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Dismantling Patriarchy
Western Cultural Narratives: Myths, Symbols, Motifs

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For Thea.

Abstract

This thesis explores the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures within Western Cultural Narratives, focusing on Myths, Symbols, and Motifs that perpetuate gender inequality and gender-based violence. By examining historical and contemporary texts, media, and cultural artefacts this study highlights how patriarchal ideologies are embedded and sustained in societal narratives within Western Culture. The data on gender-based violence furthermore reveals alarming trends and a rising number of femicides and homicides within the LGBTQI+ community. This thesis aims to understand the mechanisms and dismantle the cultural foundations that sustain gender-based violence and oppression. Key feminist theories, starting with Simone De Beauvoir but also including Rosi Braidotti and Teresa De Lauretis, as well as contemporary scholars, provide the analytical framework for deconstructing these narratives. The research aims to understand the mechanisms of patriarchy in storytelling and propose strategies for rewriting these patriarchal narratives to foster a more equitable cultural discourse and unlearning patriarchy as a system.

Keywords: Unlearn Patriarchy, Patriarchal Culture, Cultural Narratives, Western Society, Western Myths

Introduction

We consume stories every day. These stories we tell and listen to contain certain values and beliefs woven into narratives, influencing societal behaviour and cultural belief. Social norms, stereotypes and gender-roles coming with certain expectations are woven into fairy tales, films, song lyrics and all kinds of narratives of daily life. At the same time, gender inequality and gender-based violence are objects of daily life, too; numbers are rising. At least two women per day are killed in the European Union by an intimate partner, ex-partner, or family member. Gender-based violence is violence that happens because of gender. Affecting predominantly women, rising numbers and trends regarding femicides and homicides within the LGBTQI+ community are alarming.

Primary object of this thesis is to understand, explore and deconstruct the pervasive narratives of patriarchy in Western culture. The role of various cultural narratives, such as myths, motifs, symbols and metaphors in serving a patriarchal narrative and patriarchal ideologies is examined. How they shape, with the help of patriarchal culture, certain societal norms and gender roles, that configure the systematic structure of patriarchy, its meaning and its heritage, is explored. By critically analysing certain narratives, underlying dominant cultural narratives serving patriarchal structures that are discovered and dismantled, this thesis aims to challenge systemic gender biases contributing to gender inequality and gender-based violence.

There are three main objectives of this thesis: first, a critical analysis and identification of the cultural content of Western culture must be involved. Cultural artefacts of diverse nature are examined for their patriarchal narratives; understanding how stories within Western society are constructed and crafted, which perspectives they are told from and whose are prioritised and the way gender stereotypes and roles are portrayed in them. Secondly, the way these patriarchal narratives influence society and its perception of gender. They shape language and the ways of speaking in the media. Representation of gender, societal attitudes and behaviours as well as beliefs about gender are interconnected with the representation of dominant cultural narratives. Thirdly, by understanding how this storytelling influences and interconnects with the system of a patriarchal society, new ways of narrating and doing storytelling can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society.

Key theories from feminist studies are employed and connected to cultural studies and psychoanalytic theory and serve as a theoretical framework. Summarising them in Chapter 2 under the history of feminist theories, key ideas are connected and put into context. This framework examines historical and contemporary texts, media and cultural artefacts, especially films, in order to understand how patriarchal culture is embedded in Western Culture. Trying to outline the crucial role of Western Cultural Narratives when it comes to understanding the ideology of patriarchy, the construction, reinforcement and reproduction of gender stereotypes throughout patriarchal Narratives influences the maintaining of patriarchal values and societal norms.

Through this methodology, two films of contemporary culture are conducted and analyse the manifestation of patriarchal ideologies in Western Society.

Gender-based violence is real. And gender-based violence happens every day. This thesis aims to understand how cultural narratives support gender-based violence and gender inequality, as patriarchal values are maintained in the constant reproduction of patriarchal narratives. In this regard, certain feminist and cultural ideas are contextualised and connected to cultural artefacts from different historical periods. Patriarchal narratives and their variety of manifestations in Western culture are dismantled, as humans try to make sense of the world through stories. Finally understanding the importance and possibility to change the world through a storytelling free from patriarchal values is part of this thesis.

As following, this work contains six chapters. The first chapter, “Polarising Patriarchy”, introduces the concept of patriarchy, its history and especially its social and cultural dimension. Its link to Greek mythology and biblical narratives is discussed and contextualised in its structures, from ancient societies towards modern patriarchy in contemporary times. Patriarchy, a male-dominated social system, bases its power structure on the idea of oppression. The problem of trivialization is discussed through the usage of the term in popular culture and as marketing-tool. Nonetheless, the discussion about patriarchy and its dismantling is stressed, as statistics on gender-based violence show alarming rates of homicides and gender inequality are still perpetuated through patriarchy.

The second chapter focuses on key concepts from influential feminist thinkers in chronological order, starting with Simone De Beauvoir. Outlining the classical binary distinction of gender and the woman as Other, a secondary

position, sexual difference as well as the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. The idea of gender and sexual difference as a patriarchal and socially constructed ideology follows. This ideology happens to the disadvantage of women, as they are paradoxically represented within a heteronormative male-dominated spectrum that understands gender as an institutional structure imposed by a patriarchal society. Key ideas from feminist thinkers over Luce Irigaray, Donna Haraway and her cyborg Manifesto, Judith Butler’s idea of performing gender are followed by Teresa De Lauretis’ “eccentric subject”, Rosi Braidotti’s “nomadic subject” and finally Françoise Vergès idea towards decolonising feminism.

The third chapter explores the concept of culture within patriarchal society and examines how patriarchal culture is produced and reproduced through social interactions, institutions and symbolic practices. Gender inequality and oppression, perpetuated through misogyny, marginalisation and misrepresentation, are delved through a social identity in Western Culture, that perpetuates gender biases through cultural norms and beliefs supporting and manifesting patriarchal values. The idea of the Philosophy of Differences as well as the concept of subjectivity are introduced.

The fourth chapter discusses how language constructs and maintains patriarchal narratives through its reinforcement of patriarchal structures and conduits patriarchal ideologies in vocabulary and grammar, shaping identities through its representational practices. A critique of the binary opposition based also on spoken, nonverbal, aural and visual elements of language and its notion based on differences in oppositions, follows. Emphasising the importance of

individual perspectives included in language, the intersection of language itself with power and identity is discussed.

Subsequently, the storytelling of patriarchy is discussed in the fifth chapter, by analysing Western narratives, motifs, myths and symbols in different historical periods and from different cultural artefacts, and their pervasive nature, shaping and constructing historical, cultural and societal identities. Enforcing societal norms and manifesting patriarchal values, Western patriarchal storytelling functions as a cultural practice enforcing male dominance and gender stereotypes and the symbolic representation of “the feminine” as secondary. Depicting gender-based violence in certain narratives shows a continuous systematic nature from ancient to modern cultural artefacts, based on the notion of gender-based oppression structures. Two case studies of modern films follow.

Conclusively the sixth chapter gives a summary of how Western cultural narratives and their motifs, myths and symbols produce and reproduce continuously gender inequality and gender-based violence through the persistence of patriarchal ideologies. Deconstructing the hierarchical structure of male dominance within cultural artefacts throughout history, the conclusion is made that gender is socially constructed and influenced by societal norms, while language reinforces patriarchal ideologies. Criticising the oversimplification but also trivialisation of patriarchy, an expanded future research including non-Western perspectives and the intersection of colonialism and capitalism is suggested. Concluding with understanding, that patriarchy needs to be unlearned and the narratives to be rewritten, in order to manifest more adequate gender representation as well as the need for intersectionality can work as a transformative power to reduce gender inequality.

Chapter 1

Polarising “Patriarchy”

The title of this work uses the term “patriarchy”. A term that is frequently used and widely recognised, mostly used to polarise. Not at least in Greta Gerwig’s movie *Barbie*, celebrated as a fantastical visualising of a patriarchal “Barbieland”, employing pinkwashing or rhetorical strategies. Some may refer to patriarchy as a pop cultural depiction and critique of violence towards women. However, what is this work referring to, when using this term?

Per definition, patriarchy describes a social system with a male-dominated power structure and resulting privileges for men, speaking in a binary gender view (Cnn, 2023). As it is a social system, it includes certain structures throughout different aspects of society such as culture, politics, religion, inheritance, and economics. Deriving from the Greek word “patriarkhēs” it can be translated as “the rule of the father”. Following Allan Johnson Smith, it is not referring to a man, any men or a collection of men, but to a systematically shaped society, in which men and women participate not equally. This kind of society contributes in all fields, for example, education, employment, care-work, income, gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and to a certain point even voting rights in history.

Within the “koinè” during Hellenistic and Roman periods, “patriarchy” referred not just to the social and family structure, but also to the upholding idea, that the father or the eldest male held authority over this same structure. Being the head of the household, called “oikos”, the eldest male held the legal authority over all the other family members. The dependency of this oldest male towards the other members was manifested and maintained through this idea (Lefkowitz & Fant,

2005). Within Roman society, where the patriarchal system is understood as “*patria potestas*”, the male head of the family had absolute authority over the household, including the control over the family property, power over all legal decisions and even arranging marriages within a more economical aspect (Patterson, 1998).

As in patriarchal societies, typically the older males were holding more power and control, and age plays a significant role. The hierarchy was based on and reinforced through gender and age. The concept of being ruled by elders is called “gerontocracy” and is historically and culturally deeply intertwined with patriarchal structures (Saller, 1994). Ensuring the continuity of patriarchal control, societal norms and legal codes were codifying the authority of the male head of a family during Greek and Roman times. Being justified through religious and cultural beliefs, it portrayed the male authority as natural and divinely ordained (Saller, 1994).

Following this idea, Greek myths are structured accordingly: characterised by the repetitive theme of power, that is conveyed through a complex web of familial and societal relationships, significant events such as cultural practices, human behaviour, and natural phenomena are explained and understood through a series of narratives (Buxton, 2004). We all know Zeus, the king of the gods, possessing through all the narratives power and knowledge, and some would say control, that is enforced as order between gods and humans. Zeus embodies this authority, which makes him a patriarchal figure of the Greek pantheon. In contrast to this, Tiresias, the blind prophet, represents guidance and wisdom as the knowledgeable elder. He holds the patriarchal position through his age, being understood hierarchically higher, holding dominance as male (Kearns, 2004).

Mythology portrays this hierarchical society where dominant male figures hold power over humans and non-humans, inheriting this power through the male lineage. This reinforces the idea of male primacy in human realms, but also divine as power gets trans-missioned through male heirs (Morford *et al.*, 2013). Myths tell this structural conception of the world through figurations, narratives, filled

with metaphors and symbols. A series of narratives, transporting cultural beliefs and traditions, can be interpreted in the Bible, as the most important collection of religious texts for Christianity and Judaism.

In the Bible, the term “Patriarchs” is used commonly, starting in the narratives of the Book Genesis. The Bible uses the term “Patriarchs”, when referring to the founding fathers of the Israelite nation, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons, who became the leaders of the twelve tribes in Israel. The Patriarchs are hence a central figuration, used in a metaphorical way. In this sense, Abrahams is one of the central figures and is described as the father of a great nation, depicted as the recipient of God’s promises. This patriarchal narrative is interpreted as foundational and authoritative and a reflection of God’s design for family and social order (Barton & Muddiman, 2001). Describing a social system, where male figures have the power, own roles of political leadership and keep the moral authority, as well as the control over property, the Bible refers to patriarchy as a patriarchal system with power positions and relations in a hierarchical manner. Ones descendants and heritage are traced through male lines, especially their names (2001; Meyers). The patriarchal traditions were retroactions of the monarchic period. It is assumed that these patriarchal groups were semi-nomadic and settled independently, following individual and diverse clan gods (Pagolu, 1998).

Patriarchal societies also hold in history, which results in deeply anchored stereotypes and belief systems ending in biases about women and men. Based on cultures, norms and stereotypes, and to be proven in this work, also on language. Generally speaking, patriarchy perpetuates gender inequality, normalises gender-based violence for its dominance and control mechanism, restricts women’s autonomy and beholds gender stereotypes and objectification (Patterson, 1998). Nevertheless, the word patriarchy is mostly used in a metaphorical sense.

More and more often, the term “patriarchy” decorates posters, cups and t-shirts, becoming popular in media but also in daily life conversations. Films, series, and even working places, all advertising to be feminist, suggest that feminism has

developed into something more: pop feminism. Not far away from this concept is the use of feminism as marketing strategy, sometimes ending in pinkwashing. Opaque ideas, trivialisation (Walby, 1990) and inauthenticity seem to blur the meaning and knowledge about the term and what its actual meaning is. As Walby claims, patriarchy as a concept comes in different forms and with different definitions and therefore needs to be addressed on different levels. It is not just about the articulation of capitalism and racism, but goes much further into historical and cultural abstractions (1990, pp. 20f)

Indeed, when “patriarchy” is used without considering the historical, cultural and/or social context, it can oversimplify the effect and impact of the term greatly. How feminist can an agency for communication be, if it still needs to write green numbers and is part of an economical and therefore capitalistic chain? How precisely can a film describe any form of male dominance or inequality in all the different levels and nuances in which the patriarchal system operates in, having a duration of 1 hour and 54 minutes? How authentic is a marketing campaign advertising LGBTQI+-friendliness or colouring everything into the rainbow colours, when there are legacies about the denunciation of LGBTQI+ people or an attack on an open LGBTQI+ person just made the news one week before?

On that account, analytical clarity based on precise definitions is crucial for understanding and addressing gender-based inequalities and oppression and the credo for this work. Gender inequalities are real, and present and need to be addressed in all their nuances. As Teresa De Lauretis puts it: “Male power produces the world before it distorts it” (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 158).

It is about the metalevel of hegemonic thinking; put into ideologies, that are dominantly influencing our cultural, political and social practices and perpetuated by those in power and approved as the norm is understood as. Using the metaphor of the “rhizome”, a root system spreading out in many different directions, Gilles Deleuze for example tries to describe how identities and ideas are interconnected in the tree-like structures of hegemonic thinking. For him this metaphorical use criticises the fixed structures and the idea of binary oppositions (male/female)

dominated by traditional Western thought (Deleuze, 1994). Feminist thoughts and calls are criticising this way of thinking, as it is shaping and controlling a society under marginalisation and suppression of alternative perspectives (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The privilege for males, lies on structures of domination, male identification and male centrism, the aspect of oppression of women as well as control and the non-acknowledgement of agency for women and their exploitation. Growing up in a patriarchal society has left women to believe that men hold primary importance and power. Women were taught that their own identities are defined in the relation, and moreover the negotiation of men. Women's self-perception and societal contributions are reinforcing the male-dominant culture, reinforcing gender inequalities. Understanding women's social and sexual identity as internalised and externally constructed, is what feminism is trying to make obvious (De Lauretis, 1990).

Despite the possible trivialisation aspiring from the pop-culturally fashionable use of the term “patriarchy”, it has been specifically chosen to polarise thought and discussion within this work. The term is neither used in a way to generalise nor to attack male individuals. It is chosen particularly for the reason to not simplify the word, nor the term and its meaning and impact within societies. It has been chosen to overview the long history of the term, its influences and the structuralism that is the basis of any patriarchal society. For the fact, that during daily life and basic education, media and artefacts are most of the time not critically used, hiding the internalised and culturally constructed ideas coming with pop culture, stories, myths and all kind of symbols. To understand the multilevel appearance of the concept of “patriarchy”, for the further work it will be used as an adjective for the different entities it can be applied to and to understand the different aspects of a patriarchal society.

“Humanity is Male”

We do not organise our society nowadays within the structure of polis, where due to the domestic sphere, women were primarily responsible for taking care of the household and children’s care, mostly excluded and far away from public life. Political engagement as well as the right for education are wins of feminist movements and activism. Although women are nowadays in most countries allowed to vote and go to university, equality is not exactly what applies to 49,6 percent of humans in the world (*Are There More Men or More Women in the World?*, 2020). Why do I still assume there is something like the existence of a patriarchal society and culture?

