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Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears: A Matter of Gender and Fate

ABSTRACT

This paper offers an in-depth review of the Soviet hit film *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* (1979). Focusing on its female characters, it analyses the gender dynamics that prevailed in the Soviet Union at that time and the narrative impact it had on the plot. The article is divided into three subsections: a brief historical and political context, a depiction of the state of gender equality in the Soviet Union, as well as the power dynamics that existed both in the professional and domestic sphere, and a summary of the different femininities portrayed by the characters, along with the role morality and fate played in the film.

KEYWORDS: gender, femininity, morality, cinema, Soviet Union


STRESZCZENIE

Moskwa nie wierzy łzom: kwestia płci i losu

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi dogłębną analizę radzieckiego przeboju filmowego *Moskwa nie wierzy łzom* (1979). Skupiając się na postaciach kobiecych, analizuje dynamikę płci, jaka panowała w Związku Radzieckim w tamtym czasie, oraz jej wpływ na fabułę. Artykuł podzielony jest na trzy części: krótki kontekst historyczno-polityczny, przedstawienie stanu równouprawnienia płci w Związku Radzieckim, a także dynamiki władzy istniejącej zarówno w sferze zawodowej, jak i domowej, oraz podsumowanie różnych typów kobiecości portretowanych przez bohaterki i roli, jaką w filmie odgrywa moralność i los.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: gender, kobiecość, moralność, kino, Związek Radziecki

Before traveling to Moscow the summer of my 20th birthday, I decided to prepare my trip with a brief, beforehand immersion in the capital. A few minutes into looking for a movie that could provide me with that gripping

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glimpse, I came upon *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears*. A tale of love, friendship, working women, and an accurate depiction of Soviet society. It had received several accolades, and it appeared to be a widely popular film in Russia. I didn't hesitate much and watched it a couple of nights prior to my departure.

I remember the impact it had on me and how I marveled at Katya's fierce beauty and exceptional strength. A woman who in spite of having little to her favor had managed to become an engineer, raise a daughter on her own, and run a factory in the late 20th Century, was nothing short of a heroine to me.

However, I also remember how confused I felt by the end of the movie. Katya sat on the kitchen table, looked quietly at Gosha, and told him those unforgettable last words: "I've been looking for you for so long..." The climactic tone of that sentence and the emotions that transpired from the closing scene made it seem like what truly mattered all along was whether or not Katya would find love at last, whether it would stay, and whether it would become a reward for all the suffering she had endured. A final message considerably different from the one I had in mind. I was frustrated to discover that love and desperation for a society-approved family had somehow overshadowed the complexity of Katya's narrative subjectivity, and I continued to feel that way for many years.

When the idea to write this piece came to me, I knew I wanted to revisit the film. I wanted to dive into its fascinating intricacies, analyze them, establish connections between the plot and the state's domestic policies, and form a better opinion of it. Give Katya a second chance, so to speak. Five years have passed since I first saw *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* and what I intend to do in this paper is precisely that. A principled depiction of everything observed on and off camera so that if ever confused like me, the reader will have a better understanding of it.

A Brief Sociohistorical Context for the Film

Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears premiered for the first time at the end of 1979 and hit theaters en masse at the beginning of 1980. The end of the 70s and the 80s were significantly challenging times for the USSR, and although it is not within my purpose to illustrate the political ramifications of those years, it is fair to say that they shaped the film to a considerable extent.

Brezhnev's "developed socialism," later known as the "Era of Stagnation," started to exhibit clear signs of an economic debacle at the beginning of 1980 with the falling oil prices, low labor productivity, and

agricultural crisis. But to the world and the functioning of Soviet society, little was shown at that time. The Soviet Union was still an ever-expanding, peacefully coexisting body of democratic and socialist peoples. Communist ideology continued to be implemented and reinforced throughout different social areas, and the militarization and industrialization of the country, if not at the same pace, went on implacably.

