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Original scientific paper

“When a Boy Becomes a Man.” Masculinity in Czechoslovak/ Czech Cinema on the Compulsory Military Service¹

The study focuses on the representation of masculinity in Czechoslovak/Czech cinemas focused on compulsory military service. The analysis of relevant film production covers the issue from a long-term perspective, from the 1950s until the full professionalization of the Czech army in 2005. The research concentrates on identifying the preferred image of masculinity in the analysed works and possible subversive models for this preferred image. At the same time, the long time frame of the analysis makes it possible to explore possible continuities and discontinuities of images of masculinity between the communist regime (Czechoslovak People’s Army) and the democratic era after 1989 (Army of the Czech Republic). Here, the analytical outputs prove the persisting traditional gender hierarchy and the issues of militarization as a way how to support it.

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KEYWORDS:

army, cinema, compulsory military service, gender, masculinity, Czechoslovakia, Czechia

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Compulsory military service as a subject of historical research (introduction)

Compulsory military service represents one of the essential mechanisms of modern nation-states' functioning, through which the ruling power can discipline, indoctrinate, socialize, and, in the event of a threat, also mobilize its citizens to defend the territory and the existing social order. In the Czech context, the duty to undergo compulsory military service was introduced in the second half of the 19th century and its concept persisted with only partial changes until the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918. The military law from 1949 set the length of this service for men aged 17 to 60 at 24 months.² After the fall of the communist regime, compulsory military service was shortened several times until it was definitively abolished in 2005 when the Army of the Czech Republic became entirely professional. During the communist era as well as after the fall of the authoritarian regime, the public's attitude towards compulsory military service was pretty ambivalent – on the one hand, it was perceived as a form of individual deprivation; on the other hand, its completion was considered an important proof of masculinity and maturity.

Precisely, the issue of masculinity is the central theme of this study. From a long-term perspective, it follows thematically relevant film and television productions of Czechoslovak/Czech provenance to identify the images of masculinity that these visual works reproduce. The analysis of such materials contributes to the understanding of the preferred values shared in society because, in the contemporary context, cinema (later along with television) represented one of the most important forms of visual mass media; thus, being analogously crucial to the information disseminated as new media today.³ Following this proposition, the study is based on analysing film works intended for the general public – distributed nationally and presenting compulsory military service from two perspectives: a) representation of service in the army, and b) destinies of individuals during service.

An important element of these works is the storylines on various forms of (exclusively heterosexual) partnership, which adds to their attractiveness and increases their potential to appeal to a broad audience, both men and women. One of the crucial tasks of this thematically specific production was also the attempt to dispel the fears of young people about the difficulties that a man's service in the army can bring to their relationship. It was because a commencement of compulsory military service, with the prospect of only occasional meetings during two years (soldiers were often assigned to garrisons very far from their place of residence) caused a strong

² Some exceptions to this rule were applied. For example, university students who completed part of their training during their studies had a shorter service of 12 months; the service could be shortened by more than half if the man undertook to work for at least a year and a half in priority sectors – coal or uranium mines, smelters, military constructions, etc. After 1989, the possibility of substitute civil service was enacted.

³ Libora Oates-Indruchová, "Gender v médiích: nástin širše problematiky," in *Společnost žen a mužů z aspektu gender*, ed. Eva Věšínová-Kalivodová and Hana Maříková (Praha: Open Society Fund, 1999), 131.

feeling of uncertainty among young couples as to whether their love endures such separation. Thus, from a broader perspective, these films and television works were supposed to contribute to a positive image of the army in society.

Generally, in the Czech context, the issue of compulsory military service's fulfillment during the authoritarian regime has not yet received much attention in the social sciences, and it has only come into the focus of the historiography of contemporary history in recent years. In the former Eastern Bloc and Yugoslavia, the study of this matter is also gradually developing, especially in recent years. Regionally and thematically relevant are, for example, works from the area of the former Yugoslavia,⁴ the German Democratic Republic⁵ or Poland.⁶ In these studies, however, the emphasis is often placed on the functioning of the army, its role in society, and its connection with the ruling ideology; only a few authors also focus on the issue of gender or, more specifically, masculinity. This perspective includes, for example, a study on established socialist heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity in the military environment by Abram⁷ – reflecting dominant socialist masculinity and its reproduction through service in the army. A more comprehensive issue of military service is that by Petrović;⁸ albeit this author touches on gender issues mainly about the involvement and role of women in the army.

Then, Bickford's study mapping the interaction of militarization policies and gender in the former East Germany is thematically related and inspiring.⁹ The author focuses on the mutual effect of the decreasing importance of the traditional male role in the state socialism period on the one hand¹⁰ and, on the other hand, militarization and conscription as a means of "instilling notions of hierarchy, discipline, and sexism as key components

⁴ Mirjana P. Mirchevska, "Anthropology of Socialism: Auto-reflexive Memories of the Yugoslav People's Army," *EtnoAntropoZem* 20, no. 20 (2020): 131-63; Sandi Abram, "'We are guys': The Genealogy of the Reproduction of Dominant Socialistic Masculinity through the Dispositive of the Army on the Territory of Slovenia," *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 45, no. 267 (2017): 62-80; Tanja Petrović, *Utopia of the Uniform. Affective Afterlives of the Yugoslav People's Army* (Duke University Press, 2024).