The observation Simone De Beauvoir made in the 1950s about the male humanity, title of this chapter, reveals the position of understanding each male individual as the subject and any woman as the “Other” (De Beauvoir, 2012). It is an observation that also modern researchers like for example Caroline Criado-Perez mention throughout her work *Invisible women* (2019). Understanding that men were taken to represent the lives for humans overall, Criado-Perez sees silences everywhere, when it comes to the “other half” of humanity (2019). This silencing, even invisibility, inscribed in our entire culture from literature to economics, the history and stories we tell ourselves, are “disfigured – by a female-shaped “absent presence”” (Perez, 2019, p. 12) of the gender data gap. This gender data gap was created by the male-dominated culture, leading from the idea of the male perspective as universal. This pushes female experiences into a niche position, framed to be ignorable, dispensable, forgettable and suppressible, at the cost of women (Perez, 2019).

The same silence is described by Rebecca Solnit (2020) as the reason why she became a feminist writer. She talks about the disappearing of women and the erasure of women by men. About physically abusive fathers, the norm of male aggression and her friend, who gave her a desk and was stabbed 15 times by an ex-boyfriend later.

After the *Me Too* movement¹ a lot of our perception and our news agenda changed. Reports of sexism, sexual violence, physical violence, gender pay gaps, misrepresentation of women in leading positions, gender-neutral language to just name a few are present online and offline. Guidelines and reports help to prove, understand and restructure gender inequality. The European Institute for Gender Equality defines gender inequality as the “unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender, manifesting in various aspects of social, political, economic, and cultural life” (2023).

“This has always been a man’s world”, is the introduction of Simone De Beauvoir’s chapter “Nomads” in her book *The Second Sex* (2012, p. 104). To understand these hierarchical structures, she goes back to prehistoric research, ethnography and existentialist philosophy. The basic idea of the *polis*, being a hierarchical organised structure, might not be called like this anymore, but is yet existent. Any hierarchical structure indeed implements the degradation of another kind and the sovereignty upon the other, a marginalisation and under-power on the one side, and a power-over, a rendition and a position from above on the other side. Hierarchy means a division of categories, a binary structure of power, nihilistic thinking into good and bad. Underlying the binary understanding of sexes is not only based on a biological-organic difference but resulting in a distinction between man and woman and everything that is understood and lived by this.

The idea of dualistic oppositions is based on the sub-categorization of otherness, which is a thinking in terms of difference-from. Especially European fascism showed the most repressive mechanisms to proceed despotism, which can be described in other words as an absolute power ruled by violence and oppression. In order to construct exclusion and domination powers upon “others”, the differentiation in categories understood less worthy is needed (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 87f). Deleuze and Guattari combine the popularism of fascism in the 20th century with the system of capitalism and patriarchy (1987, pp. 235ff). Simone De

¹ Founded by Tarana Burke in 2006 the *Me Too* movement is a movement against sexual assault and harassment, encouraging individuals to share their experiences on Social Media under the hashtag MeToo.

Beauvoir was partially speaking about it in *The Second Sex* as difference understood in essentialist ways in order to proceed with certain connotations and consequently actions.

To gain dominance based on hierarchical power-shifting positions, oppression is used. The basis of oppression is made upon different concepts. It is functioning socially and economically as in inequality of rights due to gender and sex such as marriage rights or abortion rights. Economically it results in statistically proven gender pay gaps or unpaid care work that splits up in inequality in between gender categories. These two factors play in relation to subjectivity and identity.

Being a woman, for example, is just one part of a person's identity. This one part of identity is also shaped by class, race, ethnicity, location and sexuality, making it impossible to understand gender separated from these factors. Oversimplification and the universalisation of patriarchy can cause the same simplification for the various and complex experiences of women (Butler, 1990).

Identity is the sense of individuals as their subject and within social groups. Identity is a label, a collection of ideas and understanding about who we are, how we act and where we belong. Identity is a place for variable and multiple positions within the social field formed by historical processes. It provides a form of political consciousness, initially on the oppositional idea of woman to man with a binary view of gender. Oppression is constituted on this idea. “An oppressor” can just occur in these dualistic opposed sociosexual relations, but not as unified or constantly individually divided within these dualistic positions. Variables of oppression are manifested in classifications such as age, race, life-style and culture and societal class.

But there is more: every 11 minutes a femicide happens (*GBV Data Explorer*, 2021). According to Eurostat 2021, 720 women within the 17 European member states were murdered in 2021, by family members, relatives or their intimate partner. A femicide is the highest form of gender-based violence as it is defined as the intentional killing of women and even girls based solely on their

gender, showing deeply rooted gender inequalities and discrimination structures. 2022 was the year, where just in Germany 133 women were killed by their partner or ex-partner. Statistically speaking, this means that almost every day a partner or ex-partner is trying to kill a woman, and every third day it actually happens (deutschlandfunk.de, 2023). In contrast the trivialisation of a femicide, or any other kind of gender-based violence, within the media by reducing the act as mere “tragedy” or “drama”. Portraying those acts as individual cases, happening out of a sudden and as unforeseen event. Portraying the perpetrator as a “good, hardworking man”, while shifting towards the victim with remarks on the looks and clothes. In this narration, the seriousness of the crime itself remains undermined, and harmful stereotypes are perpetuated.

The UN *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* defines gender-based violence (GBV) as: “any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 52).

Based on an unequal power mechanism, patriarchal structures and the intention to humiliate, devalue and/or subordinate a person, the Council of Europe understands gender-based violence rooted in social and cultural structures, values and norms of societies, happening in private and public spheres. Furthermore “gender-based violence can be sexual, physical, verbal, psychological (emotional), or socio-economic and it can take many forms – from verbal violence and hate speech on the Internet, to rape or murder. It can be perpetrated by anyone” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 53).

Speaking of gender inequality, physical violence that occurs on gender appears in different forms but differs in their ways of observation. The Council of Europe states a multi-layered, multifaceted and intertwined play of factors that explain gender-based violence, focussing on four identified types of factors: cultural, legal, economic and political (2019):

Therefore, producing and reproducing gender stereotypes and prejudices, legitimization of violence for providing dominance and superiority in a patriarchal and sexist view, normative expectations of gender-scripts, oppressed and misunderstood family sphere as private, socialisation of gender, tolerating and normalising violence as part of the public sphere, ownership and control over somebody's else sexuality, as well as understanding someone's else sexuality as a threat to societal norms. Furthermore, the differentiation in law in countries all over the world between public and private spaces, and inequality in abolition or non-abolition of existing laws that repeat gender inequalities is counted within the legal factor.

Economic factors such as the lack of economic resources create patterns of violence based on particular vulnerability and the inability to extricate victims themselves. It also includes the Gender Pay Gap or unnoticed and unpaid care work. The political factor counts in the constant under-representation of women in power and politics. Those gender inequalities are also maintained systemically through civil institutions and mechanisms of male domination. According to Monique Wittig, these societal and institutional structures enforce compulsory heterosexuality, defining women through this lens as private and public (1992). It is for example inscribed in the heteronormative acting civil institution system when it comes to “family, work, maternity” (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 225).

Understanding gender, based on the theory of Judith Butler, and understanding the generating and consolidation of gender identities as a process and result of repetition and reiteration. Gender, as a result, is understood as performance and can be modified in several expectations, within different contexts and throughout various environments.

Following this construct, gender-based violence occurs when gender, factual or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity are used as a basis for violence that is put upon a person and harms them. Understanding the binary system of male/female gives a first impression of a shift of power for those, who cannot identify within this coding. In reality, a triangle seems geometrically

speaking the strongest form, as weight is shifted equally on both sides. A triangle is not made with two integrities or two points. But an opposition is done with at least two integrities: one will always be understood as the better, as the stronger in contrast to the other one. The idea of understanding gender in a binary view seems a perfect container for a system based on inequality.

The way we speak about things, the way we speak about gender-based violence, or the language we use to defend a case of gender-based violence within a trial, at work and especially in the media leads to the assumption that patriarchal thinking still influences our culture. If humanity is male – so is our language, our way of thinking, our culture. A patriarchal culture, that encodes embodied subjects into specific terms and powerful structures in dependency to variables of race and ethnicity, according to old dichotomies of a binary sexual division of male/female: “The sexual dichotomy that marks our culture has systematically situated women in the pole of difference in the sense of inferiority to men.” (Braidotti, 1995, p. 238).

In many texts about De Beauvoir, she is always described as a woman in anger, having an aggressive use of language, even polarising. But why do we interpret her way of writing? Did we assume also for Michel Foucault or others that they were aggressive men, because they used a certain way of language?

When De Lauretis speaks of public fantasies, she speaks about “dominant cultural narratives and scenarios” that are implemented in any kind of oral, written or visual narrative to tell any kind of story to people. Might it be a myth, mediaeval saga or a newspaper article. In all these kinds of narratives is an underlying representation and reconstruction, a way of thinking, decisions and moral choices. De Lauretis was not the only one naming it as a Western narrative, Western’s patriarchal thinking and cultural narrative of Western society (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 117-123, 123).

For understanding the systematic character of the dominant cultural narrative deriving from a patriarchal culture, the following chapters will analyse

certain dominant narratives, structures and belief-systems after understanding different feminist thoughts and concepts.

Women in the Media – Reporting Gender-Based Crimes in Western Media

In 2022, just in Germany 1,005 crimes including 227 violent crimes were recorded with the note “sexual orientation” and 417 crimes, including 82 violent crimes recorded as “gender diversity” as hate crime against LGBTQI+ people (Sven Lehmann: *Queerfeindlichkeit Entgegenwirken, Opfer Besser...*, 2023). Gender-based violence against women in a relationship and/ or partnership happen almost every day in Germany – nevertheless, violence against women needs to be “especially” heavy and cruel in order to be picked up by the media (Meltzer, 2021).

The use of physical force or power, whether threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group, resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, or deprivation, is called violence. The same definition counts for a high chance to result in injury. Violence against women and LGBTQI+ people include all mentioned types of violence. Motivated by a gender bias and societal norms, they lead to stigmatisation, marginalisation and discrimination (World Health Organization, 2021). As news media outlets are one of the most important sources of information for the public, this work will focus on homicides and the way media reports homicides against marginalised groups.

The way of reporting by the news can influence the attitude and emphasis on social topics in politics. It influences the way news is interpreted, understood, and even if it is a public topic. Media mirrors and reflects societal attitudes. If a topic is a taboo, its coverage can lead to more informed decisions, political changes and legal adjustments. However, its coverage can also increase feelings of shame, possibly leading to non-reporting of violence. The way the media representation reports influences the consequences and causes derived from the events reported.

Media works as a mirror about societal opinions and attitudes. The way a violent event is reported, can also influence the way society bypasses violence against women and LGBTQI+ people. Therefore, media can directly influence society's attitude and understanding of violence against women and LGBTQI+ people and determine which events and themes are considered important for and in a society and thus, also in which forms of political attention they actually receive. When it comes to distorted reporting, the under- or overrepresentation of aspects, the reproduction of stereotypes, prejudices are either created or reinforced if they already exist (Meltzer, 2021).

In order to be selected for reporting, events must have certain characteristics. These characteristics are calculated under the basic agenda-setting role, focussing the public's attention on a small number of issues and topics in the vast hustle and bustle of events happening in the world. For this calculation variables such as relevance are clustered into social, personal and emotional relevance, accumulating empirical evidence for the newsworthiness of a news to a degree the public accepts the agenda about the most important issues of the day. This makes the agenda of a news media shift from pure reporting to a collective voice shaping those described previously influences (McCombs & Lee, 1972). It also counts the economic worth of an event and the worthiness to report it.

Meltzer sums up that the agenda-setting influences directly as certain studies show that media generally is more likely to report a serious crime that caused a great harm, as well as atypical crimes than everyday crimes including the report on violence against women and LGBTQI+ people. She also describes that not just the daily-life forms of violence are hardly visible, but also factors like age, physical, psychological or mental impairment or a need for care as well as nationality influence, if and how an event is reported by the media (2021).

According to Schrötle's study, there are two types of violence disproportionately affecting women: intimate partner violence and sexual violence (2017). When it comes to physical, sexual and/ or psychological violence against women, this violence is predominantly from current and/or former relationship

partners. Nonetheless, daily-life violence and discrimination of women and LGBTQI+ people happen in various contexts and outside of relationships. Men face more likely physical violence in public from known but also unknown persons. Institutional violence is likely to happen for men with migration backgrounds, and/or disabilities, leading to discrimination. Sexual violence experienced by men differs from sexual harassment and sexual pressurising in public, at work and in educational institutions. Sexual violence experienced by women, appears in forms of rape or attempted rape, happens most likely at home, within couple relationships. Both groups face violence by male perpetrators, as women appear comparatively rare as perpetrators of severe and systematic repeated violence in couple relationships (Schröttle/Vogt 2015). Another study by Schröttle *et al.* found out, that almost every third to a fourth of women with impairments and/or disabilities have experienced sexual violence (2012), staying mostly unreported (Meltzer, 2021). These findings make the hypothesis of a symmetry in gender and sex for violence in couple relationships obsolete and not tenable, as diverse patterns and severities of violence are not comparable (Schröttle/Vogt 2015). The same asymmetry is interpretable when it comes to the presenting of news about gender-based violence.

By presenting the facts of the case, most of the time the perspective of the suspect is presented, by assuming “reasonable” motives for the act of violence (Meltzer, 2021). In the coverage for gender-based violence, most of the time the motives for violence against women were not explicitly mentioned. Although, in her study, Meltzer saw the following motives for “reasoning” violence: most frequently cited was an impending or recent breakup, following the covering up of another crime, jealousy and greed, following honour and satisfaction of sexual instincts. Different types of newspapers and media outlets do not differ from each other when it comes to naming a motif (2021). By reasoning about any crime but especially one as homicide, the line towards victim-blaming remains very blurred and thin. The perspective is narrated from the perpetrator’s point of view and takes up so much space that a perpetrator-victim reversal is inevitable. The reason for

femicide or violent crimes against LGBTQI+ people, solely based on the “justification” of gender and/or sex, remains mostly unnamed. Just as the perspective from which a report is told changes the entire perception of an incident, the language of the article can also have a huge impact on public perception of gender-based violence.

Meltzer points out linguistic aspects of reporting, such as the consideration of individual cases (2021). The reporting of a series of individual cases means that the actual underlying problem is not seen as a solution to a structural problem for society as a whole, but rather only the individual in question is held responsible. Another aspect is the tendency of linguistic trivialisation by using words like “tragedy” or “drama”, describing an unpredictable act of violence and hiding the structural problem of gender-based violence. Here, the news value of the reporting seems more relevant through the choice of words than through the actual description of it. Giving specific details such as age, nationality, if the person had a job, or the status of education, just to name a few, changes the perception of violence and the responsibility for the act, for the victim as well as the suspect. While more information given leads to more empathy, the absence of this information leads to victim-blaming. Especially the naming of nationality suggests that it is a problem of the “others”, demarcating the actual problem under the collectivisation of suspects in relation to their origin, almost as a reason for the crime (Meltzer, 2021).

However, the actual reasons for an act of killing in a separation situation, as one example, are kept most of the time unreported and actually result from a pathological addiction to control and patriarchal possessive thinking, resulting in a culture of violence (Schrötte/Vogt 2015; Meltzer, 2021). The quantity, the language used and the way in which gender-based violence is reported by the news, leads on the one hand to an underlying structural problem of language and culture and on the other hand a vicious circle by making it impossible to actually address structural societal problems.