Past the dark years of terror and mass repression, it seemed as if the USSR had become a slightly more open and modernized society. Foreign cultural influences, whether through music, fashion, or censored authors, were discussed and valued more publicly. And they were deemed *cool*. Liudmila, one of the film's lead characters, asks the babushka from the dorm's reception to answer with a simple *hello?* if ever called by one of her admirers. She seems proud to say that word in English, and the babushka rushes to write it down. Something similar happens in *The Most Charming and Attractive* (1985) when the female protagonist is advised to buy foreign pieces of clothes to impress her men colleagues at work, or in *Office Romance* (1977) when the secretary shows up at work wearing the most fabulous boots. Movie characters are not reluctant to show their appreciation towards foreign commodities, and the repercussions are undeniably less frightening than what they were in the past.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to limit the examples of this progressive openness to a word spoken in a different language, imported clothes, or to think it came during Brezhnev's time. If anything, as noted by Fedorov (2020), after the Prague Spring in 1968, Brezhnev strengthened the ideological control and single-minded discipline Khrushchev had let go of during the liberalized years of the "Thaw."

The movie, which is set at the end of the 50s in the first half and the end of the 70s in the second, brilliantly mirrors these transitional times in various scenes. One of them takes place in the apartment Katya and Liudmila are living in temporarily; they invite a few men for dinner, and one of them, a middle-aged academician who lived through the 30s, explains how hard it would have been for the younger generation to speak up as well. A young poet responds rebelliously, clearly influenced by the "freedom" he now experiences. The first half of the film is in imagery and dialogue just as lively and hopeful as those years were; the Festival of French Films the girls pass by, the space race mentioned during Katya's visit to the television studio, the streets' energy... But in the second half, twenty years later, the atmosphere is quite different. Rudolph, Katya's former lover, visits the factory she works in without recognizing her and introduces himself as Rudion, his real name. A minute later, Katya cynically mentions people going by foreign names during their youth and ridicules the trend; she also visits a professional matchmaker who expresses her concern about

loneliness amongst adults and hints at the alarming drop in the birth-rate. It could be attributed to the characters' maturity, but the dazzling breeze that had filled the initial scenes is replaced in the latter by a soberer mind-set regardless of the individuals' trajectories.

Perhaps the last element worth mentioning, and a pivotal aspect of Soviet society that is shown throughout the film and concerns the purpose of this piece, is the grandiosity of the industry apparatus and the impact the workforce had in the USSR. The enormous factories, the characters' occupations, and to which extent their lives revolve around labor and serving the state's objectives is of absolute importance when analyzing women's role in the film and real-life society.

The Gender Issue in the Film

There was an indisputable assumption within the Soviet Union that socialism had granted women equal rights with men (Gradskova, 2000, p. 6). The ideological pressure to serve a greater good, and the later deficit of men after World War II, resulted in an unprecedented number of women entering the workforce. As pointed out by Engel (1987, p. 788), women's emancipation "was to be based on women's full and equal participation in productive labor." In *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears*, we witness a fully normalized integration of women in the workforce. Katya, Liudmila, and Antonina move from their respective towns to Moscow to work, and they do so alone. Although labor migration movements became a common phenomenon throughout the 20th Century, it was rare to see women do it by themselves in the West. And while it wasn't common either in the Soviet Union and only allowed under educational premises, women who emigrated to work somewhere else in the Soviet Union at the end of the 50s had a place to live that didn't depend on their families or potential husbands, were financially independent, and had a life of their own. Quite an unimaginable thought anywhere else. Their autonomy ultimately belonged to the state, but they enjoyed "doing something socially useful, taking part in a collective, experiencing independence, and taking initiative" (Atwood, 1990, p. 121). The film's characters are an excellent example of it, but Katya's attitude and goals disclose a conflict within this newfound role that leaves women in a rather pessimistic position.

According to Gradskova (2000, p. 18), several studies show that women in the Soviet Union were mostly confined to unskilled labor, worked in low-paid industries, and occupied subordinate positions even in feminized industries such as healthcare or food processing. Men also outnumbered women in leadership positions and earned more money than their female

colleagues did. Antonina and Liudmila both have ordinary jobs with which they feel content, but Katya is ambitious and wants to become a chemical engineer. To which extent it is rare for a woman to be as bright and hardworking as Katya can be seen in one of the scenes where the television comes to interview “the only girl who works as a mechanic” (a relatively high-ranking position within the factory hierarchy) and in the second half, when Katya has become director of the factory and Rudolph tells her they’re planning on doing a documentary about her. Katya is the exception, and Soviet women, in spite of their independence and alleged equality with men, cannot count on the same advantages their male colleagues do.

During the 70s and the 80s, a particular type of female character started to appear in Soviet films. It was that of a “woman—emancipated, independent, equal, but at the same time, for some reason not very happy” (Stishova, as cited in Attwood, 1993, p. 82). Each of these women, and the fact that their commitment to work seemed strictly intertwined with a miserable personal life, revealed something more than a sociological conflict; they subtly brought to light the state’s political agenda.

