia boys are chosen over girls with higher grades.

I'm not against women in the arts sphere. But, I'm sorry to say, real creators are men. Not because women didn't have rights. Women just have a different starting point.

Women are intuitive, they are good at managing processes. There are a lot of things women can do. A woman needs to inspire a man; she needs to captivate others with her beauty; she can guide a man with her intuition; or she can work together with a man, and this often leads to wonderful projects.

But if we look at certain influential contemporary artists, like Peter Greenaway, Ilya Kabakov — there are many — women often spoil men.

My daughters complain that I take their partners' side and not theirs. I must be a contrarian: When I was growing up my mother always took my side over my partners'. But who will value and defend men if not for women?

Crazy single mothers

When I met Vasilisa's father, a real man's man, I realized that it's much better to have a man by your side who will defend you, but also beat you if you don't make him his borshch. He wanted a daughter. All men seem to really want girls.

As a woman I wanted to be the best housewife, the best cook and the best hostess. Only after the death of my second husband did I start becoming more self-sufficient.

He had been the main force behind our art projects. I was always his muse and his sidekick. When he passed away I had to take over. I didn't really want to take this weight on my shoulders, but I was good at it, and it worked.

Obviously it's better to find a partner for life. Maybe that's why Russian men are so complicated, they were raised by crazy single mothers. The man needs to earn the money, and the woman needs to put her family first. Otherwise she'll be alone in her 50s. A woman gains affection by being slightly weaker than men. But in our society, it's the women who are stronger than the men, and that is the problem of our time.

A woman needs to be quiet, wise and bake pies. Families where women are more dependent on the man, have a better chance of surviving. Real feminism doesn't exist here. Russian women are just too beautiful.

I have never pressured my daughters in any way and I'm happy that they are all pursuing their dreams within the creative industry.

Although I've worked my whole life, I wish I could have sat at home and not worked. On the inside, I feel Eastern, but our world is European. Rather than marrying a second husband who was 14 years younger, I should have been placed into an arranged marriage, so I could stay at home all day and take care of many children.

I'm in this situation now where I can say I'm "self-made," I've achieved all these things, but where from here? I want to bake pies and be there for my grandson, and for a man to support me. I don't want to be this strong woman.

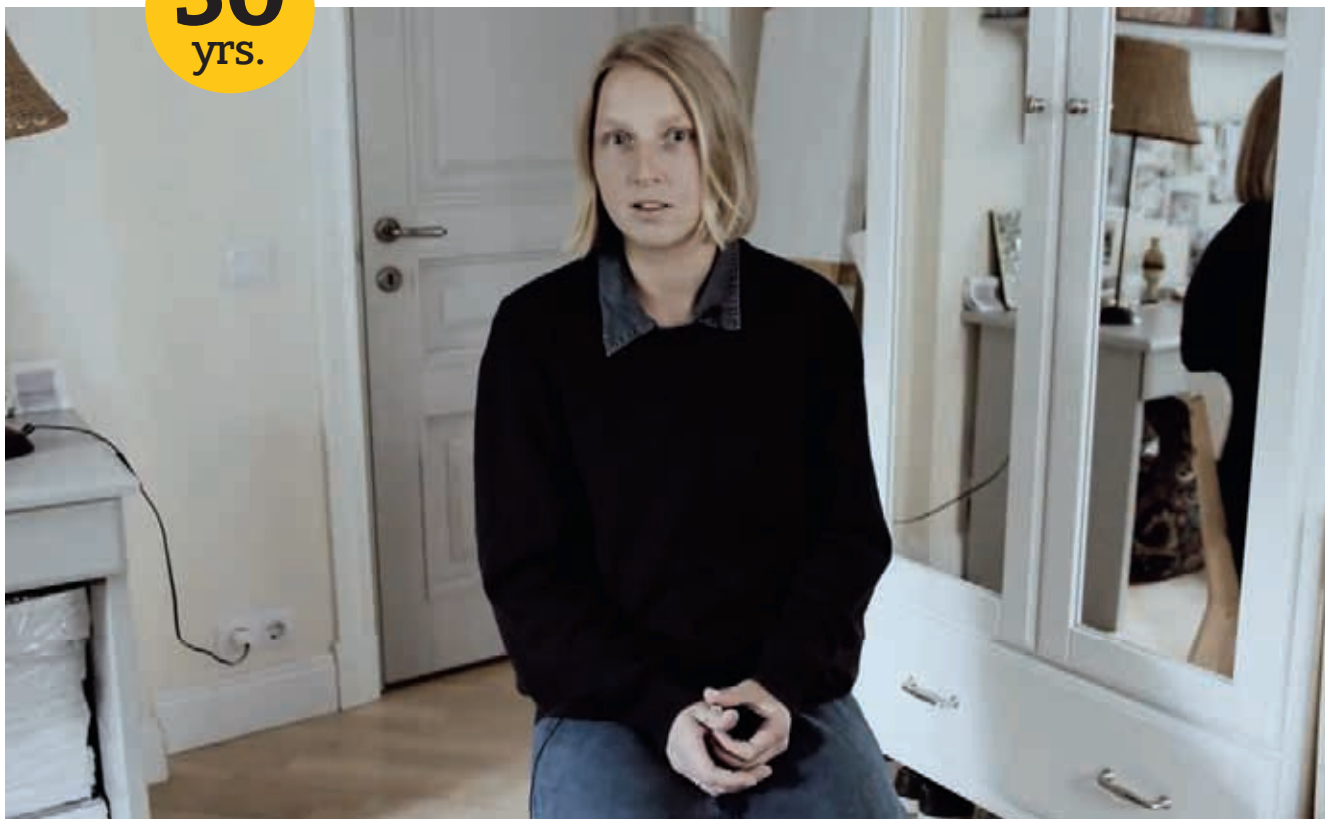
When I compare myself to my daughter Alisa, I see myself as someone who is terrified and has a lot of issues.