Using Feminism as a Marketing Strategy in Media

The way of indirectly capitalising by calculated news values and the resulting reporting, economic success can also be achieved under supposed aspects of marketing with feminism, femvertising, pinkwashing and rainbow-washing. Femvertising is a marketing technique to include women's perspectives and to play with gender stereotypes. Messages aiming to implement more equal stereotypes for women are at the same time aiming to generate and directly include women as the main target group. The aim of femvertising is, like all marketing techniques, to generate higher sales. If a lack of authenticity is perceived, femvertising is called femwashing; the target group understands the advertisement as fake activism (Alfaro-Ibáñez & Gallardo-Echenique, 2023). Pinkwashing describes a marketing strategy, used by companies and people in order to make the audience believe an enlightening and tolerant position towards LGBTQI+ people. The term became famous, when in 2006 Israel was presenting a PR-campaign showing tolerance for homosexual people, distract from human rights violations of the conflict with Palestine. In 2021, during the European Football Championship the term transformed to rainbow-washing, when UEFA was forbidding to present the arena in the rainbow flag after Hungary introduced an anti-homosexual legislation. As an act of solidarity, a lot of companies presented their image in rainbow-colours (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, n.d.).

In the beginning of this chapter the *Barbie* movie, directed by Greta Gerwig, was mentioned. Last year, already in July, *Barbie* was the most financially successful film of the year, being treated as a “must-go” in pink clothes and a mass-gathering and lining-up to enter. Hyped as a feminist film, portraying a world, “Barbieland” as a place, where the Kens are existing to serve Barbie and portraying a world that is the total opposite from our world. Gerwig uses this shift of system to point out the double standards of a patriarchal society: After a visit to the real

world, the world we live in, and the position of power and entitlements for men, Ken introduces the patriarchal society to Barbieland, at the cost of the autonomy and ambition for the Barbies. Women’s dreams are no longer ensured and seem conditional, differently than men’s, who seem to succeed easier (How ‘Barbie’ Takes on the Patriarchy - Women’s Media Center, 2023). Gerwig explores with the use of dolls and stereotypes, exaggerations and a very colourful storytelling of the bad sites of patriarchy. She does it in a way, as maybe De Lauretis was understanding “public fantasies”; a problem mentioned so crystal clear and the difference and opposition as a solution, portrayed in a story, that might be visually pleasing for some. Barbie might also portray exactly what Braidotti meant, with the sexual dichotomy within women situated as the opposite and consequently inferior to men (1995).

For sure a single film will not be able to present all the mechanisms, structural roots and consequences of a system, in this case the patriarchal system. It also is produced to pay off, being successful. It will for sure use certain narrative techniques, such as irony and exaggeration, it will simplify things, for a more pleasurable entertainment. But the criticism about the use of language, stereotypes, simplification and even trivialisation for news media reporting applies also here.

Varghese & Kumar understand femvertising resulting from the fourth wave of feminism. Femvertising campaigns as mediated texts appear on all networks more and more, featuring LGBTQI+ communities for a more authentic representation under the additional try to include all female identities. The feminist discourse is not free from criticism, including the appropriation for profit gains, the lack of intersectionality, identification issues and problematic gender relations. The accusation of hijacking is obvious, paired with the idea of strategizing in order to serve and sell value (2020).

Femvertising is a form of cultural marketing that over the past years resulted in popularity. Accordingly, it is a cultural production, that is exchanged, repeated and generated. The capitalistic approach behind the exploitation of stereotypes, women’s collective equality struggle, ideologically driven shifts for social change,

it nonetheless derives from women’s activism and digital movements incorporating certain values and culture that can have the potential to generate social change. Nevertheless, there is a need for feminist theorising as well as being conscious about the economical goal behind any marketing strategy and the production within the hypothetical patriarchal society. There is a need to include diverse and multiple personal experiences with race, ethnicity and transgender experiences in mediated and mainstream communication (Varghese & Kumar, 2020). Incorporating diverse experiences and voices within text, narration and representation is a need not just for marketing, or media. It is a need for the whole society. It is a need that is called out by several feminist thinkers, as presented briefly as follows.

Chapter 2

Feminist Theories: A Historical Survey

To contribute to this work, several feminist readings were done. This chapter sums up some and tries to give an overview over the key concepts of different feminist theory writers, used to write this work. Conceptual sets of contemporary theories of culture that kept feminist thinkers busy are the distinction and thought about subjectivity and objectivity, self and other, marginality and hegemony, sameness and difference, domination and agency and many more classical oppositional binary concepts of consciousness (De Lauretis, 1990).

The feminist discourse was equal to the ideas about gender, sexuality and sexual difference in the 1970s. Feminist thoughts were circling about the question of identification and personification of a woman (De Lauretis, 1990), while in the 1980s these categories were understood as split antithetical categories. Gender and sexual differences were understood as patriarchal and socially constructed ideologies, disadvantaged women, while sex and sexuality were seen as a heteronormative and biological fact. The discussion shifted towards the patriarchal society imposing gender as an institutional structure throughout the idea of natural female sexuality as an oppression of women. The nonbeing of women, highlighted by the paradox of their absence yet captivity within the same discourse. Women are likely represented as a spectacle but not as real individuals, constituted as objects and therefore unable to express themselves or be seen in the moment of gaze.

Identity and relations about political and socio-historical locations started to be focussed on, opening the possibility of interpreting and (re)constructing

values and meanings (De Lauretis, 1990). Feminist writing tries to discuss and analyse specific political categories and practices of women, emphasising the need for political motivation and their attempt to find a common sense. In these projects, there is the idea to change the structures of power within the patriarchal system through transformation and to educate about a variety of meanings and affective valence of certain terms given (De Lauretis, 1990). Emphasising that gender is a social construct and the exploration of women as the “Other” within a male-dominated society, where women have been historically relegated to a subordinate position is what Simone De Beauvoir in the 1940s-50s was thinking about (De Beauvoir, 2012).

In the 1970s, Luce Irigaray recognised the need to create a culture and a language that appreciates and acknowledges women’s experiences and perspectives. She criticises the phallogentric nature of Western philosophy and psychoanalysis, seeing women’s sexuality and identity suppressed by male-dominated discourse (Irigaray, 1974).

Around the 1980s and onwards, Teresa De Lauretis introduced *Technologies of Gender*, a concept of gender as being constructed through diverse social practices and cultural representations. Gender identities are in her view produced through social and cultural mechanisms that also maintain the constant representation of stereotypical gender roles (De Lauretis, 1990). At the same time, 1985, Donna Haraway introduced her concept of the cyborg, a metaphor for the hybrid nature of contemporary identities. Feminism moves towards a posthuman theory, challenging the traditional human-centred notions of body, gender and identity. Technological and materialist perspectives get incorporated and the fluidity and interconnectedness of existence are ruling the discussions. Binary gender norms are on their best way to get deconstructed; inclusivity is advocated now (Haraway, 1985).

Rosi Braidotti follows the posthuman feminist ideas in the 1990s with her concept of the “nomadic subject”, stressing that identity is fluid and of dynamic nature, shaped by multiple factors as for example gender, culture and sexuality.

Braidotti claims that subjectivity needs to be understood, adaptable and located (Braidotti, 1995).

Judith Butler and her key idea of gender as a performative act was published in 1990. Her idea is, that gender is something someone does, rather than is, that a set of repeated acts produce a certain appearance of stable gender identities, which also emphasises their fluidity and challenges the binary view.

A movement resulting in the early 1990s was transfeminism, where transgender voices and perspectives were sought to get included into feminist discourse. Transfeminism focuses on the intersection of gender equality and gender identity, highlighting the specific issues of transgender individuals. It recognized the fluidity of gender at the full cost of binary notions of gender. An important key concept is the thought of intersectionality, emphasising the intersection of many different forms of oppression, including sexism, transphobia and homophobia (Stryker & Currah, 2014).

The intersection of gender, race and colonialism has been explored by Françoise Vergès (1991) with her works of decolonial feminism. Her focus lies on the way history shaped contemporary gender relations and the need to integrate decolonial perspectives into feminist theory (Vergès, 2021). Within black feminism where concepts of simultaneity of oppressions spread, the racial inscriptions inscribed in women's identities move on the screen of feminist thinkers. Gender becomes a fundamental basis for subjectivity, as experiences, also or especially from a racist nature, shape experiences of gender and sexuality (Vergès, 1999).

Feminism means the political analysis and practice of struggles coming from these oppression structures. Putting the focus in this way is based on the embodiment of oppression within the concept of identity politics. The reality of oppression is accomplished by language.

The Second Sex

Since the 18th century, feminist ideas have revolved around the matter of the mental inferiority of women, justified by biology. The debate is shifting around the social and cultural construction that women are different, not just by naturalistic assumptions but also by their constructed difference and their deviation from the norm, namely the masculine. For Simone De Beauvoir the female subject is assessed as a structural necessity of a system that relies on dualistic oppositional thinking based on differences (Braidotti, 1995). Her famous sentence: “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (De Beauvoir, 2012, p. 202), is cited differently throughout and within different readings. The idea of the inscription on women, constructivism from society onto women is a thought made by Simone De Beauvoir with one of her most famous works *The Second Sex*. It was published in 1949, and remains called modern for nowadays time.

Until her passing in 1986, Simone De Beauvoir fought for women’s rights and was criticised for her unconventional lifestyle. We will not focus on her personality nor her personal life, but on her ideas and concepts for feminist theory. Her basic principles support the idea that sex is a product of social constructivism, led by the ideals and convictions of society. The woman itself is just defined in relation to a man. Based on the idea, that a man is the dominating subject, while the woman exists in “the Other”. De Beauvoir retells the hierarchy of men over women, noting that while a woman is defined as a feminine kind, men are described as humankind. The segregation of gender is biologically given: she, as the womb and producing machine, within her will in the context of society, their expectations and requirements, in a tensional relation. De Beauvoir’s idea was that even though a woman is born biologically female, it is up on her, which kind of woman she becomes. She remains a woman, even if she does not fulfil the expectations and requirements imposed on her. Still, she is expected to become most likely to be like a man, to enjoy the same rights and privileges as men do (De Beauvoir, 2012).

The free choice of being a woman, exactly as expected or completely contrasting, is what De Beauvoir calls emancipation. Being a mother, a sex worker, married or not. De Beauvoir dreams of men and women being more equal and more similar. Without the mix or change of gender or sex. The price men pay, for Simone De Beauvoir, to represent the universal, is a loss of embodiment. Women pay with their chance of subjectivity and confinement to the body (De Beauvoir, 2012).

The Second Sex is also often quoted as the first influential text to cross-examine women's subjectivity. De Beauvoir tried to understand patriarchal structures and societal norms, historically marginalised women and their rights. Women's identities and their agency are described as limited, influenced and constructed by Others, in a dependency on men, while De Beauvoir recognized women's diversity and complexity in their experiences. This historical construction of womanhood culturally and socially, but always in relation to men can be understood as the foundation for further feminist and women theories about subjectivity (De Beauvoir, 2012).

Like De Beauvoir also Wittig, Hartsock and MacKinnon are starting from the idea that women are not a “natural group” with the same biological basis as men but the reason for their oppression from men.

Sexual Difference

Luce Irigaray is a French philosopher, linguist, cultural theorist and psychoanalyst, born in 1930 and famous for her feminist theories of differences of gender. Her key ideas of *phallogentrism* as well as “Women on the market” are part of her two most well-known works *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977) and *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) that research on gender, identity, language and political economy in this frame (Mader, 2024).

Irigaray’s phallogocentric argument criticises the dominant cultural and philosophical discourse centred on exclusively male perspectives and language structures. For her, the very same structures are deeply rooted in Western philosophy and psychoanalysis, by excluding and marginalising female experiences and silencing female voices. Perpetuating gender inequality, the phallogocentric system constructs knowledge, meaning and culture through a male lens (Irigaray, 1985). In this respect, her work *Speculum of the Other Woman* forms a critique of phallogentrism. Irigaray calls for a new language that values and includes women's perspectives (Irigaray, 1985). Conducting empirical research about the different settings and ways by which men and women speak, she discovered a correlation between the language of men and women and the suppression of female thought in Western culture. Denoting dominance in men and subjectivity in women was found in patterns of gendered language (Irigaray, 1985).

Starting from the death of logocentrism and the dependence between rationality and masculinity, Luce Irigaray starts questioning sexual differences. With her concept of politics of radical heterosexuality, an equal and respectful relationship between the sexes can just by recognition and valuing of the differences be reached (Braidotti, 1995).

Sexual difference, according to Irigaray, is a reality that constrains humans to pursue the becoming of consciousness, which leads to a new stage of the development of humanity. The human as such cannot exist, when at this stage does not happen (Irigaray & Green, 2008). This means that sexual difference is essential in the evolution of humanity. Without accepting, integrating and embracing sexual differences, humanity is not able to reach its full potential as a “human”. Nevertheless, for this full accomplishment, the location of the individual in its full sphere of sexual, political and emotional global context is necessary (Irigaray & Green, 2008). She starts from the assumption that there is a radical difference between the sexes, that may not be conscious at all times, but always present. From this point, denying the sexual in-differentiation of the phallogocentric discourse, the specificity of female subjectivity can be stated (Braidotti, 1995).

As subjectivity is constituted differently by men and women and caused by this they live in two worlds that are foreign to one another, sexual difference is conceived in different variations and on different levels (Braidotti, 1995). In so far, this created differences in subjectivity in a culture created by and for men. The androcentric worldview holds upon and is manifested in a male-dominated system of structures and separation (Braidotti, 1995). This system applies and cultivates the Western tradition of binary oppositions, on the logic of identity, sameness and the contrast of otherness. The problem lies in the uncertainty and non-existent acknowledgement of this otherness, producing stereotypical and self-protective identities (Irigaray & Green, 2008).

For her, Western culture is unethical due to gender discrimination (Fielding, 2003), as she also includes topics like intersubjectivity, embodied divinity, and emotional differences between male and female sexes in her work *An Ethics on Sexual Difference*. Irigaray is perceived as an essentialist and earns for this position some feminist critique. Her attention on sexual difference in a heteronormative way, is blamed to bias her view. However, it can be also read as an essentialist concept, based on hierarchical binary thinking and proves that culture comes over nature (Fielding, 2003).

Female Subjectivity

Posthuman feminism is a branch of feminist theory that examines the implications of post-humanism for our understanding of gender, identity, and the human body. It challenges traditional humanist notions of the self and explores how technology, science, and new materialisms reshape our understanding of what it means to be human.

The construction of human identities in relation to non-human entities, such as machines and technologies, but also the environment and animals, is the focus

of posthuman feminism. Humanity gets decentralised and a new materialism is incorporated. Bodies are understood as material and get constructed discursively through interactions with the world. The focus lies on the agency of matter and the entanglement of human with non-human action and behaviour. The way how technology is shaping gender norms and possibilities is considered, especially with the role of biotechnology, artificial intelligence and cyborgs. The keyword “cyborg” brings us to one of the Key Thinkers of posthuman feminism Donna Haraway, born in 1944. She is teaching as a distinguished professor in the History of Consciousness Department and Feminist Studies Department at the University of California. She studied philosophy and zoology and holds a PhD in Biology at Yale. Starting teaching women’s studies in the 1970s, her most famous essay, published in 1985, is *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s* (European Graduate School Foundation, 2023).

Haraway admires French feminists like Monique Wittig and Luce Irigaray for their knowledge about writing about the body, the ability to create imagery of reconstituted bodies and fragmentation and the imagery of embodiment (Haraway, 1987). Haraway believes that the historically constituted body is a conscious knowledge (Haraway, 1987). She criticises the “Western tradition” in science and politics of racist, and male-dominated capitalism, the culture of production and the appropriation of nature as a resource for this production culture (Haraway, 1987). Haraway engendered thinking and the confusion of boundaries for constructed responsibilities becomes clear in her essay (Haraway, 1987).

