

Piotr Sienko*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0041-7757>

FILM IS A WOMAN. THE MANIFESTATION OF FEMININITY IN THE WORK OF MARIA SADOWSKA BASED ON *WOMEN'S DAY*

Abstract. The aim of this article is to discuss a film by Maria Sadowska, entitled *Women's Day*. The main theme around which the artist decided to build its plot is Halina Radwan's herstory. A woman fulfils various socio-cultural roles, including that of mother, worker and woman, which exposes her to discrimination and exclusion. Feminist criticism therefore proved to be the primary tool used in the analytical process. The article refers to representatives of different research disciplines. The focus lies in capturing the relationships experienced by the main character in Sadowska's film, both within the private and public spheres. This is preceded by an introduction, which outlines the subject matter addressed by Sadowska, and accompanied by an overview of the basic assumptions of feminist perspective in film studies.

Keywords: film, Maria Sadowska, *Women's Day*, feminism.

FILM JEST KOBIEȚĄ. MANIFESTACJA KOBIECOCI W TWÓRCZOŚCI MARII SADOWSKIEJ NA PODSTAWIE *DNIA KOBIEȚ*

Abstrakt. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest omówienie filmu Marii Sadowskiej zatytułowanego *Dzień kobiet*. Głównym wątkiem, wokół którego artystka postanowiła zbudować jego fabułę, jest historia Haliny Radwan. Kobieta pełni różne role społeczno-kulturowe, m.in. matki i pracownicy, co naraża ją na dyskryminację i wykluczenie. Krytyka feministyczna okazała się zatem podstawowym narzędziem wykorzystanym w procesie analitycznym. W artykule odwołano się do przedstawicieli różnych dyscyplin badawczych, jak chociażby socjologii czy filmoznawstwa. Skupiono się także na uchwyceniu relacji doświadczanych przez główną bohaterkę filmu Sadowskiej, zarówno

* MA, Uniwersytet WSB Merito Bydgoszcz, e-mail: piotr.sienko@bydgoszcz.merito.pl

w sferze prywatnej, jak i publicznej. Powyższe poprzedzono wstępem, który zarysowuje tematykę poruszaną przez Sadowską, a także przeglądem podstawowych założeń perspektywy feministycznej w filmoznawstwie.

Słowa kluczowe: film, Maria Sadowska, *Dzień kobiet*, feminizm.

1. Introduction

It is no coincidence that I begin the title of this article by proclaiming “Film is a woman”. The phrase that “X is a woman” is used by numerous artists, creators and pro-women activists. This observation has become one of the guiding thoughts in the definition and crystallisation of art by Sadowska, who embodies feminist postulates in her music and film projects. The artist inaugurated her career as a teenager, when in the song “My wariatki ładne kwiatki” (We lunatics, pretty flowers) she engaged with the issue of sisterhood, girlhood friendship and breaking gender stereotypes (Sadowska, Eliza 2015). Although Sadowska confessed in an interview that “I have never been a big, committed feminist” (Gnoiński), she pointed out that the issues she addressed in *Women’s Day* (*Dzień kobiet*) led her to open up to feminist themes, resulting in her involvement in activities for women’s emancipation. The artistic path chosen by the director is characterised by disagreement with the patriarchal system of values and resistance to mechanisms that exclude women’s perspective from the public sphere. The observation of social phenomena enables a holistic focus on gender-related issues as a certain construct, which is highlighted in the piece “Nikt nie rodzi się kobietą” (Nobody is born a woman), in which the author uses a socio-cultural gender perspective. The song is a clear ideological enunciation and alludes to *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (Sieńko 2021: 142), one of the trailblazers in promoting feminist thought, whose concepts continue to inspire researchers employing a feminist perspective in their discussions. The artistic awareness of the director and the timeless themes explored in *Women’s Day*, such as social exclusion, facilitate the attempt to analyse this film. This article focuses on describing the situation of women. Therefore, feminist criticism has been adopted as the main research tool, enabling the continued thematic proliferation of discussions surrounding the “women’s question” and challenging the prevailing status of “woman as an inferior being” (Helios, Jedlecka 2018: 90).