Liudmila in *Office Romance* (1977), Anna in *Old Walls* (1972), Pasha in *The Beginning* (1970), Yelizaveta in *I wish to Speak* (1976), and Katya, of course, are determined, independent women who come to find there is a high price to pay for professional success. Interestingly enough, their heartache and sorrow never seem to be a result of the state’s inability to support women’s double-burdened lives, but rather a matter of happenstance. A message is sent, and the viewers are bound to believe that women who choose career over family are punished with loneliness and often-times, a loss of their most feminine traits.

For those of us who can watch these films within a cultural distance, Attwood’s (1993, p. 93) astute observation that the animosity between a work-oriented life and happiness of the heart is “always a negative comment on the Soviet Union’s insistence that the social good has to be placed above personal interests,” is an easy one to agree. However, for female viewers back then, these characters were a reflection of an undesirable future, and it was within the state’s best interest that it continued to be perceived that way.

In the Soviet Union, political stability and the idea of a nuclear family went hand in hand. After a brief post-revolutionary period of sexual liberation, by the mid-30s, the Soviet family had become one of the main foundations of socialism. “Abortion was declared illegal, homosexuality became a crime, divorce grew difficult and expensive to obtain, and the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children was restored” (Engel, 1987, p. 789). These measures had a remarkable impact on women, and the so-called “Soviet woman” came into existence.

Emancipated women entered the workforce, and their full-time work-days were followed by endless hours of childcare and housework; men hardly ever felt the need to share these responsibilities, and soon enough they found themselves with two full-time jobs. A double-burden life became the norm for Soviet women, and the expectations to fulfill both their roles were simply unrealistic. The media heavily echoed the deceptive image of a woman that was both a committed worker and a devoted wife and mother. As years went by, it became apparent that the impossibility to be that woman was saddling “society with a range of disturbing social problems.” (Attwood, 1993, p. 80). Amongst these problems, woman-initiated divorces and the collapse of the birth-rate were noticeably alarming.

By the time these overachieving, bitter female characters started to appear on the big screen, most real-life soviet women were overwhelmed by a life they struggled to lead. They invested so much time and energy at work, and later at home, that they either chose to have fewer children, or if too misunderstood by their partners, they asked for a divorce. This wasn't an outlook the state could afford; divorces led to instability, fewer children led to a debilitated workforce, and both these circumstances threatened the health and continuity of the Soviet Union.

The demographic crisis resulted in strengthened pro-natalist policies that found their way through society through mass-communicating instruments such as cinema. What most of these movies intended to say, what Katya was referring to when she told Antonina that “once you've got everything you've wanted, you end up howling like a wolf,” is that even for women who succeed at their jobs, to get married and give birth must be an integral part of their lives. They're never encouraged to sacrifice their professional activity, but “by means of the positive imagery, Soviet media endorse the perpetuation of women's double burden” (Engel, 1987, p. 791).

According to Gradskova (2000, p. 29), surveys conducted in the 1970s showed that “25% of women would like to limit their families with one child, 60% – two children.” The idea that women were neglecting their *natural* duties caught on with the collective consciousness, and eventually, they were asked to choose between motherhood and a successful career. However, the truth is that it was never a decision they could make unhindered. On the one hand, as Engel (1987, p. 794) writes: “the government's policy of pronatalism and its desire to control personal life leads to ideological and administrative pressures that penalize the ‘morally unstable’ and make marriage a cornerstone of the respectability necessary for career advancement.” On the other hand, when a life of solitude and heartbreak is associated with success in the workplace and female characters in hit movies emphasize the consequences of leaving family behind, prioritizing a well-balanced home seems to be the only valid choice.

Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears, as well as many other films, were “a clear reflection of the pro-family campaign, with its call for the resurrection of more traditional male and female roles.” (Attwood, 1993, p. 91). But in many ways, Katya is also an exception within this group of unhappy women who succeed at work. In spite of her toughness, she is a feminine woman and a mother to Alexandra, a teenage girl who proves to be very mature and well-mannered (dysfunctional families were commonly blamed for the growing rate of teenage delinquency). The only thing missing is a man that can fill in the role as a father figure and a commanding husband. It is no coincidence that right after Katya tells Antonina how much she envies her family and marriage to Nikolai, fate puts Goshka on the same train as her. She is not a lost cause, and it seems that choosing to have Alexandra while she was studying to become an engineer, working her way through life, and waiting to find the right man, end up being morally compensated decisions.