But life has changed me. Now, I believe that family is the most important because no matter what changes throughout a person's life, or even throughout generations, what remains is the family unit. **TMT**

Alisa Dmitriyeva

Born in Moscow

30
yrs.



Actress | In a long-term relationship, has one son

My mother left my father when I was five years old. She was in love with someone else. After they separated, I mostly lived with my father, but I stayed close with my mother too.

I think she made the right decision because, you know, you can't save a loveless marriage. We have always been open with each other, and she's explained to me why she left.

But my father was very resentful, and he would project his emotions onto me. "You're just like your mother!" was something I heard him say one too many times.

Divorce was quite common then, so I didn't feel any shame. I'm not against divorce but parents should talk to each other. Mine used me as a mediator and an outlet for their anger. Families that are separating should see a therapist because all of this can be traumatic for children.

My father promised he would never leave me. And I tolerated the women he dated — except for one. She and I were from completely different planets. I was 16, and I was jealous and resentful. I'm sure a psychoanalyst would have something to say about all this.

Rebellious youth

I went to three different schools in the 90s and everyone there dressed like hip-hop stars. I wore these really baggy pants. If you dress differently nowadays people will stare at you on the street.

The first school I went to was in a well-off neighborhood and most of the students there came from wealthy families. There were a few kids whose fathers were in organized crime. At the time, I may have been jealous of the expensive brands the other kids were wearing, but looking back now, it's terrifying.

When I was 13, I became friends with a girl from a rich family. We hung out with skateboarders in the Chertanovo neighborhood, and got up to all kinds of shenanigans, fighting skinheads at rap concerts, shoplifting bread and vodka. The first time I smoked weed I was 14.



I didn't have a very good reputation at school, but I didn't care. My parents weren't talking, so when I'd go out somewhere, I would tell my dad I was staying with my mom, and vice versa.

I was definitely pretty stupid in my teens. At 16, I started going out to nightclubs with other girls. We'd put on heels, and flag random cars down for rides. I remember one night a driver mugged us and left us on the outskirts of the city in some field. Some other guy got into the car, and they tried to have their way with us but we screamed and kicked back. So they just took everything we had and left us. We weren't dressed properly and it was pretty freezing outside.

In the sixth grade we did the whole banana condom ritual at school, but by that point I already knew most of it from hanging out on the streets in Moscow.