2. The problem of terminology – feminine cinema or women’s cinema?

To achieve the intended goal of discussing the proposed work, I consider it imperative to address the questions of what constitutes feminine cinema and whether such terminology can be deemed appropriate. An Internet search suggests that films for women are otherwise referred to as “girly films”, “touching romances” or “funny

comedies”. This may potentially lead to “associations with something chaotic, of little importance, emotional, which by definition is devoid of the element of rationality, reason and other qualities necessary to exercise power” (Radkiewicz 2001: 45). Therefore, it can be inferred that the phrase “feminine cinema” reproduces gender stereotypes. It presents an image of a woman as weaker and less reasonable than a man, whose desires, in this case artistic experiences, will be satisfied by an intellectually undemanding, pleasant and uncomplicated screen adaptation. It should be noted that the phenomena related to the emancipation processes, as well as the rise of gender mainstreaming¹ ideas, have resulted in the fact that entering the phrase “feminine cinema” into Internet search engines also allows one to discover the most popular female directors and films featuring “strong” female characters. This perspective seems closer to the values accompanying Sadowska’s projects, but still does not fully reflect the problems addressed by the director.

Małgorzata Radkiewicz draws attention to the terminological difficulty I have proposed. This film scholar argues that “feminine cinema” is commonly understood as a creation intended for women, however, its authors do not necessarily have to be representatives of this gender (Radkiewicz 2004: 301). Radkiewicz presents the evaluative factors I referred to above. She states that the category of “feminine cinema” denotes: “unsophisticated B-class productions providing emotions and tearful sentiments” (Radkiewicz 2004: 301). With this in view, the described phenomenon not only appeals to the traditional understanding of gender roles, but can also be defined as something inferior, negatively valued and perceived pejoratively (Talarczyk 2011: 81).

Therefore, I consider it justified to emphasise that the phrase “feminine cinema” fails to capture the subjectivity of the female director and confines her within the aforementioned gender stereotypes. Accordingly, feminist theorists have proposed the term “women’s cinema”, which I understand following the sociologist Ewelina Wejbert-Wąsiewicz:

film creation for which the underlying basis of identification lies in the adoption of a female perspective conveyed by the semantic structure of the work in question. Women’s cinema understood in this way is characterised by accentuating the female point of view, the place occupied by the female gender, their mutual relations and relationships with others. The focus of female directors usually revolves around female protagonists whose experiences, psyche and sexuality become the central theme and axis of the plot. In women’s cinema, the narrative, imagery or music highlight the specificity of the female world, while costumes and props co-create the

¹ *Gender mainstreaming – integration of gender equality issues into the mainstream of social and political actions, as well as an international strategy aimed at achieving gender equality in all areas of social, political, and economic life. [...] Its objective is to change social and institutional structures in such a way that they ensure equal treatment of all citizens and provide them with equal access to rights and institutions, which also includes the right to fully utilize intellectual and professional potential* (Limanowska 2014: 160–162).

female identity, along with the social, cultural and moral status prevailing at a given historical moment. It also entails breaking with the “male gaze” (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2015a: 47).

Adopting Wejbert-Wąsiewicz’s formulation of this concept allows for highlighting the autonomy found in projects undertaken by female directors. It also enables the creation of socially engaged art that takes into account the perspective of women, skilfully escaping the tutelage of the ‘male gaze’. It is therefore worthwhile to discuss further the concept cited after Wejbert-Wąsiewicz and note that, among others, it has been brought to attention by feminist literary criticism. In her book *Ciało, pożądanie, ubranie. O wczesnych powieściach Gabrieli Zapolskiej (Body, desire, attire. On the early novels of Gabriela Zapolska)*, Krystyna Kłosińska analyses *Kaśka Kariatyda* by Gabriela Zapolska. Through the interpretation of the main character, this literary scholar concludes that the “male gaze” often takes on an expansive form, which can lead to the woman feeling pain:

[...] the gaze of the man evokes in Kaśka a feeling of pain, humiliation, and degradation; in the girl’s imagination, the inner sensation transforms into visible wounds on the body. The male gaze forces the woman into stereotypes. If the pain caused by this gaze was to be externalised, if the metaphors of the text were to be “made real”, we would behold the woman’s body covered with the marks of lashes or charred. The man’s gaze destroys, incinerates, and ultimately kills. It is felt by the woman as a gesture of domination, branding the slave’s body, marking it with a scarlet stripe, the “scarlet letter”. At the same time, the male gaze activates the memory of the dark times when the bodies of witches and the temptress were burned at the stake (Kłosińska 1999: 40).