Haraway’s contemporary feminism is based on the “signifier woman”, that needs to be deconstructed and denormalized. Haraway wants agency and strategic alliances based on common interests, in order to build up feminist politics that embrace “partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves” (Braidotti, 1995). Sexual Difference is an open-ended project that needs to be constructed. Subjectivity needs to be redefined (Braidotti, 1995). The subject is en-gendered, produced or even constructed (De Lauretis,

1990). Female subjectivity needs new constructed but socially shared myths and beliefs, figurations and political foundation (Braidotti, 1995).

Her Cyborg is an example of this new figuration; it is fiction and a political myth, even though the border between science fiction and social reality may appear as an optical illusion. It does so, because the cyborg lived experiences as women in the late twentieth century. Being a mixture of a cybernetic organism, a creature of social reality but a creature of fiction, a hybrid of machine and organism (Haraway, 1987), a social recognition for female subjectivity and woman of colour (De Lauretis, 1990).

The cyborg breaks down the dualistic barriers of the classic body/soul dualism and the resulting hierarchical coding. While Braidotti’s “mother-machine” understands the body as neither mechanical nor physical, nor textual, the cyborg is constructed and placed in-between. Haraway’s wish to unlearn current patriarchal structures by rethinking the world as other, as a semiotic-material agent, reproducing knowledge, becomes clear (De Lauretis, 1990)

In her *Manifesto* Haraway writes: “There is nothing about being “female” that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as “being” female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices.” Haraway (1987); the categories like class, race or gender are contradictory social realities created by patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism and are experienced historically. These entities do not build a basis for an “essential” unity, to feel represented, being part or being liberated from structuralism (Haraway, 1987).

Performing Gender

Judith Butler, born 1956 is an American philosopher and teaches at Berkeley as a professor of rhetoric and comparative literature. She is well known

for her social scientific and philosophical concepts about poststructuralism and queer theory. Her most famous idea of performing gender understands gender as something, one does, and not something one is. Repeating performances or acts constitutes gender as an identity (Butler, 1990).

Judith Butler continues the thought of Beauvoir, that women are the second, therefore another sex, designated as the Other and the idea of Luce Irigaray, who understands women as being “the sex which is not “one”, but multiple” (Butler, 1990). Within the discourse of identity, women constitute a contradiction for Irigaray, following the phallogocentric logic and economy and the total exclusion of the feminine. For Butler, this idea, about the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of women, maintains the point of departure for criticism on the hegemonic Western culture and its practices, as well as the structure of the notion of the subject (Butler, 1990).

The category “woman” is constructed by the binary opposition and results to be normative and exclusionary. In order to change the exclusionary normative fiction of heterosexual coherence, so that she understands Beauvoir’s ideas, she asks feminists to produce new kinds of noncoherent genders (Braidotti, 1995).

This means gender is not a fixed attribute, but an identity constructed through social performances that get repeated. She highlights the performative character of gender. For her, there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender, as identity is constituted performatively in the very act of “expression” (Butler, 1990).

Being a woman, for example, is just one part of a person’s identity. This one part of identity is also shaped by class, race, ethnicity, location and sexuality, making it impossible to understand gender separated from these factors. Oversimplification and the universalisation of patriarchy can cause the same simplification for the various and complex experiences of women (Butler, 1990). Representation serves to give visibility and legitimacy as political subjects to women, but also reveals or distorts assumptions about qualities of the category of women throughout language. The pervasive cultural condition, that women live in

and misrepresent them or do not represent them at all, brings the necessity to develop a language that adequately represents and brings political visibility for women (Butler, 1990). Butler mentions the problematic way language and politics define “women” in feminism, as it is the same political system creating gender inequality. Relying on the very same system to liberate women, Butler fears, might actually reinforce the same issues that feminism is trying to solve (Butler, 1990). Traditional gender norms can be disrupted, in order to challenge the binary view of gender.

For her, identity is fluid, created through actions and behaviours: Butler points out clearly, that gender is not a straightforward result of biological sex, but culturally constructed. It is a “free-floating” concept, moving away from the binary view and pairing attributes regardless of biological sex. This makes it questionable if sex itself is a stable, natural-given category, or if it is the same culturally constructed concept. Nonetheless, Butler is convinced that our understanding and definition of sex are influenced by discursive and cultural practices (Butler, 1990).

For Butler, the hetero-sexualisation of desire causes the problem of the binary view. The asymmetrical oppositions between “masculine” and “feminine”, can be just understood when expressive attributes of “male” and “female” can be applied (Butler, 1990).

The inclusion and legitimation as bodies, also for queer bodies into body politics is what matters for her and needs to be the political project. Nevertheless, the process of choosing subjectivity exists without agency, as the practice of identification with norms of sex and gender as a part of a subject's reiteration is a powerful act (Butler, 1990).

Eccentric Subjects

Born in 1938 in Bologna – Italy, Teresa De Lauretis is a literary scholar,

publishing in the area of semiotics, film theory, and feminist theory. De Lauretis is famous for her contributions to queer theory, examining the fluidity and instability of sexual identities.

With the concept of *Technologies of Gender*, De Lauretis analyses the social construction of gender under the assumption of individuals as an effect of discourse and representation anchored to mechanisms of power. She describes how culture is dependent on and shaped by tied social institutions, such as the education system, law, the family, the mass media, language, as well as cultural practices such as art, literature, cinema, philosophy and theory. She argues that gender is rather constructed than a natural or inherent characteristic. The cultural practices mentioned before are for De Lauretis the parameter for gender construction. Drawing from Foucault's idea of *Technologies of the Self*, in which he describes how individuals act upon themselves in order to shape their own individual identities, De Lauretis describes with *Technologies of Gender* the production and regulation of gender identities and roles through social and cultural mechanisms. Methods that she calls “technologies” such as the visual representation, narratives, daily social interactions are seen under the aspect of being considered masculine or feminine, enforcing the gender norms throughout the society. Especially cultural representation, like films, literature etc. are emphasising the construction of gender and play a significant part in how gender is shaped, perceived and performed. They also play a crucial role in reproducing stereotypes and containers. For her, gender goes beyond the binary oppositions into more fluid and diverse gender identities (De Lauretis, 1987).

For *Figures of Resistance* the concept *Technologies of Gender* is used: “The subject is consequently constructed, or better, engendered in a continuous interaction – in an interactive subjection, we might say today, in the language of video games – with the technologies of gender.” (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 218f).

De Lauretis focuses on the experiences of those who live on the margins of dominant discourse, those who disrupt the heteronormative framework, those who embrace alternative ways of embodiment and those who take their agency and

autonomy back. By challenging traditional notions of identity and subjectivity with a framework understanding the complexity and diversity of women’s experiences, De Lauretis challenges simplistic binarism and stereotypes with her idea of “eccentric subjects”. Therefore, her concept is especially interesting for women’s studies, as she explores the construction of gender identities, negotiates them and contextualises them socially and culturally.

Being “eccentric” means understanding the intersecting axes of power shaping women’s lives, and asks for multiplicity and fluidity of subjectivity based on the idea of agency and resistance of marginalised and non-conforming individuals. Being eccentric derives from being off-centred. Starting from this turning point with her concept of “Eccentric Subjects” about essentialist notions of identity and the acknowledgement of multiplicity and fluidity of subjectivity.

Eccentric subjects express their gender and sexuality beyond a normative way. Gender and Sexuality move multiple and fluid for De Lauretis as subjectivity is not a fixed or a singular state of mind. Transformation and complexity are embraced in the concept of eccentric subjects: “Eccentric is the position of agency and resistance towards the social-cultural apparatus of heterosexual institutions. It is the vicious circle within the paradox of a woman when it comes to female sexuality. Eccentric is the discourse that happens outside of the male (hetero)sexual monopoly of power and knowledge, outside of the sociocultural institution of heterosexuality.” (De Lauretis, 1990, p.16). Eccentric subjects show agency and exist from a position of resistance De Lauretis and White (2007).

De Lauretis moves away from the thoughts of Simone de Beauvoir and follows more materialist feminist thinking, as the construction of female identity is for her a material and symbolic process. From this assumption, gender is a process of constructing subjectivity by producing categories as hetero-/homosexuality, and men/women, correlating with other normative parameters such as class and race (Braidotti, 1995). From this structure the power system is founded and leads to its specific construct of socially normal subjects. De Lauretis

calls for the requisition, recrafting and destabilising of this normativity of the dominant forms of sexed identity by rewriting new formations (Braidotti, 1995).

What is the legitimation of bodies as a matter for Butler, is the constructed and constrained bodily boundary for subjects additionally for De Lauretis. This subjectification is a sum of effects that grew up without a pre-existing subjectivity for a constituted body ego. It is about being. The objects and bodies are contiguous but dislocated in relation to reality because of habits, the change of habits and effects. “The subject is the place in which, the body in whom, the significant effects of signs take hold and are as one contingent and continuously realised” (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 207). She insists on gender and its rootedness in the experience of the body within a social subjectivity that is not free from the influences of ideology but capable of creativity (De Lauretis, 1990).

De Lauretis mentions the personal, political and textual process of “cognitive practice”, with the idea of the power of language within a sociocultural apparatus of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is a socially constructed nature in dependence on its semiotic construction of gender; not as argued the physical and natural existences of two sexes. This institution of heterosexuality, including masculine privilege, reproduces and regulates the specific power differential between women and men through the apparatus of gender.

Nomadic Subjects

There is Rosi Braidotti who brings up Virginia Woolf, who from her point of view chose an in-transit position, watching on to the world of patriarchy. With this example, Braidotti explains the condition of patriarchy, which is contaminating practices and discursive discussions in a way, excluding a position outside of this culture.

Rosi Braidotti, born in 1954 in Latisana – Italy is famous for her main representation of gender studies and post humanism that she taught at Utrecht University.

Even though we might be born free, women live with and within a depreciated set of values (Braidotti, 1995, p. 144): “The woman-in-me is developing, alongside other women but not exclusively on their behalf, a redefinition of what it means to be human.” She follows, quoting Adrienne Rich, about the being-as-woman on a line with becoming a subject. Braidotti claims that difference needs to be acted on as well as out, collectively.

The binary division of sex, women as the second sex, comes for Braidotti from a phallogocentric system, following an inner logic of patriarchy, that constructs men and women by certain symbolic, semiotic and material conditions. This condition exists in a dissymmetrical position and opposes problematic areas. The emphasis shifts after De Beauvoir and with the help of Adrienne Rich to the emphasis on language and representation constituted as the subject. For Braidotti, the word gender is understood as a notion to clarify the interdependence of different oppression mechanisms and sexual identity. Those “situated conditions” (Braidotti, 1995) define the structure of subjectivity.

Rosi Braidotti puts a focus on the differentiation of identity and political subjectivity; whilst identity carries a “privileged bond” to unconscious processes, political subjectivity is a conscious and active position, a strategy and a decision (Braidotti, 1995). The dislocation of the subject is in connection to a critique towards classical dualism and the idea and practice of binary oppositions; forming the basic idea of her nomadic subject theory.

Feminism for Rosi Braidotti is the strategy to work through the historical notion of “Woman”. She recognizes a traditional way of feminism in either overcoming gender dualism towards a neutralised understanding of differences, or an exaggerated over-sexualisation and confronts this with her own way of thinking of her version of sexual difference as a nomadic strategy. This contains the extreme affirmation of a sexed identity to reverse the attribution of differences in a

hierarchical mode. Just in this way, women have the agency to act and get empowered. Being post-Woman women make feminists as political subjects, deriving from a sexual difference that makes it possible to affirm alternative ways of political subjectivity.

Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjectivity* encourages a woman's identity as constantly shifting, evolving, resisting essentialist categorizations and, moreover, the stable and fixed notions of identity. It emphasises the multiplicity and fluidity of subjectivity. The nomadic subject can be understood as a figuration, a new image, such as another image from her called “the mother machine” (Braidotti, 1995).

She follows the idea that feminist theories need to include the active possession of female subjectivity throughout the recognition of situated beings rather than disembodied entities. For this process a re-thinking of the basics of subjectivity needs to be done, in order to understand becoming-subject as a pre-discursive foundation. (Braidotti, 1995)

Decolonial Feminism

Françoise Vergès, born in 1952, holds a PhD in Political Theory and is now a professor of Cultural Studies and published on psychoanalysis, slavery and economy of predation, as well as on postcolonial theory. She directed two movies and curated exhibitions on slavery and women.

One of her central ideas and thematically interesting for this work is her *Decolonial Feminism*, which describes how colonialism shaped and still influences gender relations and feminist thought. By incorporating the voices and experiences of women from formerly colonised regions, she dismantles the impacts of colonialism and shows the intersection of colonial histories (Verges, 2021).

Colonial legacies impact not just social and political structures, but also economic ones, especially when it comes to gender, race and class (Vergès, 2021).

Vergès criticises the marginalisation of the experiences of women with colonisation or post-colonial backgrounds. In advertising global feminism, the decolonial perspective is crucial for her to create an intersectional and inclusive feminist movement. This global feminism must be anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist and ask for de-patriarchisation. Her book *Decolonial Feminism* starts with the campaign “who cleans the world”. The racialization of domestic work inaugurated by colonial slavery has been extended throughout the world in recent decades. She describes this workforce as a consequence of capitalism.

In Europe, domestic work was traditionally done by young white women, and European literature abounds with the figure of the abused, raped, naive, or cunning domestic. From this example she describes capitalism as an economy of waste, that disappears in front of the eyes of those, who are entitled to a good life, by those who are not seen and cannot be seen. She points out the interconnection between this economy of waste and the production of humans understood as “waste”, being in another societal class (Vergès, 2021). The cleaning section, which condemned humans to undertake overexploited work and being at the same time invisible to the majority of the society, shows the hyper-consumption done by the history of capitalism. It also shows the division of humanity into classes; the white woman enjoys the clean urban space, while the black woman falls asleep on the metro after her cleaning shift at night. This structural and unequal character of the feminised and racialised cleaning industry is connected for Vergès to the colonial past and its structure and mechanism of slavery (2021). Within the movement to bring visibility towards unequal and unpaid housework in the 1970s, white feminists left out the racial dimension and imperialistic racialization of this gender role attribution: “The racial/gendered element of this workforce has not produced the kind of white resentment that we have observed in other industries.” (Vergès, 2021, pp. 15, 57f).

According to the UN, especially women and girls from the global South are affected by the consequences of environmental crises and pandemics, that heightened the militarisation of the police, privatisation of space, the exploitation of resources and following consequences for the environment, impoverishment of the population but also violence, including femicides and murder of LGBTQI+-people (Vergès, 2021).

As a result, Vergès liberation includes all forms of exploitation, dispossession and the domination of and over human beings, including the earth. Diversity and Inclusiveness at the costs of racism, sexism and exploitation (Vergès, 2021). She addresses Decolonisation under the idea of dismantling ideologies and structures established during colonialism. This cannot happen without the rethinking of traditional Western culture and knowledge systems, that excluded non-western perspectives. This happens under her concept of “Decolonisation of the Self”, focussing on unlearning and relearning social structures, more equal and equitable to serve the collective. This includes the participation of all of us. Experiences of oppression and privilege intersect with individual identities such as race, class, gender and sexuality. These entities influence each other. Women from different backgrounds face discrimination based on their intersecting identities. That being the case, the recognition and redefinition of the representation of marginalised groups and a new way of giving space and a platform to those perspectives as well as highlighting the influences of colonialism and imperialism shape gender dynamics (Vergès, 2021).

Chapter 3

Patriarchal Culture

Any society produces a certain culture. Following Pierre Bourdieu, culture is a system of practices, symbols and beliefs that is deeply rooted in social hierarchies reflecting the power dynamics of this society. Culture is produced and reproduced through social interactions and institutions and therefore something passively and actively consumed and performed (Bourdieu, 1990). In societies, where the roles of women are subordinate to men within the binary system, these societies can be called patriarchal societies. Patriarchal culture hence refers to a social system with men in leading positions, upholding power relations and authority, control and privilege (Walby, 1990). Rosi Braidotti, in turn, said that historically the male subject was put as the stencil for universality in a logocentric mode (1995). But what does she mean?