⁵ Andrew Bickford, "Male Identity, the Military, and the Family in the Former German Democratic Republic," *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, no. 1 (2001): 65-76; Tom Smith, *Comrades in Arms. Military Masculinities in East German Culture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020).

⁶ Rafał Radkowski, "*Fala*" a "*postfala*": *Ceremoniał subkultury żołnierzy wobec zmian w Wojsku Polskim na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo JM, 2019).

⁷ Abram, "'We are guys': The Genealogy of the Reproduction of Dominant Socialistic Masculinity through the Dispositive of the Army on the Territory of Slovenia." The author presents the mechanisms of socialist heteronormativity enforcement in the military environment and, at the same time, deals with the manifestation of activities subversive to this image (he works with examples of tattooing and homoeroticism as forms of non-hegemonic masculinity).

⁸ Petrović, *Utopia of the Uniform*.

⁹ Bickford, Andrew. "Male Identity, the Military, and the Family in the Former German Democratic Republic."

¹⁰ Among the main changes that contributed to this process was the promotion of women's employment (because of the command economy's needs), thus reducing women's economic dependence on men and supporting this employment through related social arrangements, institutionalized childcare, etc. However, this statement does not mean that women were fully equal; still, their chances to leave the narrow framework of the family and traditional gender ties and traditional gender arrangements increased.

of male identity," while an important variable there is an emphasis on heteronormative family norms.¹¹ In a similar thematic framework, the issue of masculinity in the military service environment is reflected in the presented study; here through the lens of mainstream film and television production.

The text captures the forms of masculinity presented to the audience, therefore preferred by authors and filmmakers, but above all by the "awarding authorities," be they censors before 1989 or producers or businessmen after that year. Analysis of cinemas or TV series thus can tell a lot about the nature of the system under whose patronage specific film works were created.¹² Concerning this, the notion is important that film presents new (or confirms existing) ideas, patterns of behaviour, and interpretation of events, thus influencing the development and direction of the given society.¹³ This study focuses on desirable and preferable images of masculinity and gender order in general. The analysis concentrates on the following questions: What is the preferred image of masculinity in the analysed movies? Can subversive images or strategies for preferred masculinity be identified in this pop culture material? How does the preferred image of masculinity/masculinities change over the long term, specifically with the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic regime?

Masculinities in cinema (the analytical framework)

The article is not primarily a piece of work from the film studies area; it historicizes the issue and uses gender as the main analytical category. Still, it also contributes to the existing knowledge of masculinities in the former socialist countries' film production. Thus, it extends international debates on masculinities in cinema where the production of Eastern Europe is still highly overlooked, omitted, or even excluded.¹⁴

Within the most relevant works that fill the current research gap, we can mention a recent study of father figures portrayed by the famous Czech actor Boleslav Polívka. However, it analyses only the mid-2000s cinematography and primarily deals with the theme of borders, linking contemporary Czech filmmaking with the need for "deprovincialization," and focusing on connections of the Czech literary tradition with film, primarily using the example of the "antihero" figure.¹⁵ From an older period, there is a work on the image of masculinity in Soviet cinematography in the 1950s

¹¹ Bickford, "Male Identity, the Military, and the Family in the Former German Democratic Republic," 65, 69.

¹² Petr Koura, "Film jako historický pramen," in *Základní problémy studia moderních a soudobých dějin*, ed. Jana Čechurová and Jan Randák (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2014), 404. Similarly, to the issue of popular culture as sources of historical knowledge, see, for example, Martin Štoll, *Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia* (Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2018); Veronika Pehe, *Velvet Retro: Postsocialist Nostalgia and the Politics of Heroism in Czech Popular Culture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020).

¹³ Irena Řehořová, *Kulturní paměť a film: Jak se měnil obraz poválečného odsunu v české filmové tvorbě* (Praha: SLON, 2018).

¹⁴ See, for example, Ewa Mazierska, *Masculinities in Polish, Czech and Slovak Cinema: Black Peters and Men of Marble* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 2.

¹⁵ Tanya Silverman, "Revelatory Inebriation and Westward Projections: Bolek Polívka's Father Figures in Mid-2000s Czech Cinema," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 15, no. 3 (2024): 374–90.

and 1960s production.¹⁶ Despite its comprehensive character and rich source base, it needs a more critical analytical approach to the issue of masculinities. More fundamental and helpful in discussing the set of movies here, it represents the study of masculinity and violence in Romanian socialist film. The author analyses the question of hegemonic and non-hegemonic types of masculinity using the example of three selected films “in which the male characters exist outside the societal norms.” The author concludes with the thesis that emotional detachment (emotional = feminine) serves to maintain the gender hierarchy, which disrupts the potential of transmitting images of non-hegemonic masculinity.¹⁷

Thematically and analytically, the most relevant piece of work is the comprehensive study by Ewa Mazierska on masculinities in Polish, Czech, and Slovak cinemas, which is reflected in a long-term perspective. Mazierska captures the cinema production of two (three after the split of Czechoslovakia) countries, i.e., an extensive corpus of works, which she had to narrow for the research feasibility. In this selection, she relied on a combination of several factors and focused on specific “important examples” (she herself puts this expression in quotation marks, thus pointing to a certain arbitrariness of the choice). Finally, the set of movies for Mazierska’s analysis includes “those regarded as high-brow and artistic [and] those which are low-brow and popular.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, from my point of view, the analysis focuses mainly on films of a particular artistic level, many of which are part of the imaginary film canon (and this fact can influence the results, as it will be explained later).