At 18, I started to calm down. I started studying acting, which was very demanding. And at 22 I met Pasha on the set of a television show.

He and I immediately hit it off. We've been together ever since. Although we have a child,

we're not married. I don't think it's a big deal. Occasionally, we get comments. Our older family members think we're married anyway. But we have our pledge to each other, and that's what matters.

It's a ...

As a woman in your 20s, you are certainly expected to have children. I had my son at 28 and people had already been asking me, "So, do you have any kids yet, or what?"

The same day I found out I was pregnant at the doctor's clinic, I had to do an acting exercise where we had to thank one another. I was overwhelmed with emotion, but didn't want to tell everyone what I'd just learned. I couldn't hold back and started crying.

My entire pregnancy was spent working. But it was great to be busy because it distracted me from the stress. And of course the people I was with were very supportive.

I actually wanted to have a girl. I felt we had this female lineage in my family that had to continue. But I had my suspicions that I would have a boy. I mean, I don't really believe in any of this but it's as if something different was inside of me. My father-in-law was certain he would have a grandson. And I'd always tell him: "You know, it's the modern world, it shouldn't matter whether it's a boy or a girl."

And here he comes. [Editor's note: Alisa's son runs into the room.]



“In the end, it's impossible to tell whether women are scared to share their stories, or whether cases of harassment are just less common here.

There's also this unspoken pressure to have boys. When I was pregnant, the nurses at the clinic kept praising me, as if I'd fulfilled my motherly duty to the Fatherland.

I noticed recently while shopping for toys that all the toy cash registers are pink. This is a serious question! What is that supposed to mean? That cashiers in Russia are always inevitably women?

Now the question I keep getting is: "When's the next one coming?" I know a wonderful couple in their 30s, and everyone is constantly gossiping about why they don't have children.

Acting and #MeToo

I first noticed the difference between how men and women are treated when I went to acting school.

Every year the school would get three times as many applications from boys. So even if a guy is just applying to dodge the draft [Editor's note: Russian men are required to complete a year of military service, but can be exempted if they are enrolled in university], it is still likely he'll be chosen over a talented female actress. In spite of this, I still see many more women building successful careers than men.

New doors are opening for women in Russian theater and film, and there are more and more female cinematographers and directors.

As an actress, I've never been harassed. If the #MeToo stories of men abusing power to take advantage of women are true, then that's horrible. It's archaic behavior.

But we don't really have the infrastructure to allow men to work through their problems and it's made worse because of how our Soviet style of disciplining encourages sexist traits in boys from an early age.

Every allegation should be looked at individually, and if there's evidence of harassment, then a man should be punished accordingly.

Obviously, in some cases, women might exaggerate their story. But I'd still be inclined to side with them. And it's important that women are standing up and speaking out. This felt a long time in the making.

Our judicial system is corrupt. Here, the authorities side with men.

So it's likely that women will stay silent out of fear. If the aggressor isn't put in prison, the woman then has to fear for her life, because he could try to seek revenge.

In the end, it's impossible to tell whether women are scared to share their stories or whether cases of harassment are just less common here. **TMT**



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NB Art Gallery: A Moscow Institution

By **Guy Archer**

The old apartment near Stary Arbat is homey, with white walls, high ceilings, a thin carpet to muffle noise, a sofa and some chairs.

Paintings cover nearly all of the walls of the 100-square meter place, with hundreds more stacked against walls everywhere and others packed on special shelves. A large unframed painting of Vladimir Lenin in dramatic oratory pose drapes what may be a chair: It's hard to tell because it's on top of a huge stack of other unframed canvases.

The walls of what might as well be called the living room are covered with gorgeous Russian cityscapes and an occasional, incongruent contemporary painting. On the floor and against the wall is a framed poster featuring, among others, Lenin again and Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Soviet security apparatus.

Welcome to NB Gallery. Natalia Bykova founded it in 1992, and it has been a staple for the Russian and international cultural and art-collecting communities ever since. The gallery's focus has generally been more on traditional 20th-century Russian and Soviet art, as opposed to the conceptual or unofficial art of the corresponding period, although Bykova and her team have done a fine job of blurring a lot of these boundaries and exploding ideological pigeonholes.