3. Halina Radwan – mother, manager, woman

Taking into consideration the analyses presented in the first part of the text, it can be concluded that Sadowska’s film work aligns with “women’s cinema”. Not only does the film tell the story of a woman’s life, but it also adopts a non-male-centric approach which captures the “multifaceted nature of women’s experiences” (Szczekała 2022: 79). The perspective offered by the artist encourages reflection on the world, addresses universal issues and, at the same time, in a non-superficial manner touches on topics that resonate with female and male viewers (poverty, exclusion, violence or sexual intercourse). Sadowska’s work is characterised by authenticity, which is reflected in the characters she created. The filmmaker focused on depicting the difficulties that the “mass viewer” may face, giving the viewer the opportunity to “find reflections of themselves and their problems on the screen” (Helman 2011: 34). The main character of *Women’s Day* is Halina Radwan, portrayed by Katarzyna Kwiatkowska. We come to know the woman as a middle-aged person, an employee of a retail chain called Motylek (Butterfly), the mother of a growing teenage girl, who has experienced abandonment by her husband, and whose living conditions are far from luxurious. The discussed character perfectly

fits the model of the exhausted, overworked Polish woman, for whom full-time employment is the sole motivation because without it she and her family would not survive. The greyness, routine and the lack of the right to self-fulfilment are the fundamental features describing the fate of the main character. Thus, Halina Radwan is presented as a member of society for whom the transformation after the year 1989 has not been kind. It is noteworthy that women in particular play a significant role in her life and it is, in part, around their experiences and relationships that the plot of the film is built. This is the case in both the private and public spheres. In the former, we should spotlight the main character's mother Regina Radwan (Grażyna Barszczewska) and her daughter named Misia (Julia Czuraj). Similarly, in the workplace, her colleagues are women. Portraying the roles of shop assistants are: Klara Bielawka (Andżelika), Dorota Kolak (Maryla), Anita Jancia (Jadzia), Ewa Konstancja Bułhak (Ania), Elżbieta Romanowska (Monika), Dorota Wierzbicka-Matarelli (Beata Karwowska). Halina Radwan's close circle also includes men. An undeniably important and symbolic character is played by Eryk Lubos, i.e. Eryk Gołębiowski, the main character's boss and lover. Leonard Pietraszak deserves a special mention for his role as the lawyer Gawlik, who later becomes a supporter in the fight for justice.

In her work, Sadowska broadly depicts the life of women, which is why the very first scenes of *Women's Day* are strongly marked by female figures. In these scenes, we meet the main character and her daughter; during their conversation we learn that the woman, portrayed by Kwiatkowska, has been offered new professional challenges – a promotion to a managerial position. However, the guiding thought was not joy, the desire for self-fulfilment or the appreciation of the employee, but the struggle for money. In this way, the director stressed one of the main problems raised in the film, namely the low economic status experienced by the later rebel. Financial instability, exploitation and the feminisation of poverty² form the foundations on which the narrative is constructed. Systemic violence shatters or prevents balance in family relationships. Miśka, the daughter of the main character, is saddened and annoyed that her mother, by accepting the professional promotion and thus new, further responsibilities, will have “even less!?” time for her (Sadowska 2012). Halina Radwan's thoughts continue to focus on the economic aspect. The woman is happy that she will most likely enable her daughter's academic development, she says: “For example, I will buy you a computer [...], and you will take part in this Computer Science Olympiad” (Sadowska 2012). The concerned mother desires the well-being of her child and does not have a concrete plan, her goal is primarily

² *Feminisation of poverty (deprivation) – a social phenomenon characterized by economic inequality based on gender, which can be demonstrated through sociological empirical research. [...] Over the past two decades, women have become the beneficiaries of socio-economic change to a lesser extent than men [...] The phenomenon of feminisation of poverty is influenced by the advocated and implemented family model, in which women work for pay but also have to take care of their husbands, children, and often parents* (Desperak, Rek-Woźniak 2015: 141–143).

to secure the best possible future for her daughter. So she does not find space for discussing dreams and desires. She does not concentrate on the value of money or work in itself, but on how to manage the economic capital associated with her career advancement. It is worth noting here that it is the family situation that has compelled the woman to assume the traditionally understood male cultural role – that of a person who will undertake the responsibility of ensuring financial liquidity for her loved ones. Consequently, we see that Halina Radwan has to take on stereotypically “female” duties that patriarchal oppression has assigned to women, as Katarzyna Rydzik (2011: 9) notes: “despite political and social changes, the modern woman still resembles the goddess Kali with seven arms, created to cope with all challenges”. The economic plight of the main character of *Women’s Day* has led her to bear the burden of financially providing for her family on one of her metaphorical arms.