Contrary to this selective approach, the following analysis includes all Czechoslovak/Czech films related to compulsory military service themes, including cinemas that are today rejected for their strong pro-communist ethos (typically films from the 1950s), outdated or unattractive to viewers. The focus of the analysis is also somewhat different. Mazierska – due to her interest in film studies – much more concentrates on storylines, plots, main characters, etc., and less on gender analysis. Nevertheless, as a part of the following analytical work, it proves to be useful to apply the categories used by this Polish author, which are still based on Western male studies: “the soldier, the father, the heterosexual lover.” The author also offers the fourth category, “the man who does not conform to the heterosexual norm,”¹⁹ which is not applicable because only heterosexual men and heterosexual relationships are displayed in all the films from the compulsory military service environment analysed hereafter. However, this is not an uncritical and unconditional acceptance of these categories, but rather an interpretive framework within which part of the analysis will take place.²⁰ This analytical phase is then

¹⁶ Marko Dumančić, *Men Out of Focus: The Soviet Masculinity Crisis in the Long Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

¹⁷ Mădălina Pojoga, “Misfits and Troubled Men. Masculinity and Violence in Romanian Socialist Cinema,” *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 8, no. 1 (2022): 188–202.

¹⁸ Mazierska, *Masculinities in Polish, Czech and Slovak Cinema*, 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ This analytical approach should, to a great extent, avoid contributing to the further invisibility of the former Eastern Bloc’s experience in favour of Western dominance.

extended by an outline of the typology of masculinities, as they are presented in individual Czechoslovak/Czech cinemas on basic military service.

From an analytical point of view, the study is primarily built on the approach of gender as a tool of historical analysis since it is one of the basic principles of the organization of social relations. It follows Joan W. Scott's complex theoretical approach. In her canonical text from 1986, Scott defined two interrelated analytical frames: 1) gender as a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes (here, she further distinguishes four interconnected elements: symbols offered by culture, normative concepts, political concepts, and subjective identity); 2) gender as a primary way of marking power relations.²¹

Given the specific theme of the military, male-dominant environment depicted in the analysed pop culture material, the essential analytical concept is also hegemonic masculinity. This male space (in the Czech Republic, women could serve in the army from the end of the 1990s) both fulfills the essential characteristics of a total institution²² and, on the other hand, creates the conditions for the formation and reproduction of so-called hegemonic masculinity – which is, in contemporary (Western) society – typically characterized by a white man, a member of the middle class, who possesses qualities such as strength, competitiveness, assertiveness (even aggressiveness), energy, rationality.²³

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was comprehensively presented by Raewyn W. Connell in the 1980s, mainly as the pattern of practice "that allowed men's dominance over women to continue." At the same time, however, hegemonic masculinity, distinguished from other – especially subordinated masculinities – is not a norm; "only a minority of men might enact it." Nevertheless, it is normative; it requires "all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and ideologically legitimized the global subordination of women to men."²⁴ Among men, there is a constant fear of revealing that they do not meet

²¹ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75. Despite the criticism and later revision, this is still one of the most influential theoretical concepts of gender history.

²² That means places where an individual lives and performs the required activity, together with a number of others, for a specific time cut off from the wider society, in a closed and formally controlled environment. Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. xiii. Concerning the analysed topic, at this time, the individual pushes aside two institutions that, before joining the total institution, here before joining the army, substantially structured his everyday reality – family and work. Kateřina Nedbálková, "Má vězení střední rod? aneb Maskulinita a femininita ve vězeňských subkulturách," *Sociologický časopis* 39, no. 4 (2003): 470.

²³ These characteristics are repeated with only slight variations in a number of texts on hegemonic masculinity. Here defined according to Rachel M. Smith, et al., "Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity: The Roles of Antifemininity, Subordination to Women, and Sexual Dominance in Men's Perpetration of Sexual Aggression," *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 16, no. 2 (2015): 161.

²⁴ Raewyn W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 832. Based on the criticism, the authors propose reformulating the concept in four main areas: the nature of gender hierarchy, the geography of masculine configurations, the process of social embodiment, and the dynamics of masculinities (ibid, 847). However, this important theoretical debate goes beyond the paper's thematic scope and does not deny the concept's utility for analytical purposes.

the criteria of dominant masculinity. They must therefore prove that they are neither effeminate nor homosexual – traditional masculinity is characterized by heteronormativity, compulsory heterosexuality. In the concept of dominant heteronormative masculinity, women become a “means” for men to prove and confirm their masculinity towards other men. Thus, women become a kind of currency – like power, status, cars, or actual currency – through which men want to show other men their sufficient masculinity.²⁵ To sum it up, the central thematic axis for the following analysis and interpretation of films focuses on identifying the basic features of hegemonic or dominant masculinity (dominant in the sense that it is favoured and actively supported²⁶) and possible subversive strategies to this preferable image.