Bykova's father instilled a passion for art in her, but she specialized in foreign languages as a student. "During those Soviet times, we'd play a game," she says. "If you had a million



NB ART GALLERY

dollars, what would you do?" For her, it was clear: She'd open an art gallery.

"Art was always my main interest," she says. "Though I never had a professional background, I took courses in New York and Moscow. It was my dream to have a gallery."

MARS was the first private gallery in post-perestroika Moscow, founded in 1988. For over a year, Bykova would call regularly

Natalia Bykova founded the NB gallery in 1992 in a former communal apartment in Moscow. "My dream was to make a homely gallery that wasn't intimidating to anybody."

to ask if it had any positions available, and when the answer was occasionally affirmative, the position open was for a cleaner. Nevertheless, Bykova finally landed a job at MARS, and by 1992 she was ready to start her own gallery.

The location she chose was in a former communal apartment in a stylish building built in 1913. "My dream was to make a very homely gallery that wasn't intimidating to anybody." Going to a gallery and shopping for art, she says, can make people nervous and self-conscious, afraid of coming across as unknowledgeable or uncool. She wanted to prevent this by providing a warmer, more relaxed setting. And for more than 25 years, NB Gallery has provided that very atmosphere.

It also found its areas of specialization. Bykova and her team have scoured collections throughout Russia to pull together exhibitions and retrospectives of painters who had been perhaps famous for one or two officially-sanctioned works, but whose larger, more interesting pieces had been lost or forgotten. NB Gallery has become a hub for Russian art from the last century, often eschewing labels such as "socialist realism" — although the gallery has been a popular center for it — "modern," "traditional" and even "Soviet."

"I would not even call it Soviet art," says curator Anna Eramjan, "because that is so ideological."

The gallery has been particularly savvy in cultivating its Russian and international clientele and visitors. Bykova, Eramjan, and



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NB ART GALLERY

“NB Gallery has helped rescue artists from the almost certain obscurity that followed the breakup of the Soviet Union.

On a recent visit, the contemporary paintings that seemed a little out of place were by the renowned modern artist Viktor Umnov. They seem discordant amidst all of the more traditional paintings, and also in NB Gallery generally. But as it turns out, the other paintings in the room, the gorgeous cityscapes, were also by Umnov, done in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This exhibition focused on his early career, which has been almost entirely overlooked until now. And after some thought, the newer paintings were only superficially out of place. The gallery hung the recent works to provide a more robust appreciation of his work as a whole.

Eramjan brought tea and chatted about her 24 years at the gallery. She pulled the cityscapes up close. “In a museum,” Eramjan says, “you feel a distance between you and a painting.” Not here. Bykova is clear that she has always wanted NB Gallery to be a place “where you can relax and chat.” And with the thousands of pieces of art that her gallery has collected and exhibited over the decades, her guiding philosophy remains straightforward and exacting: “If it’s good and outstanding, that’s what we stand on.” TMT

the NB Gallery team organize frequent events – openings, receptions, lectures, programs for children – and they greet guests to the gallery as old friends. “We managed to create a circle of great people,” Bykova says. “Natalia and NB Gallery have had a profound impact on so many lives,” says Heidi McCormack, an ardent Russian-art collector who lived in Moscow for many years. “She has introduced many to the amazing and rich world of Russian art and wraps the journey with history and context. My life and my walls would be barren without Natalia.”

The research, collections and exhibitions of NB Gallery have helped audiences to better understand and value art that has been given stifling and rigid labels. Eramjan points to the socialist realist paintings of the 1930s as an example, and discusses how older technical traditions survived in these works. By extensively traveling, searching, discovering and relocating paintings and drawings, NB Gallery has helped rescue artists from the almost certain obscurity that followed the breakup of the Soviet Union. Interestingly, it has also demonstrated the traditional roots that have inspired some of Russia’s most famous contemporary artists.