We've discussed, and exemplified through films, women's role in Soviet society; their obligations, exhaustion, and loneliness. But not much has been said about the reason why female characters became more frequently the protagonists of Soviet films during those decades, and about the positive elements to it. Women were not only the initiators of these social conflicts we've mentioned, but they were also the recipients of all their consequences. This turned them into psychologically fascinating subjects and far more interesting characters than men (Attwood, 1993, p. 82). To deal with these problems, and do it in a bold, resilient manner; to navigate through life with bare feelings, and even a sense of humor, and to survive regardless of the level of tragedy, made women too valuable of cinematic subjects not to be brought to the big screen.

Femininity, Moral Lessons, and Fate

So far, we have attempted to review *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* from a sociohistorical perspective, and we have analyzed some of the gender dynamics that singularized the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to the female characters of the film. To comprehend the impact these gender dynamics and societal pressures had on their personalities, we should try to deconstruct the different femininities they embody, the contrast of their relationship with men, and the moral repercussions of their actions.

It was a firmly established notion in the Soviet Union (and everywhere else, actually) that motherhood was a fundamental aspect of a woman's *nature*. This role endowed “women unique personal qualities –such as

sensitivity, delicacy, and a capacity for nurturing” and by the 60s, these traits were considered “immutable, and biologically rather than socially created” (Engel, 1992, p. 320).

Both these roles, motherhood and child-rearing, and the traits they entailed, shaped the definition of hegemonic femininity in Soviet society. In a way, it was a restored, yet completely new femininity; past the angelic beauty of tsarist times and the daring attractiveness of revolutionary women, the Great Patriotic War forced women to fight hand in hand with men. Because of those circumstances and the duty to serve the Motherland, there was a process of masculinization of women at the front (brilliantly depicted in Svetlana Alexievich’s *The Unwomanly Face of War*); it was necessary that women rapidly merged on the battlefield (a radically masculine space), and at the expense of their femininity, because the future of the Soviet Union, and the world, was at stake. And it was necessary a few years later that they partially resumed their roles as subjects of desire because population growth, and conventional, nurturing families were a priority.

What we learn from hegemonic femininity based on this is not only a complete subjugation to the state’s interests but an interdependence on hegemonic masculinity. And as a result of this interdependence, another conflict occurs when “the positioning of femininities in relation to hegemonic masculinity and the workings of internal processes within the category of femininity, devalue and marginalize specific kinds of femininities while assigning privileged status to others” (Budgeon, 2014, p. 321).

To exemplify the previous observation, we should delve into the different types of femininities that emerge in the analysis of Liudmila, Antonina, and Katya’s character. Antonina, for once, is the epitome of conventional femininity. She is in the first half a shy, attentive, and obedient young woman, and a wife and mother of three in the second. She doesn’t share Katya’s ambition or Liudmila’s flirtatiousness, so her position at work never becomes a conflict, and she is faithful to her first love, Kolya, whom she marries and eventually has three boys (given the shortage of men in the Soviet Union, the decision to have her raise three boys in the film only accentuates the picture-perfect Soviet family previously essayed). She is happier than her friends, but her life is rather uneventful. There is no psychological complexity to her and her appearance, even if feminine, is a discrete, traditional one.

Katya is the lead character of the film and the ultimate combination of both Antonina and Liudmila’s femininities. She is studious, strong-willed, and composed, but she also proves to be quite naive. There is a tender quietude similar to that of Antonina in her character, yet she unhesitatingly experiences the world of courting with Liudmila, for which she is

punished. Never as provocative as Liudmila, nor monotonous like Antonina, Katya is undoubtedly beautiful. In the second half of the film, she is just as feminine as she was in the first half, yet she is now the director of a factory. The fact that she preserves all of these traits in spite of her position is of significant importance to understand why she eventually keeps Gosha by her side, and why society approves of her.

As stated by Stishova (1993, p. 176), there was a danger for Soviet women that their role as socialist workers would lead to “self-liquidation and the denial of her feminine essence.” However, it was not a matter of denying women’s most feminine traits, but to find a way that they could peacefully coexist with new, inevitably more masculine ones. To put it simply, protect the motherly attentiveness and still allow an emotionally detached, competent character at work.