Masculinities in Czechoslovak/Czech films depicting compulsory military service (analysis)

The complex set of cinemas/TV series on the compulsory military service issue represents 28 pieces of work created during the four decades of the authoritarian regime (1948 to 1989) and also later, during the post-1989 transition to democracy, until the compulsory basic military service was abolished in the Czech Republic and the Czech army became professional (2005). Table 1 depicts the distribution of cinemas throughout the period under study (the list of film titles, their year of production, and director are included within the bibliography).

Czechoslovak/Czech film production focused on the compulsory military service				
	DRAMA	COMEDY	FILM MUSICAL	TOTAL IN THE DECADE
1950s	3	1	0	4
1960s	2	3	1	6
1970s	1	2	0	3
1980s	6	2	0	8
1990s	2	3	0	5
2000s	0	1	1	2
TOTAL BY GENRE	14	12	2	

Table 1: Frequency of the compulsory military service's film production made from the 1950s to 2000s²⁷

²⁵ Michael S. Kimmel, “Mali by / môžu / budú muži podporovať feminizmus?,” *Feministický kultúrny časopis ASPEKT*, no. 2 (1999): 59. From the 1970s and especially the 1980s, Men's Studies began to develop, initially mainly in the United States of America. More on the issue, for example, James Doyle and Sam Femiano, “The Early History of the American Men's Studies Association and the Evolution of Men's Studies,” *The Journal of Men's Studies* 21, no. 1 (2013): 21–43. It was precisely in connection with the development of Men's Studies that the concept of hegemonic masculinity was criticized for its ambiguity and simplified view of masculinity; see, for example, Jeff Hearn, “A multi-faceted power analysis of men's violence to know women: from hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men,” *The Sociological Review* 60, no. 4 (2012): 589–90. Despite these objections, the concept of hegemonic masculinity remains a useful analytical tool, especially when studying such an intensely masculine environment as that of military service.

²⁶ Michael S. Kimmel, *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinity* (California: SAGE Publications, 2005), 4.

²⁷ The table prepared by the author with data accessible from the Czech and Slovak Film

An overview of the film production shows a fairly even distribution in frequency and genre. A slight increase in the production of comedies can be observed in the atmosphere of the easing of the regime in the 1960s and again in the 1990s in connection with the newly acquired freedom. It is worth noting that the last films that work on the theme are musical and comedic. It was as if the issue of military service was becoming a topic reserved only for the professional army and, therefore, no longer attractive to the public. Today, the issue of the militarization of society, or the resumption of military service, appears in the public space in other contexts, perhaps even with a certain urgency because of contemporary war conflicts. This perspective, however, is outside the scope of this study.

From the frequency point of view, only the 1970s show a certain decline in the film making, most likely as a consequence of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968 and subsequent "normalization," i.e., a return to the earlier model of the functioning of society under the Communist Party's dictate, a return from economic reforms to a command economy, restrictions on civil rights (freedom of speech, movement, etc.). The plot of the first film of the decade, *High Blue Wall* (*Vysoká modrá zeď*, 1973), was set back in 1951, so it avoided the current social and domestic political situation. And the aircraft fans – despite the strong ideological load – admit it to be attractive in depicting combat air technology. From the mainstream broadcasting point of view, however, today, it is a *de facto-forgotten* film.

108 Contrary to this, the second film of the 1970s, the star-studded cast comedy *My Brother Has a Super Brother* (*Můj brácha má prima bráchu*, 1975) is still popular, repeated by national TV stations at least once a year, usually several times a year. The film has a well-constructed plot, which revolves around the unexpected pregnancy of a girl whose lover is about to start his two-year compulsory military service. The third film of the decade, *Two Men Report Arrival* (*Dva muži hlásí příchod*, 1975) is also occasionally shown on screens, although not with as much frequency as the previous one (more on its plot in the following analysis).

A certain thematic wariness also appeared in the mid-1980s, which represented the richest period of producing cinemas on the issue of compulsory military service; most of them were made only in the second half of the decade, after 1987. These works attempted to offer a more realistic image of the military service, pointing out some problems, especially bullying. Generally, however, nothing significant happened in the image of the army and its role in society until the end of 1989. The eleven-part series *Boys and Men* from 1988 (*Chlapci a chlapi*) is the last work of this era. It was launched to present an authentic picture of basic military service, as stressed by contemporary authors.²⁸ From today's point of view, there is an apparent attempt to improve the image of the Czechoslovak People's Army in the eyes of the public, to emphasize, above all, the positive effect of service in the army on young men's personality characteristics and maturation.

Database (CSFD, accessed February 17, 2024, <https://www.csfd.cz>). The drama category includes films with romantic plots, crimes, and social dramas.

²⁸ "Chlapci a chlapi," *Týdeník Československé televize*, no. 40 (1988): 8–9, accessed February 2, 2024, http://www.digitalniknihovna.cz/cuni_fsv.