The main character’s ennoblement seems to be an opportunity for her colleagues (all of whom are women) to abolish the inextricable division between better and worse employees. The fresh start is supposed to involve the appointment of their manager (the masculine form used consistently in the film), a person who has suffered the hardships of exploitation and poor working conditions accompanying those employed in lower positions, usually female cashiers. However, the revolutionary slogan “Down with management!” (Sadowska 2012) shouted by Maryla, one of the workers, at Halina Radwan’s birthday party, turns out to be a utopian wish. Entangled in the patriarchal-capitalist pursuit of money, the newly appointed manager has been forced to navigate within a system that exploits its “subjects”. Naturally, the start of a career in a senior position at the shop involves conscientiousness and understanding, which entails, among other things, fairer, partly truthful, filling in time records. However, in the course of a conversation with her boss, Eryk Gaşiorowski, the main character learns that standards such as those resulting from legislation, for example labour law, do not apply to the establishment she manages. The implication is that at Motylek no systemic solutions have been proposed, no laws regarding working conditions have been implemented. Instead, a change in attitude towards a more positive one has been suggested – ‘everything can be done if you really want to’ (Sadowska 2012), and the way to break the deadlock, the problem of the unpaid overtime, is simply to fire the employees.

The policy of the popular discount chain encompasses more than just the above-mentioned decisions of the supervisor. During the training session attended by Halina Radwan, we learn that the key word for achieving the company’s objectives is “productivity”. In order to realise this idea, the trainers suggested physical exercises and singing the “Motylek Anthem” (Sadowska 2012), which was intended to unleash energy and create a sense of community among the management staff. Professional advancement also involves increasing the prestige of private life, the main character decides to change her place of residence and purchase new appliances (including a computer for her daughter). However, the ennoblement also brings

a multitude of responsibilities associated with the new role, greater time challenges and rejection by some of her former colleagues. For instance, one of them, jealous of the promotion, accepts a delivery of products without informing her superior.

I think the most pivotal moment turns out to be Halina Radwan's willingness to defend female employees who find themselves in a challenging life situation – one of them is expecting a child, while the other learns about her husband's illness. However, as the shop managed by the main character ranks low in productivity, Eryk Gąsiorowski orders the dismissal of one of the women, saying: "you see, my bosses love numbers" (Sadowska 2012). The magnanimous man leaves the choice to the shop manager; if she does not terminate her subordinate's employment, she can resign herself. Halina Radwan decides to fire Maryla, whose husband dies shortly after the incident, and the grieving woman becomes an alcoholic.

The main character, consumed by the responsibilities associated with her new position and the lack of support from her boss and some of her coworkers, forgets about her family, especially her daughter Miśka. The patriarchal, oppressive system does not allow for a conflict-free combination of socio-cultural roles. The shop manager encounters male domination, which translates into phallogocentric social relations, i.e. "the universalisation of what is male, hidden at the base of culture, preventing the female voice, representation, symbolic existence" (Bator 2001: 61). Thus, the female employees of the establishment (including the new manager) function within an exploitative arrangement. They can expect no social assistance, no schemes to support single parents, and the unfavourable system for women has condemned them to parenting failures. The daughter of the main character stops going to school, starts smoking cigarettes and plays computer games obsessively, fanatically. These developments address the patriarchal desire to see the woman in the role of the "keeper of hearth and home". The mother's increased professional responsibilities have resulted in her daughter suffering. Feminist theories draw attention to this injustice. June Hannam, describing the concept of "separate spheres", makes it clear that it is 'a term used to describe different social roles. It was assumed that biological and social differences between the sexes affected both their personalities and their suitability for particular tasks. Thus, men were seen as rational, aggressive and competitive, and therefore fitted for the world of work and public activity, whereas women were emotional, nurturing and passive, and therefore most suited to look after the family within a domestic setting' (2007: 37). *Women's Day* demonstrates that the patriarchal system affects both spheres of life, which influence each other. Justyna Tomczyk's findings further support this notion, for, as the sociologist observes, "the range of patriarchal power influence is very extensive", encompassing aspects such as family, production and reproduction, and economic systems (2014: 171).