The idea of a universal patriarchy derives from the notion of gender inequality and oppression in the Western culture in that it exists (Butler, 1990). Examples are given throughout the whole work, illustrating the universal principle and the obviousness of the examples as cases happened. As already mentioned, the link to the oppression system derives from hegemonic structures; within culture they turn dominant structures that transport fixed ideas about gender, identity and social relations. Culture, on this account, constructs gender in its own set of laws (Butler, 1990).

Social identity is the influence on our identity from social groups to which we belong as members. Some of those social groups include the definition and/or

practice of gender, ethnicity, nationality, language, race, religion, sexual orientation, ability, age and even economic class. Being born in a society means being a member of certain social groups per se. Still, identity can transform, be chosen, or displaced. Even though social identity cannot be denied, as we all live in social groups and have the urge to belong to them, individuals have agency over how to define themselves. This is the concept of personal or individual identity. Individuals with certain democratic based privileges can for example choose their religion, beliefs, and places to live. Therefore, to be part of a society means to have an identity that is understood through the lens of the dominant culture of this society.

Western Culture, the classified culture this work will focus on, shows dominant, regulatory and exclusive structures within a system of class-conscious, sexist and racist social contexts (Braidotti, 1995). Within these structures lies a belief system of what is understood as “natural” and what is not, again based on systematic structures of representations, myths, figures, symbols and stereotypes (Braidotti, 1995). Historically developed and repeated over and over again, those figurations became what we call traditional or even classic. Working as a container, as Braidotti puts it, a phallocentric culture is underlying, the very same culture assigning women to a copied-out set of values and laws, forcing women to stay under the contamination of patriarchal practices (1995). Resulting in inequality and its deeply culturally manifested root, Teresa De Lauretis names the absence of a penis as one reason. Creating a narcissistic wound to the body ego and the directly connected threat of not being a girl and the cultural image of a female body within a damaged body-image view: “the fantasy of having a body that is imperfect, faulty, or inadequate to give pleasure to be loved.” (De Lauretis & White, 2007, p. 114). Regarding the ideas of Freud, De Lauretis derives from the positioning of the body-image constituting the first matrix of the ego; this imperfect, incomplete and unlovable body results in a threat of the body ego and a threat of non-being. She compares this narcissistic wound for a girl with the fear of castration for boys. The idea of the phallus as the penis endowed with social and

sexual power (De Lauretis & White, 2007), also finds its way into Rosi Braidotti's idea of patriarchal culture and its embodied symbolism. Imprisoning women in them, or understanding women unconsciously as the nonexistence of a female body besides the pleasure and serving men's desire (Haraway, 1985). These practices serve a world of production and reproduction as well as communications for Haraway and in doing so, they keep the same characteristics. She calls it the informatics of domination (1985). The very same informatics of domination can be understood within gender data gaps, like Perez was researching one. Women are understood as marginalised and as a minority. In fact, they make up half the population. Framed as thus, as a niche identity, biased by a culture that is male-biased according to Caroline Criado-Perez, in a world constructed on male universality, women become forgettable, dispensable, ignorable from history, culture and data. They become invisible (2019): “The fact is that worth is a matter of opinion, and opinion is informed by culture” (Perez, 2019, p. 66). Rebecca Solnit describes in her novel *Recollection of My Non-Existence* (2020) the same disappearing, the non-existence and the threat of both for women. While Solnit describes the non-existence of women as a polite and kind compromise that is deeply inscribed in the patriarchal culture, De Lauretis goes beyond showing how the sense of an inadequate body for girls finds confirmation and explanation within family practices, social arrangements and cultural forms that give privileges to men not only sexually, but also socially (De Lauretis & White, 2007). Growing up in, following Freud, constantly envying the penis, women search for compensation and the equivalent of the penis she doesn't have throughout maternity. The perfect body through motherhood is based on a culture that believes motherhood brings the regain of narcissistic pride.

A dominant culture produces and reproduces norms. Luce Irigaray calls it a “patriarchal metaphysical framework” in which women as women are locked inside (1985, pp.112f). It points out the lines between what is understood as socially acceptable and therefore normal and what does not belong to this container. Deleuze understands that this aspect, and the fact of the male as the main

referent, puts women and all the cultural norms, legacies and logos around them, in an oppositional position of “the Other”. It becomes especially interesting for thinking subjectivity, as for Braidotti becoming-woman results in a process of de-territorialisation (1995). Breaking away from this known culture, its sets of values and laws, its logo, its fixed identities and its prison of being-woman in Western society. Breaking away from the figuration of Otherness in Western discourse, in order to gain subjectivity. Breaking away from the normality that is associated with masculinity, results in being objectified as women, as women are regarding this masculine normality understood as asymmetrical, abnormal and consequently disqualified (Braidotti, 1995). This is upheld in patriarchal culture. Whenever we think about a cultural piece, whether it be a song or a video game, a paragraph from the Bible or a legal work, we need to understand why this cultural piece was invented like this, in which way it is retold or performed and what kind of ideology it consists of.

Patriarchal culture is also, when it seems more natural to play an avatar in the shape of a blue hedgehog, than a female avatar, as the case of Assassin’s Creed from 2014 showed (Perez, 2019). This thinking reflects a belief that introducing a female character in a video game is strange, and the reaction to such an introduction is often one of disbelief, finding it unimaginable and unfitting. It is the same reaction, about men getting angry about a campaign showing historical female figures on English banknotes and threatening as a reaction with violence such as rape and death (Perez, 2019). Patriarchal culture is also the need for women’s quota, to represent a more inclusive gender representation in politics and leading positions and the result of endless articles, claims and harassment. Patriarchal culture does not accept any minor female representation and traits any tries to do so as a misdeed. (Perez, 2019). Patriarchal culture is that after each post about femicides men claim that it is not all men. Especially after one of the latest social media trends *#notallbears*, the reality seemingly looks differently: women prefer to be alone in the forest with a bear instead of a man. To prove that it is not about generalisation, but about the fact, that it is much more unlikely to get

attacked by a bear, who follows instincts and tries to survive and keep its territory, than the reality of that just in the EU one out of three women aged 15 and over experiences sexual and/or physical violence, one in four has experienced sexual and/or physical violence through the intimate (ex-)partner since the age of 15 and nearly the half have experienced psychological violence by an intimate partner (*Beijing +25 Policy Brief*, 2024).

There is a quote by Clarice Lispector, that may match the best:

Whoever has known de-personalisation will recognize the other under any disguise: the first step towards the other is to find within oneself the man of all men. Every woman is the woman of all women, every man is the man of all men and each one of them could answer for the human, whenever s/he is called upon to do so. (Lispector, 1989)

Lispector names the common humanity that appears in all of us, from the perspective of others, including all external appearances. There is a universal aspect in all human beings with the self. Just as every woman embodies the qualities of all women, so too does every man embody the qualities of all men.

The actual lack of symmetry, not in bodies per se, finds itself in the resulting idea about culture and economy. The asymmetry that results in gender pay gaps, the misrepresentation in politics and media, exclusion from academia or maybe just equal chances in the public sphere, finds its way everywhere. Patriarchal values are additionally multiplied by institutions; which operate the same way on the principle of male authority and control (Connell, 1987). These institutions can be the education system, governments, religious organisations, cultural organisations but also the family itself.

Connected constantly and consequently to patriarchy by its negation, women are marked in a difference of a negative value and in inferiority. Within this difference in inferiority and defended by biology and anatomy, the classical misogynist argument is rooted (Braidotti, 1995). Misogyny is a rhetorical technique, aiming to construct and maintain the ideal of humanity within males.

Misogyny is woman hate, the devaluation of femininity and the downgrading of the female body, resulting from this oppositional concept of differences. Per definition, patriarchy describes a social system with a male-dominated power structure and resulting privileges for men, speaking in a binary gender view (Kurt, 2023, pp. 18f). As the whole culture is based on this binary view in oppositions, the process of constructing male identity in the same opposition and therefore rejection of women seems a structural necessity (Braidotti, 1995). Misogyny is another motif, upholding and reproducing certain signs and values of male domination and patriarchal narratives, and as Braidotti names it an identification with phallogentric values (1995). It is ingrained in stereotypes and clichés, prejudices and metaphorizations, even jokes and comedy. Misogyny is a discriminatory behaviour, a social practice, manifested in institutional structures and culture. At the cost of perpetuating gender inequality, it marginalises women and devalues femininity.

Based on differentiation as an ideological inscription, sexual differentiation is also a history of contradictory practices at the root of the concept of heterosexuality (De Lauretis, 1990). Marriage, women's bodies through the male gaze and motherhood are all tools to serve the purpose of this oppressive system and cultural narrative. Sexuality is located at the join of subjectivity and sociality, and is practised in a social system dominated and biased by male domination, the woman in Otherness and every human being at the notion of heterosexuality (De Lauretis, 1990).

The subordination of women under power-holding men in different aspects of life under a social system with its cultural norms can be summed up within patriarchal practices. It is what Simone De Beauvoir calls “the Other”, as the historical exclusion of women from power and authority positions (2012). Limiting rights for women in favouring those for men, as for example voting rights for women who appeared in the early until mid-20th century in Europe or the criminalisation of marital rape in the late 90s state the institutionalisation of power structures in favour of just one sex. Another practice is manifested in the equally

denied access to education and the following profession. Tied to the oven and the family, the traditional construct of marriage in Western society, relying on its concept of heterosexuality, enforces women's dependence on men (Rich, 1980). The family itself might serve one of the hardest and most manifested cultural expectations dictating specific roles for men and women (Butler, 1990). The woman as the classical housewife, primarily responsible for domestic and care work, caregiving and supportive, in the total contrasting stereotype to the leading powerful husband, who is responsible for decisions. The status of a woman was tied through marriage to their male relatives. Marriage, which was not just a cultural given central aspect for a woman, served the purpose of legitimate heirs and alliances throughout folks. Freedom of emotional and sexual choice is not equal for men and women; it is not even for the ego. Sexual difference in Western culture is understood as asymmetry in sexes; the picture of this asymmetry works as a powerful motif and cultural imaginary (Braidotti, 1995). Reinforcing gender binarism through specific culturally transported gender roles and stereotypes in male/female and masculine/feminine, maintain patriarchal control and serve as performative acts (Butler, 1990).

These stereotypes are perpetuated by the media, following a constant reproduction of patriarchal practices. For example, the “male gaze” that will be discovered later, deriving from analysis from Donna Haraway and Teresa De Lauretis. The male gaze, that in one sense happens contradictory but still matching, when it comes to the myth of virginity, understanding women's sexuality under the concept of purity, innocence and control, transported through traditional narratives. It is the virtue of the woman that is asked for, for the control and limit over her on the other side, defined by her sexual status (Firestone, 1970). The imaginary weaves itself through different narratives and finds its way even to practices, such as white clothing to prove the woman's virginity, diminishing her worth to a piece of tissue. The sexuality of a woman is predicated through the phallic regime of an asserted sexual difference between men and women, understood as “the Other” sex, not serving equal practices and representations of

the sexual (De Lauretis, 1990). From traditional myths to literature, art and media of contemporary times, the cultural narratives are propagated in a patriarchal culture, a test tube for stereotypes about gender, clichés and prejudices, carrying patriarchal values at the measurement of the male as the norm (De Beauvoir, 2012). A closer look at those patriarchal narratives will follow in the fifth chapter.

In Europe in 2020, around 3500 women were killed by family members or their (ex-)partners (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021). Gender-based violence is a patriarchal practice. Enforcing women's subordination, sexual harassment and domestic violence serve to act as control and domination mechanisms (hooks, 1984). Violence, that is normalised, and seemingly justified by societal norms, supported by legal systems that are not protecting victims or asking for accountability for perpetrators, and cultural beliefs as well as a certain use of language that excludes all diverse experiences makes gender-based violence a patriarchal practice.

Patriarchal practices are at the same time the mechanisms that keep patriarchal culture maintained, constantly reproducing itself: may it be the economic dependency from men, may it be, because of legacies and the marital status, or the gender pay gap and the fact, that women end up more often in lower-paying jobs because of care work responsibilities (Eisenstein, 1979). May it be through the institutional level; getting told in school that men perform better in maths than women, media that cares about the private lives of female politicians or even worse about their neckline, any misogynist movie that places its narration on an ideology of control. May it be and unfortunately is the reality of all women, gender-based violence as an outcome but also as a tool to enforce female subordination and fear (hooks, 2000).

The Philosophy of Differences: Otherness from mankind?

The concept of difference that builds the ground for the binary understanding of the world, was and still is popularly used in European fascism to understand individuals within a society into different sub-categories, heterogenic to a powerful majority and a minority existing in lack. Especially used by totalitarian and fascist regimes, it defines a biological determinism. The constructed otherness is the basis of power and exclusion for determining either pejorative or inferior otherness. It is the argument for categorising, which group was worthless, and which group was ruling over those. In totalitarian regimes this power construct is instrumentalism for the exploitation and extinction within biologically determined over the “worth-less” sub-category, exponentially raising the supremacy idea in European minds. The notion of “differences” results in the image of the “other”, a sub-category signalling less value and is according to Braidotti inscribed within the signifier woman and the feminine (1995), but also plays into the difference of race and ethnicity. Colonisation and imperialism coming from Western society built up a global system of white supremacy, based on racial hierarchies. Françoise Vergès focuses on the deeply rooted dominance of white people over other races within patriarchal culture, impacting economic, political and social parts of human life by reproducing power structures at the benefit of white individuals and at the cost of marginalised people of colour (2021). Braidotti claims that “a culture has the truth it deserves” (1995) and understands following the Western culture as a century of the concept of differences that spreads into all fields of social life. While the definition of the Otherness is not so clear, clarity lies in the understanding of the Other as “inappropriate”, a lack, lesser value. This concept results in the generalised exclusion of women and people of colour from all discourses, even the ones about their sexuality (De Lauretis, 1987). Difference in patriarchal culture finds its notion into gender and sexuality (De Lauretis, 1987), but also in ethnicity and race (Vergès, 2021). And this notion works as a container, limiting women and women of colour into a predefined and

defined upon them, set of behaviours and social relations (De Lauretis, 1987). Defined in relation to man, makes otherness in its absolute sense and the woman as the “imperfect” version of man. What about the woman of colour and her notion of the white man? De Lauretis states exactly this paradoxical sense, deriving from biology and the idea of the woman as the ideological by-product of the male that is reflected in Western society’s culture, habitus and the discourse about objectification and subjectification (1990). This body, which is claimed to be biologically given, is more the surface and the gate for socio-symbolic codes (Braidotti, 1995), the visual location of power (Haraway, 1985), the tool for manipulation and the result of social construction (Braidotti, 1995). All feeding the ideology of differences on which a whole system is put upon the conceptual paradox of a social difference, that is at the same time a social indifference. Legitimated through class-biased and racist practices (De Lauretis, 1990). For Haraway for example, the differences are much more discussed in ideological and professional contexts, as they have a reasoning in biology. As certain things, like social behaviour, mental activities, using tools and language were inscribed to humans as unique species, biology also proved that this drawn line between humans and animals remains blurry, after realising animals do the same (1985). The same natural given and determined by biology argumentation hits when it comes to gender differences, which are understood as fixed and natural, pre-existent before any symbolic influences or cultural inscriptions. Gender-subscribed differences are therefore not changeable. Within their category, the oppositional positions are unitary “for the sake of coherence” of difference (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 230). If we understand gender as something continuously and repetitively performed, it seems natural and inherent over time. These repeated acts within a certain regulatory frame make gender work as a repeated stylization of the body (Butler, 1990). Unconscious processes, the body and subjective experiences have a meaningful influence, as the phenomenon of hysteria proves that the body works as an entity shaped by cultural and symbolic factors. Psychological issues manifest here physically. In the same way as the body is influenced by interactions

to its symbolic order, also gender and sexuality are shaped and cannot be understood as simply natural given categories (De Lauretis, 1990).