Such a picture was highly important because of the negative attitude of the majority of society towards the army after 1968. As historian Jiří Hlaváček writes in the comprehensive monograph on compulsory military service, this attitude related not only to the permanent deployment of Soviet troops on the Czechoslovak territory, the excessive ideologization of the military environment, and the growing defense spending. It also (and perhaps above all) arose from the direct personal experience of hundreds of thousands of men who returned in the 1970s and 1980s from two-year basic military service and whose narratives full of disillusionment were usually in stark contrast to the official image of the Czechoslovak People's Army.²⁹ What images of men and masculinity appear in these works? The first step to their identification is the following comparison with Ewa Mazierska's conclusions.

From soldier to lover

The first category this author focuses on is the soldier, "man and war," in a broader sense. While Mazierska deals with the theme of war films, the movies reflecting compulsory military service are set in the post-war period, so there is no plot of fighting the enemy; the films display only preparation for a possible fight or defense against the aggressor from the West. Thus, analytic conclusions can be different. For example, Mazierska identifies "the lack of indigenous heroes and the scepticism about them," and this conclusion is supported by an analysis of famous Czechoslovak parodies of the 1960s.³⁰ On the other hand, cinemas on compulsory military service, which throughout the observed period inevitably contains (more or less) an element of pro-communist propaganda, stressing the importance of the army within the framework of the Cold War world, this scepticism must not contain. As a result, the main characters are always, or predominantly, positive heroes, soldiers who fit the image of hegemonic masculinity as outlined above.

The second category, according to Mazierska, includes family ties, the figures of fathers and sons, with a focus on their mutual relationship, which is displayed differently in different periods. In the 1950s, it was a topic when "the more fatherhood is relocated from family to respectable institutions, such as Party, school or state, the better for everybody concerned."³¹ A similar conclusion relates the films from the military service environment, entirely in accordance with the characteristics of the given period – the harshest period of communist rule, with a slight easing of the political tension only at the end of the decade. Contrary to this, in the 1960s, characterized by the democratization process and the New Wave in movies,³²

²⁹ Jiří Hlaváček, "Významy základní vojenské služby a jejich reflexe v generační paměti českých mužů," in *Mezi pakárnou a službou vlasti: Základní vojenská služba (1968–2004) v aktérské reflexi*, ed. Jiří Hlaváček (Praha: Academia, 2022), 293.

³⁰ Mazierska, *Masculinities in Polish, Czech and Slovak Cinema*, 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

³² The most famous era of Czech and Czechoslovakian cinematography. It was mainly characterized by films original in terms of form (participation of non-actors, improvised dialogues, black-to-absurd humour, etc.) and critical in terms of content (efforts to capture humanity and non-black-and-white perception of reality, deviation from the socialist realism of the previous era). For more information, see, for example, Peter Hames, *Československá*

Mazierska identifies generational conflict related to father-son relationships, as a "difficult passage from adolescence to adulthood."³³ This plot is almost absent from the films on military service; rather, they manifest the absurdity of the military environment.

Concerning the films of the 1970s, the cited author identifies the increasing importance of the family – partly because of the heavier censorship of the time, partly due to people's disillusionment after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia and the cancellation of all democratization measures of the previous period. These feelings then led to withdrawal from political, and public life and into private space. Generally, such characteristics can be accepted, even in this somewhat simplified form. More questionable in this conclusion, however, represents a set of cinemas it is based on – popular movies with considerable artistic value, very limited sample – only a three-part series about the Homolka family from the beginning of the decade (1969, 1970, 1972). At the same time, this analytical part does not elaborate on the characteristics of the father figures and does not indicate the preferred image of fatherhood instead it focuses on the image of society (consumption, intergenerational ties, etc.).³⁴

The fundamental problem with the above mentioned Mazierska's analysis lies in the fact that while the majority of the population could "withdraw into the private sphere," media, movies, and generally production presented to the public were required to prove and support loyalty with the re-emerging "normalizing," i.e., authoritarian regime. This loyalty was often proved within the films and TV series situated in the public sphere, the world of work, traditionally defined by men. Naturally, it was because the public sphere could be more controlled than the private one. With a bit of paradox, the films on basic military service issues of the time more often included the theme of family than "civilian" production. In two of three films of this decade, the question of family, parenthood, and, above all, fatherhood represented one of the main storylines. It was an image of responsible fatherhood, which, however, did not deny the traditional gender division of roles.

Mazierska then did not include the second "normalization" decade, the 1980s, in her analysis and went straight to analysing the image of the father in post-communist films. She considers this period as an era "associated with promoting [...] a conservative vision of society, in which men and women fulfill traditionally feminine and masculine roles." Besides, the films reflect a new phenomenon of unemployment, which often prevents a man from fulfilling the role of breadwinner, and an increase in singlehood as a new style of life. All these phenomena are manifested in the image of fatherhood, as it is portrayed in post-communist filmmaking, together with, for example, the character of the surrogate father, or the father "overpowered by his wife."³⁵ However, this typology of individual roles is only outlined, and a deeper connection with the preferred characteristics of masculinity is

nová vlna (Praha: Levné knihy KMa, 2008).