Interestingly, through reading interviews with the director, we can learn that Sadowska is an advocate of the egalitarian model of the family, which she has implemented in her own relationship, for example, through alternating childcare

responsibilities (Rutkowska 2017). Given this, it can be assumed that she has presented herself as a conscious director. Together with the co-screenwriter, Katarzyna Terechowicz, she succeeded in depicting the experiences of Halina Radwan and drawing attention to the dilemmas faced by overworked, overtired and frustrated women. I therefore think that the filmmaker has successfully and consistently pursued an artistic project which can be considered as bringing attention to the “women’s question”.

In the light of the above, it is necessary to recall the “still functioning model of a woman – the Polish Mother” (Ksieniewicz 2004: 93), which established its foundations in the times of the nobility (Titkow 2012: 29). It is understood today as the type of woman presented by Sadowska in *Women’s Day* – an exhausted caregiver tasked with fulfilling the role of a family manager (Imbierowicz 2012: 430–431). The socio-cultural gender perspective has led to the emergence of another concept describing the role of women in society. Researchers argue that due to the redefinition of certain phenomena, a new category has been constructed – the “superwoman”. This cited model goes beyond the traditional understanding of women’s duties (taking care of the family, the household etc.), as it also takes into account the labour market. Anna Titkow explains that a “superwoman” is a “wonderful mother, wife, employee” (Titkow 2012: 32), “who is able to meet the most difficult demands imposed by social reality. A person who is ready to give up her aspirations in the spirit of sacrifice for the Homeland and the Family, not expecting other than symbolic gratifications, thus gaining prestige and position in the family and society” (Titkow 2012: 30). It is therefore necessary to quote the observations of Henryk Domański. This sociologist, in his book *Zadowolony niewolnik. Studium o zróżnicowaniu społecznym między kobietami i mężczyznami w Polsce (A Grateful Slave. Study on Social Inequalities Between Men and Women in Poland)*, stresses that:

Capitalism, from its very beginning, has favoured the persistence of gender inequalities in access to professional roles. Unemployment and recession cycles, followed by a shrinking labour market, push social categories with weaker bargaining power into inferior positions. Women voluntarily or under the pressure of objective conditions choose domestic occupations, yielding professional space to men (Domański 1999: 23).

The state presented above, as observed by the researcher, is easily noticeable in *Women’s Day*. The main character, despite making every effort, fails to meet the requirements arising from her role in society, which Sadowska has keenly captured in the discussed film. Halina Radwan experiences failure, she does not fulfil the hopes placed in her, she is unable to satisfy the needs of others. The woman’s husband abandoned the family and left for the United States, and, despite her attempts to rebuild the relationship with her daughter and rekindle a sense of mutual trust and care, the main character faces defeat; furthermore, as a shop manager she performs her duties at a level that is, at the very least, unsatisfactory.

Another significant thread presented in *Women's Day*, which I consider important, is that the main character decides to enter into an intimate and confidential relationship with her boss, who takes care of his disabled wife. Sadowska portrayed romantic getaways and moments of elation as a time of detachment from daily professional and family obligations, as well as making difficult decisions. However, the most intriguing aspect of this story seems to be not that Halina Radwan chooses to become entangled in an affair, but rather with whom she consummates it. The character of Eryk Gąsiorowski can be described as follows: a capitalist boss, co-responsible for family dramas – the disturbed relationship between the main character and her daughter. The character also contributed to work-related failures – quarrels, disagreements between the manager and her former colleagues, and inhumane orders, such as the fact that “when one of the employees has a miscarriage, another one has to cover the customer’s corpse with a bag and open the shop” (Chutnik 2013). It should be therefore noted that apart from becoming a source of bodily and spiritual pleasure, the financier becomes also an allegory of the accumulation of the woman’s problems, and the bane of her life. An important moment in the story of Halina Radwan’s life is the betrayal of her lover with a newly hired female employee. As a result of the man’s infidelity, Halina Radwan distances herself from him and he decides to take revenge by imposing new responsibilities on her, which prove impossible to fulfil. Viewers witness further dramas that affect the main character. Halina Radwan is dismissed on disciplinary grounds and, with no prospects ahead, she falls into depression. Eryk Gąsiorowski does not feel responsible for the unlawful directives, moreover he bids farewell to his former manager and lover with the words: “You’ve broken the rules! Halina, you can go to jail. Don’t you get it!? I’m saving your ass” (Sadowska 2012).

