CONSTRUCTING SLOVAK WOMEN ON SCREEN: COMPARATIVE AND DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVES IN CZECH CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the representation of Slovak women in Czech cinema from the interwar period to the present, with a particular focus on transformations after the 1993 dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Combining comparative imagology with feminist film theory and postcolonial perspectives, the study traces recurring imagotypes - from the folklorized, natural girl of the 1930s and the implicitly "Slovak" heroines of the New Wave, through the eroticized figures of the Normalization era, to the explicitly Slovak migrant characters that appear in post-1993 mainstream films. By examining representative works across these periods, the paper shows how Slovak female characters function as key sites for negotiating Czech national identity. Their portrayals, oscillating between erotic "wamp" and self-sacrificing mother, contribute to broader debates on gender representation by revealing how cinematic femininity becomes a metaphor for ethnic and geopolitical Otherness. The study argues that post-1993 Czech cinema uses Slovak womanhood to stabilize symbolic oppositions between West and East, thereby shaping contemporary Czech–Slovak cultural relations.

Keywords: comparative imagology, Czech cinema, Slovak women, gender representation, media and culture, national identity, Czech-Slovak relations

INTRODUCTION

The peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1993 marked a significant rupture in the shared political and cultural history of Czechs and Slovaks. Although the split was orderly, it required both nations to renegotiate their self-understanding and mutual perception. Cinema, long recognized as a medium through which collective identities are imagined and reproduced, has played a central role in this renegotiation. Czech film has continued to incorporate Slovak characters into its narratives, often positioning them in ways that articulate broader symbolic oppositions between the two nations.

The representation of Slovaks in Czech discourse has historically been shaped by asymmetry. Since the nineteenth century, Czech cultural imagination has frequently feminized Slovakia, attributing to it qualities such as emotionality, backwardness, traditionalism, and closeness to nature.

This paper asks: How has the representation of Slovak women in Czech cinema evolved after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, and what role do these cinematic images play in constructing Czech national identity? By exploring diachronic patterns of depiction, the study highlights how Czech cinema uses Slovak femininity to negotiate symbolic boundaries between the perceived West and the imagined East.

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