³³ Ibid, 99.

³⁴ Ibid, 110–13.

³⁵ Ibid, 121–28.

missing. Due to the nature of film and television production on basic military service after 1989,³⁶ it is impossible to offer a relevant comparison here.

The third broad category that Mazierska analyses is “men in love.” Here, too, the author proceeds according to individual decades, capturing how love was portrayed in films from the wartime period, from the era of Stalinism, and then how these pictures were in the 1960s when the emphasis in films was put on feelings and romantic love. The following two decades then, she characterized by “increased sexualization of female-male relationships in the film,” which, however, is not convincingly demonstrated by the analysed (very limited) material.

Forms of masculinity of the common soldier (typology on male characters based on gender analysis)

A previous comparative analysis has to be extended by a more comprehensive analysis using the concept of hegemonic masculinity. This knowledge gap will reflect the following analytic part, which presents three basic types of male characters as they were identified when focusing on partnership plots in the films: 1) romantic, 2) lover, and 3) partner (husband, father). These categories were defined according to the relationship of individual characters to women, not, for example, to the issue of fulfilling military duties or hazing, relevant, for example, to the category “friend.”

1) Romantic. A man characterized as timid, cautious, dreamy, and monogamous in his sexual behaviour (often anticipated in the future). This is the most frequent category in the analysed set of movies, with roughly one-third of occurrence. The most important message here is that a monogamous heterosexual partnership is the only acceptable norm of behaviour. Consequently, the relevant plots should improve the image of the army in public and dispel fears of young women and girls that they will lose their partners due to compulsory military service. Women are often depicted as passive romantic heroines; thus, the plot maintains the necessary gender hierarchy, women’s subordination.

2) Lover. It is the second most numerous category (it appears in less than a third of film or television works); usually, this type appears together with the first one, the romantic. Within the plot, the man is both a romantic hero, and he takes on the role of a lover, a heterosexual man who explicitly expresses his sexual needs (explicit love scenes are included in accordance with the contemporary permissible standards). At the same time, however, this type of masculine hero is represented indirectly, typically in the dialogues and stories about love adventures and sexual needs shared among men. Women are perceived primarily through their bodies; the female body

³⁶ In the first years after the transition to democracy and abolition of censorship, they reflect the demand for previously unavailable titles. The key ones are two comedies from a military environment, filmed in the early 1990s – Tank Battalion (*Tankový prapor*) from 1991 and Black Barons (*Černí baroni*) made in 1992. In both cases, these films are based on literary works by previously “prohibited” authors; their literary works are set in the 1950s and are very critical of not only the military service but also the communist regime of the given period. The stories can, therefore, be perceived as coping with the communist past but also as works that entirely use the newly acquired freedom of expression and introduce erotic motifs.

is objectified as a body for others,³⁷ which reinforces male dominance. Movie heroes who do not experience the transformation from "romantic" to "lover" within the plot (or their character is a combination of both roles) undergo another very fundamental transformation in the spirit of the motto that compulsory military service makes them "real men." Their initial romantic spirit transforms, or at least takes on, the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity – rationality, emotional restraint, moral integrity, and especially competitiveness, which can be easily accentuated in a military training environment.

3) Partner. This category was no longer so noticeably represented in the analysed works; it was defined as a permanent partner whose aim is to start a family to bring children (or a man already married, with children). The role of the partner in the analysed movies was used more when describing the troubles of professional soldiers' private lives, often to portray the most positive and "human" image of officers who find themselves in the dilemma of whether to be a good soldier or a good husband and father. At the same time, these men run into a misunderstanding with their partners, which further complicates their situation as soldiers; they have to face women as irrational beings. Ultimately, they succeed in this endeavour; they solve problems successfully and "resist" feminine emotionality and irrationality, as demanded by the image of hegemonic masculinity.

In the images from the life of soldiers in compulsory service, a permanent partnership almost automatically means marriage, and it is presented as unproblematic. Only rarely and in side episodes does one of the soldiers mention that the girl (never a wife) left him while he was in the army. Rather, the films emphasize that separation makes love stronger. If we consider how difficult it was, in reality, to manage the separation from previous emotional ties and partnerships "at a distance," which is also evidenced by the memories of the witnesses, the overshadowing of this topic in the film production is undoubtedly an attempt to idealize serving in the army. In addition, accentuating fears of separation would disrupt the desirable image of the soldier's masculinity as a strong man without any emotional weakness or emotional dependence, which could be perceived as an expression of effeminacy.

In general, a woman was expected to support her partner unconditionally (in all three types of relationships), as military service is mentally and physically demanding, unlike life at home or in the household, which is the woman's domain. A woman is enclosed to the family environment by her body's physiology, which is much more closely related to reproduction. Everything feminine is, therefore, associated with nature, while masculine is associated with culture and civilization. Through these theoretical constructs, a gender hierarchy is effectively reproduced in which nature is always subordinated to culture (the family to the public).³⁸

³⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Nadvláda mužů* (Praha: Karolinum, 2000), 59.

³⁸ Sherry B. Ortner, "Má se žena k muži jako příroda ke kultuře?," in *Divčí válka s ideologií*, ed. Libora Oates-Indruchová (Praha: SLON, 1998), 90-108.