However, despite the pain and suffering inflicted by him, Halina Radwan continues to have feelings for her superior. It is only when she realises that her former lover’s interest in reviving their relationship is aimed at having her sign a confidentiality clause that she decides to permanently end this acquaintance, which at the same time marks the beginning of a difficult, complicated battle of David against Goliath. In an attempt to raise awareness about working conditions in the popular retail chain, Halina Radwan initiates a media campaign, organises demonstrations and unites the professional community. Sadowska offers a portrayal of a strong, independent, and hardworking woman who, through spiritual renewal, unites her former colleagues. Thus, we can see that the director has used feminist values and created a courageous, self-reliant heroine who only succeeds by making autonomous decisions. Furthermore, *Women's Day* addressed the actual problems encountered by women, as their experiences were portrayed in the film and the plot revolved around them. Sadowska successfully aligns with feminist emancipation strategies, which aim to highlight the female point of view, amplify women’s voices, and present their own original narratives (Kłosińska 2006: 99–100).

It is also noteworthy that the main character’s attempt to defeat a large corporation and disseminate information about the mistreatment of Motylek’s female

employees impacts her family relationships. When unemployed, Halina Radwan faces criticism from her mother, who dies while her daughter stands up to the unfairness. Ultimately, Halina Radwan triumphs over the authorities of Motylek. However, it is important to point out here that she did not fight this battle alone: the shop's female employees were among those who contributed to her victory. The preceding events, the dramas described above, show that the women did not form a community. Toril Moi asserts that "each of us has had similar experiences" (Moi 1993: 102) and makes it clear that patriarchal oppression often affects all women, or at least they are exposed to it. I assume, therefore, that it was the commonality of experiences which caused the female shop workers to adopt a similar perspective. This resulted in them joining the former manager in the ongoing battle between good and evil. In relation to these findings, it is worth referring to the idea of sisterhood, which I understand here in line with Karolina Sikorska and Sandra Frydysiak as "acting in solidarity, supporting each other and fighting together. Individual experiences gain collective articulations, thus acquiring greater power and agency" (2020: 96). As Sikorska observes in another article:

sisterhood between the heroines only emerges when they find themselves in a similar situation, when they all begin to have problems at work, and when the economic exploitation of their employer proves equally severe for them. The competition inherent in the corporate logic largely eliminates opportunities for genuine female support and cooperation. It is only when the women (led by the main character, Halina) realise that the employer's practices benefit neither the individuals nor the team, that they are able to stand together in solidarity to fight back. Sisterly actions are initiated in response to a difficult situation, for some of the protagonists of the film's narrative already extremely distressing (Sikorska 2019: 39).

In the light of the above, it can be concluded that thanks to the fight, the shop employees have achieved one of the important postulates of feminism in general. This does not mean, however, that sisterhood was the main goal that the women sought to accomplish. It was born out of their collective acts of solidarity, when the recognition of a shared threat and the absence of alternative means to cope with adversity fostered mutual mobilization and support. Remarkably, such cases are well known from the herstory³ of women's social involvement. Titkow emphasises that

despite the lack of universally accepted conclusions regarding the nature of the relationship between the women's social movement and feminism, it should be accepted that feminism was born thanks to the women's social movement, and that the women's social movement in turn

³ *Herstory – a neologism created by American second-wave feminists [...] as part of criticism of traditional historical writing; the wordplay her-story (her narrative) formed a counterbalance to his-story (his narrative). The rejection of the notion of history and its replacement by the word herstory was part of a broader critique and an attempt to change the patriarchal language, described by feminists of the time as manglish (man + English, male + English) (Kuźma-Markowska 2014: 179).*

was able to emerge thanks to its animators and leaders, whom from today's perspective we would call feminists (1998: 214).

I also consider Halina Radwan's relationship with the attorney Gawlik, who did not charge for his services, to be worth mentioning. Through this relationship, the filmmaker broke stereotypes and demonstrated that cross-class, cross-generational and cross-gender solidarity is a value which proved indispensable for achieving the desired goal. The character of the plaintiff's attorney was portrayed as a selfless, kind-hearted and compassionate man, who altruistically engaged in the main character's case.