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The Women's Century: Five Writers to Watch

By Michele Berdy | @micheleberdy

Today, Russia has no dearth of successful, celebrated women writers, but it wasn't always so. During the Soviet period women writers were perceived by the Communist Party and publishers as either subversive or beside the point. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, they negotiated a rather rocky coming-of-age. But now they are what publisher, translator and writer Natasha Perova calls in her book "Slav Sisters." "A force in the world of letters," writers of "confident craftsmanship, wide thematic range and high stylistic standards."

In fact, women writers dominate the best-seller lists: Detective fiction writer Daria Dontsova has published more copies of more books than any other living Russian writer, followed by fellow crime writers Alexandra Malinina, Tatiana Ustinova, and Polina Dashkova.

The established writers Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Tatiana Tolstaya, Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich and Olga Slavnikova win awards, publish in large editions, speak on radio and television, and pack halls at book fairs and lectures.

And then there is another group of women writers from the former Soviet republics who emigrated and write either in Russian or the language of their new countries: Dina Rubina, Tasha Karluka, Alisa Bialsky, Anna Likhtiman in Israel; Ellen Litman, Anya Ulinich, Olga Grushin, Lara Lapnyar, and Sana Krasikov in the U.S. Some are identifiably Russian in language, culture and subject; others have only a trace of a different sensibility — a rejection of political absolutes, a sensitive appreciation of anyone who is "other."

Here are five young Russian women writers who are making their mark on contemporary fiction, film, and poetry.



MARIA STEPANOVA

Maria Stepanova

Maria Stepanova (1972) is one of Russia's most influential cultural figures, who seems to be constantly mastering new media and genres. She was the chief editor of OpenSpace.ru and now heads Colta.ru, the first online newspaper funded solely by crowdsourcing. She is an acclaimed essayist, with two volumes of published works. And she is one of Russia's finest contemporary poets, author of more than a dozen volumes of verse. Her poetic language pulls in and spits out all the voices and myths of Russia, past and present, mixing Biblical verse, pop song lyrics, 19th century ballads, and all the glory and detritus of Russian letters. In 2017 she moved to prose with the book "Post-Memory" (literally "Memory of Memory"), a kind of fictional non-fiction, the story of three generations of her family told through the preserved and remembered artifacts of their lives — the tale of people whose greatest achievement was simply to survive the perilous 20th century.



GUZEL YAKHINA

Guzel Yakhina

Guzel Yakhina (1977) grew up in Kazan. Her first language is Tatar, and she only began to learn Russian when she went to school. Like many of her literary peers, she is a graduate of a film institute in screenwriting, but upon graduation she first worked in public relations and advertising while writing short stories. In 2015, after being rejected by many publishing houses, she published her first novel "Zuleika Opens Her Eyes." This is a fictionalized account of her grandmother, who was sent to Siberia as part of dekulakization in the 1930s. The Tatar context — words, folklore, traditions — opened up an unknown page in literature and history. The book won the Yasnaya Polyana and Big Book awards, has been translated into over 30 languages and is being made into a movie. Her second novel, "My Children," also deals with early Soviet history, personal freedom and the fate of the "little man" as she follows a teacher of German origin living near the Volga in the 1920 and 1930s.



YEVGENIA NEKRASOVA

Yevgenia Nekrasova

Yevgenia Nekrasova (1985) is a writer and screenwriter who was born near Astrakhan and grew up outside Moscow. She graduated from the scriptwriting department of the Moscow School of New Cinema, and began publishing her screenplays and short stories in professional and popular journals. Until recently, she was best known for her prose cycle "Unhappy Moscow," which was awarded the Lycee Prize. That was before her newest novel, "Kalechchina-Malechchina," produced a sensation among readers and critics. The novel is about a little girl who lives in an ordinary high-rise in an ordinary small town with preoccupied parents and bullying classmates. But then extraordinary things happen: a snake comes out of the pipes, human figures emerge from blotches on the ceiling, and a house sprite that lives behind the kitchen tiles takes the little girl on a journey. Nekrasova's Moscow is magical, fantastical, funny and dangerous.