The key difference of all of them is set after the phallic phase (Irigaray, 1985). Kids before their phallic phase do not differentiate between sexes. Later, phallogocentric structures introduce and present male sexuality as the standard and subordinate female sexuality in its deviation (Irigaray, 1985). Culture, language and especially psychoanalytical theories from Lacan and Freud are centred around the symbol of the phallus, standing for authority and power. Within the structure of constructing knowledge, forming reason, language and logic, female experiences are excluded from scratch and are not represented in Western culture and language (Irigaray, 1985). This difference is for De Lauretis conscious, not absolute, but socially constructed and subjectively assumed (1987). Femininity is socially constructed and as the experiences of women are not represented in the phallogocentric structure, their status as being objectified is and having agency as a subject is something that can just happen outside of the traditional gender roles and terms.

To deconstruct the binary oppositions and their value-loaded containers such as male/female or white/black and understand those containers and inscriptions are socially constructed and used as tools for maintaining power structures is one of the key ideas of the philosophy of differences. It is associated with poststructuralist thinkers such as Derrida, but also feminist theories and discussed by Irigaray, Butler and many more. The philosophy of differences challenges the characteristics of individuals and groups based on attributes like gender, race and sexuality. Often associated with poststructuralist and feminist theories, explores the concept that identity and meaning are not fixed but are fluid and constructed through various cultural, social, and linguistic processes. Providing a framework, this philosophy also understands gender as socially constructed. The patriarchal culture perpetuates systematically gender inequality (Butler, 1990; Irigaray, 1985). Identities are understood as fluid, performative and constructed through social practices and discourse (Butler, 1990). Irigaray

underscores political implications by aiming to dismantle hierarchical structures marginalising minorities by recognizing and supporting diversity (Irigaray, 1985). Within the philosophy of differences find also queer theory with Butler’s claim to accept more diverse sexual orientations and gender identities that are excluded within binary thinking (1990) and thoughts about how ethnicity and race are constructed through systemic racism, culture and social practices (Crenshaw, 1989). In summary, the philosophy of differences emphasises the plurality and multiplicity of identities as well as it promotes intersectionality. Defined in 1970 by the feminist Kate Millett, her concept of sexual politics talks about the same power-structured relations resulting from gender, sex and sexuality in relation to the social system of patriarchy. The resulting inequalities between individuals and their practices are politicised by this. Carried within women’s and gay liberation movements new argumentations and concerns developed sexual politics including transgenderism, pornography, sexual violence, gender-based violence as well as queer politics.

Haraway calls it the postmodern identity, an identity based on the acknowledgment of difference, otherness and specificity, among which especially women of colour struggle to find their identity in. As terms like “black” or “woman” historically and traditionally negated and excluded them, their identity needs a space in which identity is formed through a collective political effort and the acknowledgement of multi-diverse experiences within their group (Haraway, 1985). Whiteness and maleness are the default versions of identity, they are implicit and go without saying (Bourdieu, 1977), they do not need neither a justification neither an explanation; they are considered the standard. According to Butler, identity is formed within available cultural terms of an existing definition or norm. New identity concepts cannot be implemented as a practice in this container, as the previously discussed framework conditions of this patriarchal culture preclude transformation. Therefore, certain identities are established and communicated through a culture, certain political practices lead to a contingent basis for these identities (Butler, 1990). Remotti argues that identities are not fixed

but constantly shaped by historical, social and cultural contexts and understands identities as a fluid process involving constant negotiation and redefinition (2007). Socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility are forming identity, as much as identity is assured through stabilised concepts of gender, sex, sexuality and “the person” but becomes unstable from the moment a person does not conform to the gender norms of the practised culture defining those. As gender is complex and culturally constructed, instituted and relinquished gender norms to affirm identities, gender cannot be defined, transformed or lived in this culture (Butler, 1990). In so far identities are hardly recognized, mostly misrepresented and misunderstood as they are understood within fixed traditional categories and containers (De Lauretis, 1987). The same power structures that maintain and reproduce stereotypes and patriarchal practices, also produce fixed identity concepts of sex. The masculine sex in this patriarchal culture is the elaborated one from the production of the “Other” (Butler, 1990).

Gender is neither a result of sex in a causality, nor a seemingly fixed sex. It also does not automatically correspond to biological sex. Gender is also not a cultural interpretation of sex, as sex itself is already a gendered category. Gender is a system in which the sex of concept is produced, but gender also holds inscription on pre-existing sex. The notion of the naturalness of binary sex categories is socially constructed and holds a history, a tradition, that can be examined and deconstructed. To challenge the notion of the binary view, gender must be understood as cultural means by which the concept of natural sex is presented and created as if it is independent and pre-existing to culture. Therefore, sex and gender can be understood as variable and fluid constructs (Butler, 1990). Gender does not align with (self-) identification in their representation throughout the male gaze, as the male gaze directly influences this representation. This male gaze is put on women as “Others” (De Lauretis, 1990).

It is this gaze, according to Braidotti, that on one hand tells the story about women created out of the rip of men, but on the other hand, associating women with monsters back in time till Aristoteles. The “Woman as Other” is used as a

prototype for everything, that is not confirming the standard and the norm. The *topos* of difference and abnormality are signified in the idea of the female sex as “other-than” the male norm (1995). As the subject is a materially embodied entity and the body a culturally coded and socialised entity (Braidotti, 1995), the influences on subjectivity become quite obvious.

Identity and Subjectivity

According to Remotti and as already mentioned before, identity is not fixed but rather dynamic and shaped by various social and cultural interactions (Remotti, 2007). Rosi Braidotti understands subjectivity as fluid and constructed through experiences and relations (Braidotti, 1995). Identity and subjectivity consequently have something in common. Subjectivity does not come without a body, that on the other hand serves also the identity formation as an object under the societal gaze. It is the “screen of imaginary projections” (Braidotti, 1995, p.103), where societal norms and cultural codes inscribe themselves onto. If the culture and society are patriarchal, so are the norms and cultural codes.

Identity is a signifying practice and is at the same time formed through social practices and especially language. Shaped by the rules and norms our identity is embedded in the container that language creates. As language is not a fixed set of terms, meanings and narratives, but a constantly and continuously evolving system, different ways of speaking can co-exist and interact and give possibilities to express and understand identities in various ways (Butler, 1990). The power of language, its plasticity, derives from the production and reproduction of social actions, which accordingly become practices and institutions. It is constructed that men were seen as the role of a speaker, becoming universal and through practices historically. “Language has a plastic action upon the real”, according to Butler (1990, p. 158) the way we use language, can either influence

bodies and contribute to sexual oppression or overcome exactly this oppression. Even though understanding ourselves is anchored within the body itself and the perception of it, language has the ability to shape the perception of others and ourselves. Accordingly, identity is for Butler additionally influenced and mediated by language and the gaze upon our bodies. Purely bodily or self-contained identity is for Butler impossible, the same as the understanding of language as not sexualized per se within a patriarchal society and its perceived truths and narratives (1990). Not just Braidotti but also Lauretis claim that gender and body are linguistically and socially constructed concepts, where the grammatical “I”, takes the political necessity of the signification of the bodily ego and therefore is important for physical and psychological survival (De Lauretis, 1987). Language is the foundation stone for patriarchal narratives influencing Western society. Nevertheless, even if two sexually differentiated subjects will be recognized, language and subjectivity are still limited by the binary thinking and the restrictions of binary oppositions. Within these characters, the subject itself can lose its fluidity in communication. Being a speaking subject with its relation to the world is understood as a tool, but the need to affirm identity as a gendered and sexed subject is in focus, as otherwise a confinement with the language and experiences of the oppositional sex can happen (De Lauretis, 1987). This approach shows the significance of how gender is shaping identity, but also the understanding of identity, as well as the sexed subject.

Being a subject means, for De Lauretis, being subjected to societal rules and norms and identifying with social class, gender, race and ethnicity. Categories on which societal norms and rules are put upon. It means also, existing and acting in a society, with the ability to make decisions autonomously and therefore resist oppression. The subject exists in a grammatical sense as a subject (1990). The division into subject, described as active and thinking beings and objects, described as those to be acted upon, derives for Butler from the traditional Western culture. It is especially problematic when it comes to understanding identity, as this way of thinking automatically limits the design, experiences, living out and understanding

of identities (De Lauretis, 1990). For example, the term “woman” denotes a commonly understood identity. In this idea of what it means to be a woman, the actual experiences for a representation rather than a pure description is not possible (Butler, 1990). The problem of the containers is discussed before. Starting from this point, subjectivity has two values. It is being controlled by social constraints, deriving from a certain culture and its norms and rules, but also having the ability to resist oppression, manage internal conflicts and self-determination (1987). Braidotti develops further the idea of Foucault and claims that one becomes a subject through the set of interactions and permissions that are dominating one culture. The identification with the cultural codes and phallogocentric symbols within a patriarchal culture, align and influence the subjectivity of an individual (Braidotti, 1995). Therefore, subjectivity is plural, under constant development, influenced by society and interconnected with language and cultural narratives (Braidotti, 1995). Subjectivity is also negotiated through the stories we tell each other and that are told about us. As subjectivity is plural, so do stories contain a plurality of voices, forming a heavily nuanced understanding of identity (Schachtner, 2020).

For De Lauretis the gap between the representation of *Woman* and the real experience of women is clear and needs to be discussed (1990). The commonplace of subjectivity lies for De Lauretis in sexuality, as this is the place where subjects elaborate themselves as an image and their corporeal knowledge. To understand how the self and the body relates and acts in this world, happens there (1990). Sex as well as the sexual subject are constructed and are in an accumulated process by effects from the materiality of bodies, that are themselves not modifiable. It is the body, the subject itself that is “permanently under construction” and the *process of sexuation*² comes into this life-long process (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 205). Subjectivity and the body are not pre-existing entities, but constructed through

² The term “sexuation” understands the fluid formation of sex and gender influenced by biological factors and cultural values as well as language. De Lauretis uses this expression to research the traditional construction of gender roles and identities. She uses the term explored by Jacques Lacan (1966).

social interactions and the process of sexualisation (De Lauretis, 1987). Nevertheless, for Braidotti, the reassuring notion of the “sameness of bodily material” as a wrong idea results from understanding differences. Just through differences, the individual can measure the singularity of each subject (1995, p. 64). Focusing on the concept of sameness can be misleading to understand identity and experiences in all their diversity and specificity per individual bodies. Not all bodies are essentially the same and the value of the differences challenges the body materiality as a universal and uniform foundation and resulting normalisation (Braidotti, 1995). Body materiality inscribes the concept of different bodies that are constructed and in interaction with cultural and social institutions on the physical surface of the body. This idea recognizes the physical experiences of different bodies. Braidotti’s concept of the nomadic subject recognizes all these differences and challenges the idea of fixed identities. As a new figuration of subjectivity, the focus lies on how language and cultural narratives of Western society in all their colours and shadows are paying their contribution to patriarchal narratives and their impact on women’s identities. Celebrating the fluidity of subjectivity, the nomadic condition is based on a non-hierarchical way and offers a multi-differentiated perspective (Braidotti, 1995). The nomadic subject is discussed more deeply in the chapters two and five.

Having subjectivity, being able to act as a subject and being seen in subjectivity, means having validity. For Rebecca Solnit, having validity means counting as a person, which in turn means having power, rights and legal. If a person has validity, their words have authority and the power to determine what actually happens to them. A subject has self-determination in the idea of equality (2021). Subjectivity allows additionally people to know how the world and the culture work around them; the way social norms and cultural forces are influencing them. Having subjectivity means consequently being an active agent and analysing, negotiating and resisting these forces deriving from patriarchal culture (De Lauretis, 1990). Having subjectivity is also important to understand the full complexity of plural and multiple identities and the embodiment of experiences.

Embracing all the differences and including all experiences allows an intersectional approach for discovering more inclusive and diverse identities and individuals (Braidotti, 1995).

Experiences are processed through narrative forms: we tell others about our experiences, we exchange stories and narratives get transported over decades. Within these narratives, individuals construct themselves as subjects as a reflexive practice. Through narration individuals develop a self-concept, making themselves perceptible to Others. This narration happens within the container of societal and cultural norms, which means that individuals automatically produce and reproduce common socio-cultural standards. The narrative subject hence uses the practice of narration in relation to existing social orders and interprets, modifies and refines them. (Schachtner, 2020).

Language creates and communicates disparity and difference and creates the social reality of hierarchy. Created through the locutionary acts of speaking subjects, language is powerful enough to produce and reproduce the illusion of a symmetrical difference within the economy of phallogocentrism as the economy of the same (Butler, 1990). As femininity is undetermined within the relation of difference in this economy, the substantive identity cannot exist, is not representable within the dialectic of the false binary of the “Other” and the Same. As the Other is marked as the negative elaboration of the male subject, both categories of this false binarism are marked as masculine and render femininity as absent. Therefore, Judith Butler quotes Irigaray and Wittig arguing that “the subject is always already masculine”, as the subject is performed through a very plastic language exclusively in masculine territory from a patriarchal culture (Butler, 1990, p. 158). Challenging the dominant viewpoint from patriarchal culture can according to Butler just be possible, if femininity is not anymore understood as a fixed essence, but to understand that femininity is created as absence created from the masculine viewpoint in the economy of sameness and exclusion and the hegemonic conceptual scheme (1990) as described before.

Supported by cultural narratives, even in science the language of women

remains resistant to the inclusion of women’s experiences, established by the monosexual framework of mankind. For example, the label of hysteria manifests as a symptom, especially in women’s language, that remains unrecognised when women do not own subjectivity.

Jean-Martin Charcot and Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne are considered the founders of modern neurology, decisive for the invention and classification of the concept of hysteria. Deriving from ancient Greek *ὑστέρα hystéra*, the term hysteria derives from uterus as the producing part of the body and works as historical name for psychological disorders characterized by an altered ego awareness or dissociative behaviour and histrionic personality disorder. Hysteria was understood as a physical and psychological disorder that solely occurred to women, who appeared self-centred, addicted to criticism and unreflective (Tasca et al., 2012, p. 110). Among other things, Charcot used for his analysis of hysteria paintings of Toni Robert-Fleury, showing the personification of madness in female figures but also his work at the *Salpêtrière* hospital in France, which is described as a place for “three thousand female paupers, vagabonds, beggars, “decrepit women,” “old maids,” epileptics, “women in second childhood,” “misshapen and malformed innocents, ”incorrigible women – madwomen” in 1690 (Didi-Huberman & Charcot, 2003, pp. 13f, 32-36f). Hence, the history of hysteria goes back until the times of Ancient Egypt, where it was identified as a spontaneous uterus movement within the female body and is brought together with procreation and perpetual virginity in the Greek world. Following the Middle Ages, called as the madness of love and unfulfilled sexual desire, the popular view on women, from which the term hysteria finds its source, derives from the Aristotelian concept of the superiority of man under the assertions of women as “failed” men (Tasca et al., 2012, pp. 110-112). Later on, in the 13th century, “hysterical” women are understood as in “presence of demons”; the concept gets confused with sorcery and gets punished or “cured” with exorcism. Until the 16th century, hysteria remains a “symbol” of femininity, is still depicted in numerous pictures, stories and storytelling about witches, such as *Malleus Maleficarum* by Heinrich Kramer.

Described as “moral and physiological imbalance” or melancholy, it was in the 18th century, that hysteria was no longer seen as a disease associated with the uterus, but rather as a neurological cause. Charcot is one of many scientists, and becomes famous for his hypothesis of hysteria as a hereditary degeneration of the nervous system. He finds out, that this disease is by fact more common amongst men than woman (Tasca et al., 2012, pp. 113ff). It will follow Freud and many more, the understanding and picture of hysteria, connected to the woman's body, remains as iconic metaphor.