The above description is worth supplementing with a slightly more political approach, as the film's plot and the director's authorial idea are strongly inspired by feminist ideals – the fight against an exploitative, unjust system and social inequalities. This makes it possible to highlight several problems, which I draw attention to following Andrew Heywood. Characterising the ideology of socialist feminism, Heywood notes that it criticises the free market system and addresses the “institution of private property” (Heywood 2007: 262) as the bastions of patriarchy that exclude female citizens from the public sphere. According to Friedrich Engels, the abolition of the “mother right” (inheritance through the female line) led to “the world historical defeat of the female sex” (Heywood 2007: 262). Moreover, he also expressed disapproval regarding morals, concluding that the cultivated myth of romantic love imposes restrictions on women, and that its main task is to protect “male privileges and property” (Heywood 2007: 262). Eryk Gąsiorowski does not care about building a relationship based on partnership, security and love. The protagonist only seeks to satisfy his own needs in different spheres of life. Furthermore, it should be noted that the decisions made by Halina Radwan, which worsened the situation of the female employees, were influenced by her boss-lover, as mentioned above. The man thus becomes a metaphor describing the dependencies between the heroine and her workplace. By ending the relationship, Halina Radwan gains autonomy. This enables her to engage in a fight against the dishonest employer.

Sadowska illustrated that the patriarchal system, by overlooking women's unpaid work and imposing socio-cultural roles, led the main character to suffering, exclusion and a daily struggle for survival. Socialist feminism included in its tenets, among other things, the abolition of male property, which would result in women's economic and cultural independence (Heywood 2007: 262–263). Using this perspective, it is important to point out that the main enemy of female workers is not men, but oppressive, neoliberal capitalism. Obviously, the director made use of the portrayal of unfriendly and exploitative men driven by profit, such as Eryk Gąsiorowski. However, considering the presented analyses, it can be assumed that it was capitalism that socialised the ruthless financiers.

I consider it necessary to emphasise that the director has presented two types of characters. On the one hand, a picture of exploitative individuals is painted,

through the portrayal of the Motylek bosses; these are the people employed high up in the corporate hierarchy. On the other hand, we see people facing obstacles arising from everyday life, as well as discrimination or a lack of the right to dignity. Sadowska chose to employ a scheme known from westerns, as the director herself says: “In *Halina*, there is such an archetypal struggle between good and evil, and I often call this film a western, because it has such a scheme of a lone warrior who gathers allies in order to win against someone who appears stronger and invincible” (Jaźwiński 2013). Additionally, it is worth noting the issue of gender, as the group threatened with exclusion and poverty consists solely of women. The heroines are socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged shop workers, whereas in the dominant roles the director casts men. In view of this, I believe that *Women’s Day* is a film that manifests the community and solidarity of women. The work is also an authentic story, referring to the herstory of Bożena Łopacka, one of the employees of the Biedronka supermarket chain. In 2000, the public learned that the shop assistant “sued her employer for particularly harsh and unfair working conditions, which included having to work extra hours without pay and not being able to leave the till for hours, even to go to the toilet. Łopacka’s story was the main source of inspiration for Sadowska’s film” (Mazierska 2022: 283).

4. Conclusion

In the proposed work, Sadowska attempted to challenge the patriarchal norms of viewing the world and to oppose the “male gaze”, “which remains the underlying foundation of cinema based on the mechanisms of unconscious patriarchy” (Beinek 2008: 70). Even though *Halina Radwan* was promoted to a managerial position, she still functioned within a violence-ridden situation and played the role of a woman dependent on an oppressive, macho system. Furthermore, she received no support from the state or her employer, despite raising her daughter as a single parent. Through this, the director realises one of the demands of feminism. She gives voice to unrepresented and excluded groups and enables the narrative to be constructed from the women’s standpoint, opposing “their exclusion from the artistic and intellectual sphere” (Radkiewicz 2011: 124). In this regard, Sadowska has succeeded in highlighting one of the fundamental perspectives adopted by feminist criticism, that of turning to women’s experiences (Showalter 1993: 121; Hannam 2007: 148).

To summarize the article, my intention is to highlight several significant practices that the creator accentuated. Specifically, she explicitly refers to the validity of using feminatives while also acknowledging the intricacy of the Polish language. One captivating scene from *Women’s Day* features a dialogue between *Halina Radwan* and her daughter, in which the latter demonstrates to her mother how she earned money. The girl, playing a video game character, points out to her mother that she has disregarded the gender of the character and has used the masculine form,

generally considered universal: “And what did you get so much money for, that warrior?” the mother asks, to which Miśka enlightens her, saying, “Warriorress!” (Sadowska 2012). It is worth pointing out that throughout most of the film, Halina Radwan referred to herself as a “manager”. However, education has not been in vain, as in one of the interviews Halina Radwan introduces herself as a “manageress”. Interestingly, the change in the language of the main character occurs only when the woman begins her fight for justice against the discount chain. Here again, the authorship of Sadowska’s work can be noticed. Specifically, in one of the interviews, the director recounted a herstory from her life. While playing “captain” with her daughter, her daughter declares that “I am a girl, I am the captainess!” (Rutkowska 2017). Furthermore, Sadowska emphasises her femininity and requests to be referred to as a directress, not a director (Wiśniewska 2013).