As complementary to these categories, a type of “friend” was also identified, which is not directly related to a heterosexual partnership but through interactions among men regarding women. The male togetherness, a kind of male community, is most clearly manifested in storylines where soldiers look for suitable conditions and opportunities for a love act (secret meetings, finding a suitable place for a date, etc.). This sort of behaviour significantly outnumbered situations, only two in all the films analysed, when one soldier steals the girlfriend of another soldier. Girls and women are again instrumentalized; they do not decide on anything, and their wishes or desires are often not even implied.

Variety of film scenes, invariability of gender relations (conclusion)

All categories correspond to the pattern of hegemonic masculinity, which was an essential feature of the movies considering the nature of military service. From a certain point of view, the strongly masculine environment of military service can be compared to another total institution – a male prison. By entering these environments, men are assigned the status of a dependent, subordinate person, usually attributed to women in society. In response to such an arrangement and in an attempt to eliminate the harmful effects of feminized status, men in everyday practice create sets of informal values and norms that allow some of them to strengthen their masculine identity. Thus, the prison space, like the space of broader society, is power stratified into the weak and the strong people, where the strong are defined as masculine men and the weak are defined as effeminate, feminine men.³⁹

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As for subversive images of masculinity, which were also the focus of the analysis, they appear only rarely, if at all. Paradoxically, women’s agency partially appears in the period shortly after the communist coup d’état – in the film from 1954, *Tonight Everything Ends* (*Dnes večer všechno končí*) with the main plot of the love between a young soldier and a beautiful girl. An “espionage” storyline escalates at the end of the story when it is revealed that this girl is a “dangerous agent” working for the Western enemies. The relationship between the young man-soldier and the girl is very romantic for a significant part of the film; the man is in love for the first time. Parallely, the movie presents the issue of men’s sexual desire and their need to “enjoy” with women if the girl allows it. There is no doubt about their heteronormative masculinity. In addition, male comradeship ultimately saves the protagonist, it does not allow him to behave contrary to the norms of people’s-democratic (communist) Czechoslovakia.

On the contrary, in the 1960s, in the atmosphere of the liberalization and democratization of society, traditional patriarchal behaviour patterns were emphasized in the movies analysed here. Two of them can be mentioned as illustrative examples. The first, *There Were Ten of Us* (*Bylo nás deset*, 1963), introduces a completely new element from the point of view of partnership

³⁹ Nedbálková, “Má vězení střední rod?,” 477. In the military environment, these mechanisms of the construction of masculinity and femininity are fully manifested, especially in connection with hazing.

– a young soldier's relationship with two women at the same time during his military service (this motif is not repeated in other films, including works from the period after 1989). When this man's behaviour is revealed, the hero is not "punished" – only he himself must decide whether to end one of the two relationships or not. Women are used in the story for men's amusement; they are a part of the "everyday life" of soldiers. The almost archetypal motif of the man-hunter is essential here ("When we finished the chocolate, I could do with her whatever I wanted. If I wanted to. However, I suddenly didn't want to. Precisely because I could do anything.")

Another film from the 1960s, *Constellation of the Virgin* (*Souhvězdí Panny*, 1965) supporting traditional gender order is built around the desire of a young soldier to meet his girlfriend and spend a romantic night and love act with her. However, the man cannot leave the barracks because of the emergency/combat alert. Then, the male togetherness offers a solution – all men, ordinary soldiers as well as officers join their forces to "sneak" the girl to the barracks and keep her presence a secret in the military area. Besides, it is the only one of all the analysed films where the motif of the secret "transportation" of a girl or woman to the barracks appears (more often – and in a much less romantic form – this activity resonated in the memories of the narrators-former soldiers). The film *Constellation of the Virgin* is also the first of the Czechoslovak movies from a military setting where the love scene is shown in more than hints, and for roughly the next twenty years, also the first and last picture where nude female breasts appear. Again, we see a clear expression of hegemonic masculinity – an emphasis on heterosexual intercourse, in which all other men, not only the protagonist, participate implicitly (as those who help the lovers).

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As in the 1950s, again somewhat paradoxically in the 1970s' "normalizing" pro-communist authoritarian regime, woman's agency appears in a certain form, albeit very subtly, disrupting the image of a "proper" partner who understands and well performs the role of wife and mother. At the same time, she needs a man's (soldier's) protection, thus understanding and supporting the importance of military service. In the film from 1975, *Two Men Report Arrival* (*Dva muži hlásí příchod*), the theme of how serving in the army makes a man out of a boy returns as the central motif. It is the only one of the films being analysed where a woman misbehaves, alternates sexual partners, and is a bad mother, so she is a reprehensible person. A young man, the main character, returns home from military service as a "man" and decides to save the boy (son of that woman, not the soldier, who became a surrogate father) from bad family conditions, represented mainly by his mother, who abandoned the child. It might seem that this plot violates the traditional image of a woman as being primarily a mother, anchored in the private sphere, and a man, connected to the superior sphere of the public. However, the film does not present an image of a man who will permanently care for the child, striving for a work-life balance. The story ends with the image of the man who rescues the child from an inappropriate environment precisely because he has become an "adult man." It is implicitly clear that the boy will be accepted into the new family and will likely be cared for primarily by the grandmother, whose character is portrayed as a loving and caring

woman. This conclusion confirms patriarchal stereotypes of the organization of society.