Women communicate differently, which keeps getting stigmatised and marginalised by the dominant cultural traditions, which are those of a patriarchal culture (Irigaray, 1985). The woman's experience disappears, but the woman itself disappears in our language and our numbers; she disappears in the history of science, but also in the naming of places or streets. We say mankind for human beings that are within societal norms good human beings. The man, defining the standard, functions as the scale and defines the borders of the patriarchal society (Perez, 2019). The domain of universality within the male sex, moves over all relationships of the speaking subject to the surrounding world, forming the categories and discourses to its standards. “Man has always represented the only possible subject of discourse”, claims Irigaray (2002, p. 227), and connects the universal appearance of language as the language of man (Irigaray, 1985).

Chapter 4

Being of Language - of “Man”?

We use language to communicate. Language is present not just in the public but also in the private sphere, derived from a long history and tradition, changes and develops throughout time and with the help of technologies, and is more than spoken word. Language is also nonverbal, aural and visual (De Lauretis, 1990). Language holds power; moreover, the power to be self-referential and self-accountable (Braidotti, 1995). Language holds in certain representation and in doing so, also the representation of women. Luce Irigaray speaks of the “*Language of Man*” (2002) in her work *To Speak is Never Neutral*, used as a matching title for this chapter.

The way we speak, the language we use, influences the way we think and perceive the world. According to Sapir and Whorf, language is a box of words and expressions, and in the case of not having a word for a particular concept, the concept cannot be understood completely by the speaking person. Their hypothesis of linguistic relativity also implies that different languages make people understand and see the world in different ways. The language itself shapes the environment throughout its linguistic relativity and determinism. One of the most famous examples for this interrelation of language and perception, but also culture, is the example of a language having a lot more words for snow, different expressions for which kind of snow, which taste, smell, and colour, than we have. The speaker might understand the concept of snow in much more diverse and nuanced ways, than a speaker who has one word for snow. This example shows

that grammar and vocabulary shape and influence perception and for this the felt experience. It shapes the culture of the speaker, as language also reflects cultural practices and connotations of a culture. It also shapes cognitive thinking throughout the particular linguistic structures used within a language and the perception variety resulting from it. The relationship between thinking, perception, culture and experience (Whorf, 1956) is also described by Braidotti as all humans as “being in language” (1995, p. 186), that are influenced by the linguistic signs and the shape of ordinary language from the culture the speaker lives in.

Language has the ability to open up worlds; think back to the time you were studying a foreign language and learned about grammar, the vocabulary, but also metaphors, expressions, saying and cultural beliefs. While language has the power to connect, it also has the power to divide, to exclude and to silence. Kübra Gümüşay reflects in her book *Speaking and Being* about this power, how language shapes our worldview, interactions and even our identity. Throughout language, we can express who we are, what we want and where we come from. We can express how we see others and ourselves. Language shapes personal and cultural identity. Words and structures shape the way we interpret reality and how we perceive it. We communicate our identity and create a shared reality with others, if we understand each other through our words; we create a shared reality, where we are distant and separated through barriers, when we lack a common language (Gümüşay, 2020).

Language works as a container, it does imprison throughout its underlying construct and inscription. The grammatical structure and vocabulary can either expand or limit the ways of thinking and expressing ourselves, certain concepts and emotions do not find their words in a certain language, but maybe in another (Gümüşay, 2020). Perhaps some expressions do not adequately describe an emotion, situation or condition.

Language has power and its power is incalculable, resilient and complex (Braidotti, 1995). Language has the power to include and exclude; dominant ways of speaking, the same as language, affect social exclusion and inequality, when

individuals get marginalised by not conforming to the norms transported by the way of speaking (Gümüşay, 2020). To speak is to be, and to speak is also to connect. To speak is also to show where I am coming from, but it needs to be acknowledged by the listener. Language also has the ability to disconnect, to heighten the gap between the practice and inequality of gender freedom (Butler & Spivak, 2007). Language, for Haraway, is the translation of racism and colonialism caused by the embodiment of Western *logos* (1985). Languages manifest juridical structures and constitute politics in the way of positioning power structures (Butler, 1990). Limited through the predicated binary structure that finds its way also into language, the hegemonic cultural discourse is inevitable (Butler, 1990). That being the case, language pre-defines the realms of gender per se (Butler, 1990). Language can also signify codes, mark gender, exploits misogynist structures as for Wittig (1985). As language works as a discursive link, conjugated with the verb to be (Braidotti, 1995), feminist theorists claim for the importance and rethinking of women's representation throughout language as social subjects in all spheres. This includes politics, but also representation in texts, films and public discourses.

Teresa De Lauretis looks up the word gender in her essay *Technologies of Gender* (1987). In terms of grammar, for classificatory terms, the same idea of classification applies regarding the sex and the absence of sex as the “natural gender” of terms. In Romance languages the characteristic given is named “grammatical gender”; differentiating without any hint for a pattern to determine masculinity or femininity as a universal law. This grammatical gender classifies a gender as masculine/feminine in order to distinguish nouns within a language, mirroring the two-gender system and defining the gender of a noun as a rule, no matter how meaningful it may seem in terms of content. Gender is a representation, but it is not only the representation of the word itself representing a specific object, thing or animate being, but it is also representing relations: the entity of class, the belonging, an identity of an individual with its position (De Lauretis, 1987). De Lauretis uses this example to point out that the semiotic relation of the social to the discursive is manifested within the start, in language (1987). The way of use of

language, the way it is manifesting and classifying, influences our perception of the world; of identity, of gender, and can even cause a “violence of rhetoric” (De Lauretis, 1987, pp. 31f). In this sense the act of violence among other things starts for De Lauretis in the violence through language, constructing certain social power relations within the constitution, its constructed and inevitably reproduction of the figure of the family in Western culture.

De Lauretis names a study about the treatment of battered women in emergency rooms while ignoring the cause of the injuries as an example of the structural construction of relationships and social beings even over institutions of medicine (1987). She calls it the “innocent of the ideology or the rhetoric violence”, that lies behind gender-neutral expressions, such as “marital violence” or “spouse abuse”. Implying an equal engagement in battering or a necessity, a natural law, that serves the cause on the one side and the moral neutrality on the side of the knower (1987, pp. 34f). Language contains in its structure the power as a productive force that spreads simultaneously generated forms of knowledge about subjectivity and social subjects throughout society (De Lauretis, 1987).

This representation stands in relation to the social construction of gender and subjectivity and mirrors the culture it is performed. Language also holds the felt experience of individuals, which therefore reproduces occurrence with class, race and cultures across different languages, cultures and the sociocultural *apparati* (De Lauretis, 1990). This is why, according to De Lauretis, women enter already without concreteness or singularity history, as the inscription of women as Mother within a capitalistic and patriarchal ideology is the “machine that reproduces human species” (De Lauretis, 1987, p.130). Irigaray understands the need for a new way of thinking and a new civic language, speaking from more than one language in order to construct a universal and democratic culture in which language is decisive. She understands “speaking as woman” as a “facilitator of creative dialogues through difference” (Irigaray & Green, 2008b, p. 245).

Sexual difference as discussed earlier happens on the notion of opposition along the axis of gender and shows a clear “one-way relation of oppressor to

oppressed, coloniser and colonised subject” (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 168). In this way thinking of the female body is constituted through the male gaze, seen through male eyes and mapped by phallic desire or led by the Oedipal discourse (De Lauretis, 1990). Sexual difference is the acceptance that women are biologically, emotionally and socially different, but try to assimilate to patriarchal culture and the rights and rules of men – at the cost of the “silence of women in the language of men” (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 168).

Braidotti goes one step further in understanding the culture and logic that we share, are based on the parameters defined for and by the male sex. In this sense the terms “Woman/woman”, “woman”, and “the feminine” organise, manifest and create a phallogocentric system, that at the same time oppresses and exploits women and defines their subjectivity (1995).

Dismantling “Phallogocentric Language”

There is a gender-specific division of women in language (De Lauretis, 1990) and the existence of a “phallogocentric language” (Braidotti, 1995), that describes the same correlation in Western culture as Gümüşay described between being and language. In this culture, being is undoubtedly and unchangeable being-sexed. Being automatically being-sexed is nevertheless not represented by the grammatical structure of language. The “I” is neither “she/her”, nor is a “you”, as personal pronouns genders excessively (Braidotti, 1995), and in some languages the existence of nouns and subjects with a gender as male, female or neutral easily leads to the exclusion of the other sex in cognitive processes. A study by Lera Boroditsky about how language biases the perception of society through the gender of words and grammar found a consistency in the way speakers described objects and the grammatical gender of nouns in their language. As an example, to describe a “bridge”, that is in Spanish “el puente” (masculine), Spanish speakers used

stereotypically masculine adjectives like “strong”. Whilst in German “die Brücke”, a feminine noun, stereotypically feminine adjectives were used by German speakers, such as “elegant” or “beautiful” to describe the bridge (Boroditsky, Schmidt, & Phillips, 2003).

Positioning the masculine construct as the “subject” is therefore for Butler also carried by the structure of language, automatically excluding a semantic and structural possibility of a feminine gender by additionally creating a bias already in the very language (1990):

The extent to which male-unless-otherwise-indicated permeates our thinking may seem less surprising when you realise that it is also embedded in one of the most basic building blocks of society: language itself. (Butler, 1990).

Perez presents an analysis of the World Economic Forum from 2012, to which the countries with a gender-inflected language and a very binary differentiation of the masculine and the feminine within their language, are also the most unequal countries when it comes to gender (2019). The most interesting part is, that genderless languages such as for example Hungarian or Finnish, showed that without the possibility to mark gender, the misrepresentation of women in language cannot be fixed. The hidden bias in language still silences women’s presence in the world (Perez, 2019).

We also understand the deposition of the female as a deviation from the masculine, when we look at nouns like the German term for “lawyer” which is “Anwalt” and refers to the generic masculine. De Beauvoir’s “Other” is quasi mirrored in the codicil of “-in” to the term. It is not just about the linguistic translation of the feminine as the “Other” in certain languages, but also the confirmation bias that lies behind. Having the unconscious image of a male lawyer in our mind, we have the tendency to select, determine and interpret information in the way it confirms our expectations. The “lawyer” in our head in German is most of the time male (Perez, 2019).

Braidotti’s “phallogocentric language” derives from phallogocentric, the male or phallus-centred symbol of male dominance and logocentric, the centre around logic and reasons as a way of understanding the world. With this term, she describes the dominant ways of speaking in the Western society. By marginalising or silencing female and non-male viewpoints, the phallogocentric language focuses on and primarily includes male experiences and perspectives in a long historically deriving way, as the theory, philosophy and language are shaped by and for men. As it presents solely male perspectives, it limits the understanding of gender inequalities, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and in the world. Phallogocentric language is accordingly traditional, culturally inscribed and inscribing Western culture (Braidotti, 1995). To show the socially constructed linguistic idea of concepts within terms, she defines “Woman”, written with a capital letter “W”, as this universal idea of woman defined by and in the patriarchal and phallogocentric system. It represents the symbol of it, reducing women to stereotypes or ideals created by the patriarchal culture. The recognition of women as individuals with their own experiences, as different and non-stereotypical, refers to the “woman” with the lowercase letter “w”. “The Feminine” refers to culturally and historically produced and traditionally associated qualities, traits or symbols with women and femininity by societal norms; but insists that there is no connection with biology. Her distinction of her is a way to show the diversity that is insofar as not represented by the language and the concepts of patriarchal culture about women (Braidotti, 1995).

This gender-specific division of women in language also becomes clear, when we look at the distance from the culture and women’s relation to subjectivity, and the way language captures it so far (De Lauretis, 1990). The image created by the language of “Woman” is culturally dominant and preconditioned, it is imposed on all women and puts them into the container of a defined female identity with certain qualities and parameters. Language accommodates collective knowledge about terms, their representation and the biases applied to those representations, resulting from the historical and social construction of femininity deriving from

“being-a-woman” (De Lauretis, 1990). Female subjectivity and “Woman” are culturally dominant and prescriptive models; analysed for De Lauretis a construct of identifiable *topos*, for Butler a masquerade, for Irigaray a positive essence or for Wittig the ideological trap (Braidotti, 1995). “Woman” as a term opens up associations and contains everyday life experiences within the suspect of “Woman” as a representation done upon, within and throughout our dominant culture, that through language produces “Woman” with all the qualities of the patriarchal ideology, that lies within our culture (De Lauretis, 1990).

The binarity of gender neither the sexual difference is not a biological given, but a biocultural and historical state of the arts (De Lauretis, 1990) and the interpretative modalities of female function are defined through the binary oppositions of language for Irigaray (1985). Oppositions such “have/not” embody sex as an organ, following the logic of binarism such as “penis versus clitoris”, “plus/minus”, or “be/become” (Irigaray, 1985). This logic assumes difference and otherness, the distinction from the human subject, the Man, the male and its contradistinction of chaos, the female. It results from the Platonic traditional symbol about the modelled and primary binary opposition of the male (Irigaray, 1985). Binarity as a definition and oppression system, as a structure for language, a paradigm for biology. The woman in a patriarchal culture is what the patriarchal culture is defining her as. It is a contradiction of women in culture and language and this contradiction is manifested paradoxically, as the way the female is represented, bearing the prefix *de-* for the deconstruction to describe femininity (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 146): “We speak of the de-aestheticization of the female body, the desexualisation of violence, the de-oedipalization of narrative, and so forth”. Gender and sexuality are rendered by the rhetorical assimilation of the patriarchal culture which serves conceptual entities (De Lauretis, 1987) and gendered subjectivity as a corporation in and through language (Braidotti, 1995). Female subjectivity understood as a new form of materialism is based on the emphasis on an embodied and sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject, an individual that challenges the notion of a universal, neutral subject by

embodying, gendering and socially situating experiences that shake the individual's expression and identity (Braidotti, 1995). Within “woman” falls a set of many complex and highly paradoxical contradictory experiences within this structure. They do not share a “redefined collective quest for a political re-examination of sexuality as a social and symbolic system” (Braidotti, 1995, p. 199) that is so particular for the Western discourse. This very same Western discourse is underlying through structures of the described patriarchal culture in the previous chapters of this work. The axes of subjectification like culture, race, nationality, class or even preferences that define this Western discourse about subjectivity need to be redefined in order to embody the subject into the interrelated network in which sexuality is happening along these axes of subjectification (Braidotti, 1995). Braidotti bases her thesis on Adrienne Rich's “politics of location” to frame her feminist theory to gendered language and identity. “Speaking As” therefore refers to understanding someone's identity and perspective when entering a discourse, to create a practice that recognises the social and cultural position an individual is speaking from (Rich, 1986). It is a difference if I speak as a white, middle-class, European woman, the same as it makes a difference if a White, middle-aged, American man talks to me. The situation in terms of power, culture and identity is framing the way of perception and interaction with the world, based on the “politics of location”, that understands the relation between the historical, geographical and social contexts of an individual's experiences and perspectives (Rich, 1986).

The Silence of Women

As Braidotti pointed out, women struggle to find the proper language for the different forms of subjectivity they are exploring within heterogeneous ways (Braidotti, 1995). A struggle in language, or better said the insufficient, not

translatable language especially in between cultures as Kübra Gümüsay speaks about. While there is the idea of miscommunication through not speaking the same language, or not sharing the same cultural ideologies, there is also the topic of being without a language, or being with the “wrong” language; as a woman speaking with the language of men (De Lauretis, 1990). The marginalisation of less privileged voices through the described dominant linguistic forms and the transfer of cultural ideology throughout this language, can also cause the silencing of those already marginalised voices (Rich, 1986).