Sadowska articulates the need to mark her gender not only by using feminine endings. She argues that taking on a “male profession” results in the expectation that a woman working in directing must become a man on set. This strategy is adopted by some Polish female filmmakers, including Agnieszka Holland, and Dorota Kędzierzawska (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2015a: 52). I would therefore like to refer to the visual aspects that, in my opinion, Sadowska drew attention to in *Women’s Day*. In particular, after being promoted to the position of manager, Halina Radwan changed her appearance, but it was not because of her autonomous decision. The reason for the metamorphosis turned out to be the order from the woman’s boss, Eryk Gąsiorowski, who said to the main character: “Ms Halina, we have such beautiful uniforms, and you still walk around dressed like a guy – in trousers. It’s not appropriate, you are the company’s business card” (Sadowska 2012). With this, I think Sadowska has illustrated that a woman, despite promoting herself to the position of a manager, is not free to make her own choices regarding her image. The customary domination of men has established that women must wear skirts and dresses. Here, the practicality of wearing trousers should be considered. Halina Radwan, even as a manager, did physical work. As such, trousers probably proved to be more comfortable and functional clothing. The main character conscientiously obeyed her superior’s order, respected his suggestion. However, she reverted to the more practical clothes when she embarked on the victorious battle against her exploitative employer.

The technique applied by the director has shattered the traditional understanding of sexuality. Through her lens, women undergo a transformation that liberates them from being mere accessories, objects of visual pleasure subordinated to men. Consequently, there has been a reinterpretation of socio-cultural roles strongly intertwined with corporeality. The female characters have been empowered, becoming self-determined and willing to redefine and change the world into the one that is more just and accessible to women (Radkiewicz 2015: 91–93).

It is worth noting that during the making of the film *Women’s Day*, the director also released an album with the same title. In interviews, the artist points out that it

was thanks to female camaraderie that she had the opportunity to deeply understand and present feminist ideals. Her songs were inspired by the works of eminent feminist researchers and essayists, such as Susan Sontag, Barbara Kruger and Simone de Beauvoir. The multifaceted collaboration with representatives of Polish women's movements, Katarzyna Bratkowska and Kazimiera Szczuka, enabled the presentation of cultural texts by world-renowned feminist figures (Wiśniewska 2013).

The above discussion constitutes only a part of Sadowska's rich, engaging, and non-male-centric art. However, I think that by describing the figure of Halina Radwan, one can conclude that in her work the director undertakes a critique of predatory capitalism (Węglarczyk 2013), and by paying particular attention to the situation of women, she expresses her disapproval of patriarchal oppression. Hence, it is worth quoting the rhetorical questions posed by Margaret R. Higonnet (2015: 388), who writes: "did women indeed have their own renaissance, romantic movement, their own modernism? Until the appearance of another formation, did they experience and inscribe their historical experiences in a counter-language foreign to male school education?" I think that the quoted words reflect the tactics adopted by Sadowska. The director is trying to make society aware that the failure to include women's perspectives and narratives of their problems will result in further years of exclusion, which, in her opinion, should be "spoken about loudly and fought against persistently" (Węglarczyk 2013).

In *Women's Day*, the director also breaks stereotypes surrounding the perception of feminism, which she discusses in one of her interviews (Wiśniewska 2013). Throughout the film, Sadowska exposed her feminist sympathies. Positioning herself as a "reformer", she defied patriarchal gender norms and told the herstory of a marginalised group (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2022: 46–47). In conclusion, it is worth noting that "Maria Sadowska was prohibited by the film distributor from using the word 'feminism' or stating that the film is about women" (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2015a: 52). Despite these inconveniences, she managed to create "independent, auteur" cinema (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2015b: 260). What is more, thanks to "its bold message, it belongs to a small group of socially engaged films, solidifying the author's status as a feminist director" (Ozimek 2015: 116).

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