This balance was vital because the masculinization of women was “detrimental to their domestic and maternal duties” (Attwood, 1990, p. 135), and because these traits were never supposed to upset hegemonic masculinity.

If we compare Katya in *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* and Liudmila in *Office Romance* (1977), for instance, we can easily see who oversteps the limit of taking on masculine patterns of behavior. Katya and Liudmila are both tenacious and well-respected (sometimes feared) women at work. However, Katya dresses in a more feminine manner, wears makeup, surrounds herself with girlfriends, and by the time Gosha comes into the picture, she is ready to let him become the man of the family and accept her naturally submissive role in domestic matters. Liudmila, on the other hand, is practically a social pariah; there is hardly any recognizable femininity in her, and she falls in love with a single father who coincidentally lacks most of the masculine traits she has. Anatoly and Liudmila are a histrionic example of the role-reversion conflict the Soviet Union tried to overturn, and once again, cinema helped deliver the lingering message. But for Katya and Gosha, the situation is quite different. None of them have allowed their respective femininity and masculinity to collude, and yet it takes Gosha a lot of adjustment to accept Katya’s social position.

Gosha, on the other hand, is the personification of the Soviet man. He is a dedicated worker, who in spite of his remarkable abilities remains humble and content in his position. He is admired by his friends, he doesn’t drink excessively, he carries himself vigorously, and he is a man with strict, traditional values. To Katya, he is nothing but respectful and kind, but when he shares his thoughts on the role of men and women in society, it becomes clear that Katya’s circumstances antagonize his viewpoint. During their date in the countryside, he tells her that families can’t work if women earn more money. When he helps Aleksandra protect her

boyfriend from being beaten up, and she praises him, he refuses to take credit and tells her that “making a decision and fight for it is a man’s duty.” And after Katya confronts him, his answer summarizes the very essence of his mindset: “As for the decisions in this house, I’ll be making them for the simple reason that I am the man here.” Katya agrees to it, and the power dynamics between them, perfectly aligned with the *nature* of their gender, are established. It might also be noted that while Aleksandra quickly adjusts to the idea of a stranger becoming the leading figure of the family, in *My Mom Has Married* (1969), Boris, the teenage son of single mom Zina, despite being in the same situation, rebels against his mother’s new partner and strongly opposes their marriage. Gosha never threatens Katya’s authority because Aleksandra assumes that it is within his right to claim it, and her obligation to accept it. But Zina’s new husband intends to become the man of the family, a responsibility Boris feels like his own and tries to defend.

Therefore, it is obvious that these behavioral patterns and dynamics within the household are pedagogically inculcated from a very young age. One could be surprised that Katya would be willing to let Gosha be in charge so easily. After all, she is an emancipated woman who has raised Aleksandra on her own and is in a position of significant power at work, but the truth is that her subconscious would rarely allow questioning such deeply-rooted notions of domestic life.

To my understanding, and equally important to the analysis of the film, there are two latent characters in *Moscow Doesn’t Believe in Tear* without whom we cannot understand Liudmila’s character or the personal trajectories of the rest of the ensemble. One is Morality, and the other one is Fate.

As believed by Turovskaya (1993, p. 143), “a woman’s erotic appeal was never her most important quality in Russian culture. She performed the function, primarily, of a moral standard.” Women were taught to behave according to a set of moral standards that adjusted to the ideology of the “Soviet family.” This perception of women as principled, non-erotic beings, was specially strengthened at the beginning of the 30s after the government decided to cease any expression of sexual freedom, both in film and real life. As years went by, the intensification of the pro-natalist campaign and the need for stabilized, nuclear families, made it very clear that there was little space in the Soviet Union for women with dubious morals. Liudmila, perhaps the most psychologically complex character of the film, is the perfect example of that.

During the first half of the movie, Liudmila is a funny, confident, and smart young woman who knows her way around men and doesn’t like to be told how to live her life. She is rather picky when it comes to her suitors,

doesn't show any interest in the idea of marriage, and when she goes with her friends to spend the weekend at Kolya's parents' dacha, she tells Katya that she would rather kill herself before living in the countryside. She is lively and unapologetic, and she embodies the type of femininity the Soviet Union would censor. Not only does she try to differentiate herself from her female colleagues at work by flaunting her superior attractiveness, but she is scolded for not even paying the Union fees. She seems to be neither a valuable worker nor a righteous woman, but surprisingly enough, she meets Sergey, a famous hockey player, and they marry. There is no apparent punishment for her superficiality. However, twenty years later, we find out quite the opposite. In the second half of the movie, Liudmila is a middle-aged divorcée living a miserable life. Sergey has become an alcoholic who only comes back to her for money, she has a boring, unrewarding job, and her now short list of admirers are either married or uninterested. She has been punished after all, and there is no salvation for her. What we gather from her story arc is the state's ultimate disapproval of women, who like Liudmila, don't abide by the moral rules.