Regardless of the fundamental political rupture of 1989 and the transition to democracy, we can follow a clear continuity in the depiction of gender relations in the production regarding basic military service, while militarization serves as a way how to support and valorise “traditional gender roles” (similarly, as in the Bickford’s study⁴⁰). Thus, even in films produced after 1989, we do not find subversive gender patterns; previous models are reproduced and consolidated. In the mid-1990s, the character of a female soldier appeared in a TV series, namely in a few parts of the 52-episode series *Life in the Castle (Život na zámku)* from 1995. The main character’s son, Otakar, falls in love during his basic military service and secretly marries; his wife is an officer. Otakar’s parents are angry with the situation; the female officer is not feminine enough and not “good” enough for their son. Moreover, Otakar wants to become a professional soldier after his basic military service and study medicine (his parents wished in previous years) at a military college. In a short time, the woman-lieutenant becomes pregnant and an “ordinary” – feminine – mother and wife. The whole storyline is a variation of the “army makes boys men” theme that has been present in this kind of work since the 1950s. Only the figure of a female soldier remains a new element, again used to present the army in a positive light, to show that the army has changed, to emphasize the discontinuity and the building of a new army that will serve the democratic state. The storyline of a woman’s army career is not developed; soon, the motives of motherhood and family care are emphasized as this woman’s primary task (and preference), and women in general.

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To sum it up, the comparison of film/television production of the communist regime’s period and the era of transformation, democratic society confirms the strong continuity of preferred masculinity and gender relations. This preferred model is hegemonic masculinity, characterized by strength, decisiveness, rationality, and performance, as well as through relationships with women. That is why women are so often cast in passive roles and objectified in films.

⁴⁰ Bickford, “Male Identity, the Military, and the Family in the Former German Democratic Republic,” 71.

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1. CSFD (Czech and Slovak Film Database), accessed February 17, 2024, <https://www.csfd.cz>

MOVIES/TV SERIES

1. *Dnes večer všechno skončí*, 1955, drama, direction Vojtěch Jasný a Karel Kachyňa, 86 minutes
2. *Modrá a zlatá*, 1956, drama, direction Pavel Háša, 51 minutes
3. *Váhavý střelec*, 1956, comedy, direction Ivo Toman, 102 minutes
4. *Zářijové noci*, 1957, drama, direction Vojtěch Jasný, 84 minutes
5. *Bylo nás deset*, 1963, comedy, direction Antonín Kachlík, 87 minutes
6. *Kto si bez viny*, 1963, drama, direction Dimitrij Plichta, 94 minutes
7. *Kdyby tisíc klarinetů*, 1964, musical, direction Ján Roháč and Vladimír Svitáček, 130 minutes
8. *Každý mladý muž*, 1965, comedy, direction Pavel Juráček, 83 minutes
9. *Lásky jedné plavovlásky*, 1965, romantic comedy, direction Miloš Forman, 77 minutes
10. *Souhvězdí panny*, 1965, romantic drama, direction Zdeněk Brynych, 83 minutes
11. *Vysoká modrá zeď*, 1973, drama, direction Vladimír Čech, 91 minutes
12. *Dva muži hlásí příchod*, 1975, comedy, direction Václav Vorlíček, 89 minutes
13. *Můj brácha má prima bráchu*, 1975, comedy, direction Stanislav Strnad, 94 minutes
14. *Kluci z bronzu*, 1980, comedy, direction Stanislav Strnad, 92 minutes
15. *Velitel*, 1981, drama, direction Zdeněk Kubeček, 6 episodes
16. *Pod nohama nebe*, 1983, drama, direction Milan Růžička, 92 minutes
17. *Zelená léta*, 1985, drama, direction Milan Muchna, 88 minutes
18. *Copak je to za vojáka...*, 1987, comedy, direction Petr Tuček, 85 minutes
19. *Hláska*, 1987, drama, direction Milan Růžička, 150 minutes
20. *Zírej, holube!*, 1987, drama, direction Vít Olmer, 25 minutes
21. *Chlapci a chlapi*, 1988 drama, direction Evžen Sokolovský, 11 episodes
22. *Tankový prapor*, 1991, comedy, direction Vít Olmer, 83 minutes
23. *Černí baroni*, 1992, comedy, direction Zdeněk Sirový, 92 minutes
24. *Zobani*, 1993, drama, direction Jiří Vanýsek, 90 minutes
25. *Mlýny*, 1994, comedy, direction Ondřej Trojan and Jiří Fero Burda, 70 minutes
26. *Život na zámku*, 1995–1998, drama, direction Jaroslav Hanuš, 52 episodes
27. *Rajonové blues*, 2005, musical comedy, direction Václav Křístek, 82 minutes
28. *Otec neznámý aneb Cesta do hlubin duše výstrojního náčelníka*, 2001, comedy, direction Karel Kachyňa, 84 minutes

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