ANNA KOZLOVA

Anna Kozlova

Aнна Kozlova (1981) breaks with her colleagues in education — she got a degree in journalism — but not in one aspect of her work. She has established herself as one of the country's most successful screenwriters, author of the hit television series "Short Course for a Happy Life" and this summer's "Ring Road." Her writing is straightforward, unflinching and unsentimental. Her most recent television series, "Ring Road," so shattered the image of the "traditional" Russian family that it was shown out of primetime, after 11 p.m. But she is also one of the country's most-read novelists. Her 2008 novel "People with Clean Consciences" was shortlisted for the National Bestseller. Her latest, sixth novel, "F20" — the medical services code for schizophrenia — won that prize in 2017. It is the mesmerizing story of an adolescent boy with schizophrenia, told from his particular, sometimes peculiar, point of view.



SANA KRASIKOV

Sana Krasikov

Sana Krasikov (1980) was born in Ukraine and spent the first eight years of her life in Georgia before emigrating to the U.S. After graduating from Cornell University and the Iowa Writer's Workshop, she was promptly published by The New Yorker. She writes exclusively in English and does not call herself a Russian, or hyphenated, author. But if her language is English, some of her characters and their surroundings are richly Georgian, émigré, Russian or Soviet. Her first collection of short stories, "One More Year," describes the lives of Georgian and Russian émigrés abroad or back in their changed homelands. Her second novel, "The Patriots," follows three generations of an American family whose members emigrate to the Soviet Union, back to the U.S. and then back to the new Russia. Her latest short story in The New Yorker, "Ways & Means," describes a #MeToo relationship that has nothing to do with Russia, except, perhaps, that it is written with the sensibility of someone who knows the dangers of denunciations, certainty, slogans and labels.





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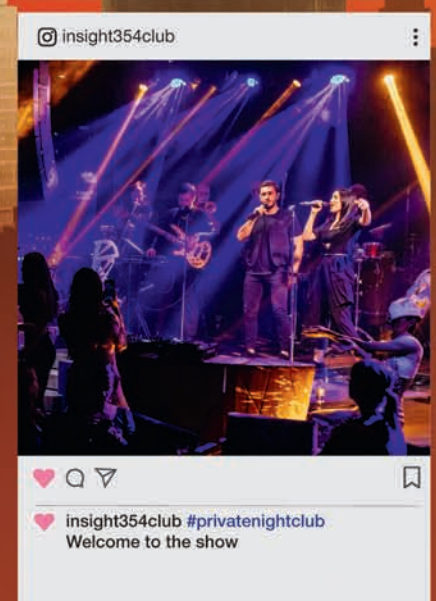
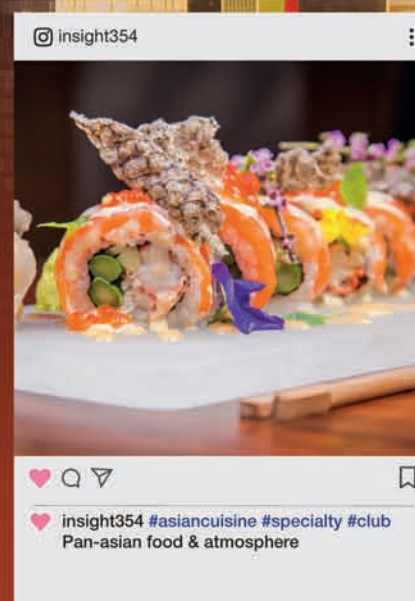
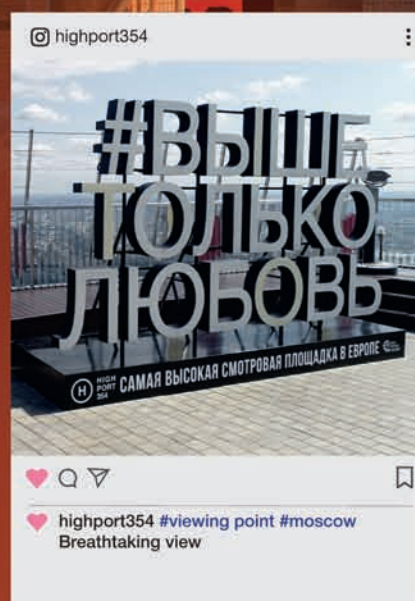
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