But morality's latent effects in the film can also be seen in Katya's story arc. In spite of the Soviet Union's strict sexual morality, there was a state of relative freedom in the years previous to marriage, in which the workings of moral principles seemed to be looser. Katya exceeds the limit of enjoyment young women were allowed (by having sexual relations with Rudolph) and becomes pregnant. She endures the shame of being a single mother, and because she thrives on conflict, and proves to be a very profitable worker, she is compensated. For her, there is moral salvation, even if only because of her worth as a professional, and as a potential wife. To Liudmila, who will not provide the state with any children, who men see more like a lover than a caring wife, and who is not an essential employee, there is not. And any time Katya comes close to crossing the line, we are subtly reminded of it. For instance, when at the beginning of the second half she is seeing a married man (an evidently frowned upon affair), the song playing as they kiss is the very same that is played at Katya and Rudolph's infamous rendezvous, *Bésame Mucho*.

Nonetheless, Morality could never make such an impact on its own, which is why it requires another latent force to mold the characters' lives, Fate. For Western societies in which Catholicism governed their value systems and moral codes, it was natural to attribute any kind of punishment or lesson to God's doing. For a society that had the ideological objective of eliminating religion, it was necessary to create another form of spiritual authority. In *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears*, Fate becomes that omnipotent ruler. We are encouraged to believe that the destinies of Liudmila, Antonina, and Katya, the consequences of their choices in life, and the

lessons they learn are a matter of Fate, instead of the reflection of the harm inflicted by the state's ideological agenda or the unrealistic expectations women have to live with on a daily basis, not to mention the double standard of morality that contradicts the gender equality the Soviet Union had proclaimed achieved.

Conclusion

A month has passed since I started writing this piece. As I sit and type these lines, I realize I have come to understand more than Katya's last words. I have delved into her world in the hope that I could make a fair depiction of every influential factor to her story, and I think I have detailed a significant amount of them.

The objective of this paper was to identify gender dynamics within the movie, which simultaneously served as a reflection of real-life dynamics in the Soviet Union. I wanted to find out whether Katya was even aware of this unjust double-burdened life we have analyzed throughout the article, of Gosha's sexist expectations of her, and the cost of real emancipation for a woman of that time. I believe she was not aware, and I believe most viewers couldn't possibly be either. As previously mentioned, these types of behavioral patterns were inculcated from a young age, both at school and home. Young women knew what it took to lead a life that could be approved by society and more importantly, that could be of use to socialism.

Just as my upbringing and knowledge of different feminist discourses have provided me with an insight on potential issues these female characters faced because of their gender, it is expected that they couldn't possibly reflect on them or even question that they existed in the first place. As stated by Attwood (1993, p. 79):

Amongst the population as a whole, feminism found little resonance. The Soviet press portrayed the Western women's movement in wholly negative terms, as a hysterical middle-class phenomenon which had no relevance in the Soviet Union.

Whatever process of transformation Western women were experiencing abroad, it didn't permeate Soviet society. The state's political agenda, together with endless years of patriarchy, ultimately prevented Katya, in spite of her independent and self-assured character, to wish nothing more but a loving, man-ruled home. And it is within this paradoxical outcome, that the woman question in the Soviet Union becomes a fascinating phenomenon to study.

However, it would be a huge mistake to undermine any of the female characters' mesmerizing traits and extraordinary influence in spite of every gender issue disclosed. There is a genuine sense of sisterhood within them that is hard to come by in films. They are strong, compassionate women, and most of all, they are authentic. And even if the Soviet Union was far from being a model of gender equality, as observed in this article, one can't help but admire the efforts it did to integrate women into the workforce, often providing them with a valuable sense of self-respect.

I am sure that my horizon of cultural beliefs has prevented me from seeing it all, or arguably seeing a bit too much, but perhaps because of this, the reader might find this perspective something worth a second thought. And with it, the conversation about women's place in society, whether through the analysis of a film or an argument between two colleagues, might continue.

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