The silence is loud, especially when it comes to the history of already silenced women. De Lauretis names the speechless smile of Mona Lisa, Ophelia’s song or Leda, just to name a few of the long list of representations constructed and fashioned by men (De Lauretis, 1990). Women who invented great ideas under male names or their husbands’ cover, who asked for a room on their own, to have their thoughts – in silence. “A contradiction of women in language, as we attempt to speak as subjects of discourses which negate or objectify us through their representations” (De Lauretis, 1990p. 25). A woman expressing herself in this language of men, that marginalised her historically, is a paradox; it needs the Speaking as subject, to represent their individual voices, experiences and perspectives. A representation that does not reduce women to objects, that is not based on stereotypes, phallogocentric roles and images, an identity adapted to patriarchal culture. The labelling as neurotic, narcissistic, symptomatic of some disorder or simply mad, hysteric women whenever their behaviour is not congruent to societal norms. Their way of communication is at all time pathologized or misunderstood by the patriarchal society (De Lauretis, 1990).

The silence of women for De Lauretis starts with the exclusion of women from the polis and its communal language (*koinè*) and is more than the result of the patriarchal symbolic order and culture, logos or the language of “Man”. The same exclusion and inequality run through the course of history, in different branches, may it be the private and domestic sphere at home, when women were not allowed to have their own bank account, or the ability to join paths of academia.

Examining whether women’s silence is merely a product of patriarchal oppression, De Lauretis also assumes it can be understood as a distinctive feature of women’s unique experiences and existence throughout history. If it is Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia’s story, the first woman who received a doctoral degree at the University of Padova in 1678, after a long and difficult journey. After her first application for Theology was denied because of her gender, she earned the Doctor of Philosophy. Women at this time were invariably excluded from educational and professional opportunities, no matter how highly educated they were or from which kind of families they came from.

De Lauretis uses Elena’s story to illustrate the “eccentric” position of women in history and inclusion in fields dominated by men. Even though Elena’s achievements despite obstacles and systematic barriers serve as a prestige case for women’s intellectual capability and resilience, the standards for her were not equal compared to her colleagues. They were also quite exceptional, as Harvard University in the US States had their first female student in 1876, Oxford University in the UK in 1878, and Germany in 1900. Admitting women to universities around the 19th century took much longer to understand and follow the social and cultural shift towards gender equality in education.

But also figures that De Lauretis uses as examples for figures of resistance, like Virginia Woolf’s Judith Shakespeare, show the inscription of silence in women’s speech when they speak the “language of man”, where silence is at its core of material existence and the price is high, even at the greatest part, as a room within, but for a whole house (De Lauretis, 1990). Judith, a fictional character, imagined as the equally talented sister of William Shakespeare, faces barriers and limitations when it comes to education. She is expected to marry and fulfil her domestic role, giving up her talent and aspiration for societal expectations. Her potential not just gets wasted, but stays unacknowledged and unseen; her story ends tragically; it ends like the lives of many women due to gender inequality.

This example works on a double level for De Lauretis, speaking about the literacy of women. While Judith’s talent was denied, Virginia Woolf, as a woman

in the early 20th century, was limited in educational and professional opportunities and faced the same structural gender inequalities she wrote about. Her works are speaking of an intellectual freedom that was in her times not given.

One result of this is also patriarchal literariness. Women's writing and experiences were marginalised or even excluded. She points out Virginia Woolf's contribution to literature, which at the same time recognizes the same talent of Judith as her brother William Shakespeare. For De Lauretis literary standards, but also general representation and women in cinema need to be rethought, to show a higher and more diverse literature without gender exclusion.

Haraway points out the idealistic dream of feminists having one common language critically. For her, having one perfectly true language, containing perfectly narrated experiences, is an imperialistic dream. Colonialism and racism are translated into language and through language mostly, imperialist and racist ideologies are shared and combined (1985). Schachtner follows that the idea of a mono-culture extinct the new combinations and new values for cultural codes that would form and express transcultural identities through language that enables individuals to integrate diverse and various cultural influences into their personal to create a collective identity (2020).

“Fantasy is the psychic mechanisms that structures subjectivity by reworking or translating social representations into subjective representations and self-representations.”, (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 14), and it is a fundamental human activity based on the ability to produce images in someone's mind (imagining) and the ability to make images through techniques such as speaking, the production of language, drawing, photography, film, or even performance (De Lauretis, 1990). The production of text, tales, myths or any other kind of oral, written or visual narrative is based on the transportation of dominant cultural narratives and representations of the culture, showing and shaping social arrangements (De Lauretis, 1990).

Cinema as the inscription in images is often understood as a language of representation, a constructeur of narrative space, that holds place for those who watch it. (De Lauretis, 1984)

De Lauretis calls those “public fantasies”. These public fantasies contain the inscription of a culture, its chains, its mechanisms, its ways of speaking and using language, its figurations and for De Lauretis especially speaking the language of man at the cost of silencing the word of women. In her work *Figures of Resistance*, she addresses the question of the relationship between women and language, the redefinition and rewriting of narration and the importance of representation.

Language has the capacity to collect and develop a broad range of motifs, myths, metaphors and symbols, reinforcing patriarchal narratives (Braidotti, 1995). How through language and the use of those narrative elements a culture is shaped will be analysed in the following chapter about the storytelling of patriarchy.

Chapter 5

Storytelling of Patriarchy

The narratives of the world are numberless. Under an almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and nowhere there is or has been a people without narrative. (Barthes, 1966)

Stories and hence narratives have always existed and existed before we arrived on the scene (Schachtner, 2020). Citing Roland Barthes, the “narrative begins with the very history of humanity” (1988, p. 95). Narratives provide cultural, historical and societal aspirations and play a crucial role in constructing collective and individual identity (Vine & Richards, 2022). As narrative is shared, narrative is also international, trans-historical and transcultural (Barthes, 1966). Narrations consist of aggregations of experiences, hold values and norms, orientations and principles and represent accordingly meaning-contexts or life-worlds (Schachtner, 2020). Therefore, narratives are embedding norms, values, orientations and principles deeply within their cultural frame, representing them at the very same time in our culture and our personal beliefs. Lived experiences and societal belief system are encapsulated in narratives. Throughout their complexity, they involve selected preservations of the past, emphasising group values and identity characteristics (Vine & Richards, 2022). The construction of narrative as a sequence of events told, depicts causal and effectual relationships, reinforcing these experiences in forms of prejudices and biases, attitudes, consciously and unconsciously and a resembling of stereotypes (Vine & Richards, 2022). “We are born into a world of stories which are told to us and which we tell to Others” (Schachtner, 2020, p. 30) describes it best. It starts with bedtime stories when we

are children, the stories in school books we read to learn, the stories we discover in films, games and sometimes in our dreams. Narrating means, making the world our own and situating ourselves in it for then telling others, over and over again (Schachtner, 2020). The narrative act serves to make the world understandable, through the ability to use language (Schachtner, 2020). This language includes imagery, figurations, gestures and patterns, can be verbal or non-verbal and is organised in a narrative structure – almost everywhere and everyone is telling stories.

Storytelling engages with the audience and creates co-constructed narrative experiences by involving a dynamic process (Vine & Richards, 2022). Might it be a rhetorical speech, a newspaper article, advertising, gossip, architecture or comics, just to name a few (Schachtner, 2020). Stories go beyond just entertainment according to Vine & Richards, as they work as cultural artefacts, shaping our beliefs about the world. They contribute to individual identity and collective consciousness, as they influence the way we perceive ourselves and others (2022). Revealing how we live is done through telling stories and narratives. Therefore, storytelling can be understood as a generator for life forms. Storytelling is an act to convey an understanding and configuring of the world (Schachtner, 2020). Intrinsic to the human condition, storytelling is considered a learning method universally present as one of the earliest cross- and transcultural forms. But it also serves as a binding element for a postmodernity where multiple truths coexist and stories become an important transition for individual and collective identity (Vine & Richards, 2022). Telling stories serves a crucial role in constructing collective identity, storytelling is a fundamental characteristic of human experiences. It is more than solely retelling events, as it shapes societal cohesion, cultures and identities (Vine & Richards, 2022). Storytelling exists in a paradox, reflecting a broader reality, abstract from fiction, to learn, teach and understand (Vine & Richards, 2022).

As De Lauretis speaks of public fantasies mirrored by especially films, Schachtner reflects on the narrative character of culture, representing norms and

moralties and inscribing rules and legacies (2020). But more than this, culture can be interpreted as a story that narrates what is considered to be “normal” but at the same time gives space for different interpretations and connections for finding a common understanding (Schachtner, 2020). Narrative is a culturally transmitted and constrained version of reality, that is led by a “narrative necessity”. As human memory and experiences are organised through narrative forms, such as for example reasonable arguments, stories, myths (Bruner, 1985), or sayings, certain norms and normalities get transmitted over generations.

We can see differences in stories from different cultures, we can distinguish certain narrative forms and characters, reflecting on different norms and normalities. What we are told as “universal myths”, like the ones in Shakespeare’s play, Tolstoy’s novels and so on, is transmitted knowledge over generations (Salmon, 2007) for especially in Western culture, which does not apply to Eastern culture. So is for example the concept of an individual protagonist, or a hero, a fundamental trope of Western storytelling, cultivating a sense of individualism as a part of identity construction from an early age; completely different from Eastern storytelling, where the sense of community and togetherness is more cultivated (Vine & Richards, 2022).

The status of women in Western culture draws mostly from Greek mythology and the Old Testament, where “the feminine” is defined symbolically (Braidotti, 1995).

The story of Philomela from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, starts with her sister Procne missing Philomela and travelling to see her with her husband Tereus. Falling in lust for Philomela, Tereus plans to rape her and cuts her tongue out, after she threatened to tell the world about the rape. After silencing her, he rapes her another time and leaves her imprisoned in a cabin back in the forest. Philomela, unable to speak, weaves her story into a tapestry, sending it to her beloved sister. The unspeakable crime is revealed through the tapestry; Procne frees her sister, planning together revenge. Killing the son of Procne and Tereus and serving him for dinner, makes the two sisters flee from Tereus’ anger. They get transformed

into a nightingale and a swallow and Tereus ends up getting transformed into a hoopoe (*Metamorphoses* 6.438-674). Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* reflects in several stories certain gender patterns of male domination and violence. Tereus does physical and sexual harm to Philomela on different levels and, in the end, he is silencing her. Using his position of power, the silencing of one woman reflects on the silencing of all women, to speak about the truth or the censorship of the society, that does not listen to women’s experience as it does to the male ones³.

The idea of male primacy in divine and human realms is in focus when it comes to the inheritance and transmission of power through male heirs in myth stories. The hierarchical structure seems maintained and manifested throughout Zeus’ dominance. His patriarchal control and subjugation over female figures such as Leda or Callisto are reflected in many stories (Buxton, 2004): Europa, who got abducted by Zeus as a bull, Danaë who got impregnated by Zeus as a golden shower, seduced Antiope in the form of a satyr or Alcmene, pretending to be her husband (Pseudo-Apollodorus, 1976). To name just a few, women faced harassment and violence at the hands of powerful male mortals and gods, in order to tell a story and to learn a lesson. Semele, who was tricked by Hera and paid with her life, was killed by the lightning bolts by Zeus. Or Philomela, who was first raped and then silenced, by cutting her tongue out (Buxton, 2004). Cursed women like Cassandra, transformed women like Medusa, sacrificed women like Iphigenia and even buried alive like Antigone (Pseudo-Apollodorus, 1976).

Displaced by its sex, the woman is “cut out from the rib of Adam” (De Beauvoir, 2012, p. 166), following the Old Testament, and their “voices are buried underneath someone else’s – man’s – words” as Braidotti puts it (1995, p. 131).

³ William Shakespeare reworks the story of Philomela in his play *Titus Andronicus* (1588-1593). The play takes place in the Roman army. Tamora, who is the queen of the Goths, is treated as a slave. Lavinia, another woman who is already betrothed, is raped by two men during a long plan of revenge. As done to Philomela, Lavinia is silenced after the rape, her tongue cut out. Additionally, her hands are cut off too, to silence her better than Philomela. Still, the mutilated Lavinia is able to communicate her suffering after reading Philomela’s story. She writes the name with a stick in her mouth in the sand. In a misery of brutal power struggles, betrayal, revenge battles and throne theft, one victim ends up buried alive and both rapists end up as pie. The motif of subjugated women is as loud as the silence of women of the play (Shakespeare, 1995).

Created from a man, who leads and is portrayed as the one, who makes the man fall in the book of Genesis, the creation story reflects patriarchal narratives. The male lineage and inheritance were mentioned in the beginning with the stories of the Patriarchs, limiting at the same time the role of women to domestic spheres and motherhood by laws and rules reflecting the patriarchal society. Till today, there is for Catholicism no female priests; same-sex marriage is not allowed, as the sacrament between one man and one woman is designed for the purpose of procreation and abortion is understood as a sin.

In the book of *Judges 19* there is the story of a Levite’s concubine, that was handed over to a group of men by which she got brutally raped until she collapses. After she died from this ill-treatment, the Levite cut her up in twelve pieces and sent them to the other tribes of Israel, starting a civil war (*Exum*, 1995, v. 19:11–30). This woman remains unnamed, she is reduced to her “job” and entitlement as a concubine, which were women used to keep lineage and serve as surrogate mothers, when there was no possibility of getting children with the wives. An embodied hotbed, handed over, nameless, to save his own life, cut in pieces to seek revenge. As she does not have a name, she also does not have a voice. Her body is first used to give birth and uphold lineage, after this cruel incident, it is used to give signs and seek revenge.

In all examples, all the women from the stories were treated as a secondary category of humankind, displaced by the word *woman*. For the story of the concubine, the term woman is not even mentioned, but metaphorized and reduced to the function of the woman’s body. The term *woman* appears as a political category, given naturally and influencing the socioeconomic relations of gender (De Beauvoir, 1997). This metaphorization of “the feminine” in a textual and theoretical process shows not just historical realities, but veils the historical oppression of women in equivalence (Braidotti, 1995). Mythology is fictional, trying to draw causal connections to the environment. Even if it is fictional, the violence described in myths seems systematic. It is not just a case of gender-based violence, it is a row of cases and incidents. It does not stay with sexual violence,

but it goes also over trafficking, abuse and femicides. It does not stop there with any Greek myth or a story from the Old Testament, it does not stop with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Shakespeare's *Othello* or a Grimm Brothers fairy tale. It does not stop in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, a film from 2013, or *Under My Thumb* by the Rolling Stones in 1966 which celebrates the dominance and control over a woman who is portrayed completely as an object. It also does not stop, when Johnny Cash sings “poetical” and lyrical descriptions of him murdering Delia, reasoned by her “devilish” behaviour in *Delia's Gone* from 1962. Depicting gender-based violence reaches into and over pop culture, being fictional but showing the acceptance, the kind of representation of it and probably success in our Western society. Becoming celebrities, earning money and glory for it, gender-based violence seems a “classical” motif for any kind of artistic piece, normalising gender-based violence on the one hand, and highly influential in shaping cultural narratives on the other hand. Under the circumstance of including and portraying patriarchal patterns, noting misogynist elements and reinforcing patriarchal values, these narratives circulate, get constantly transmitted and carried, inscribe themselves, exist. All of them entail particular effects in the identification process with any of the stories heard (De Lauretis, 1990, pp. 242f).

These patriarchal narratives, with all their motifs, metaphors, symbols and pictures, get constantly remediated, by the fact that any kind of media borrows from another one, collectively; it gets multiplied, refashioned (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), or as Marshall McLuhan puts it: “The “content” of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph” (1964, p. 8). The representation of a medium in another content is understood as remediation. Storytelling saturates symbolic space and tacks artificial narratives onto reality and does this in transcending into all spheres, the private, the public, political, cultural and societal dimensions, fuelled by the possibilities of the Internet (Salmon, 2007).

Any story retells another story, history; try to teach us something, tell us something or let us dream away. Storytelling influences the flow of emotion,

shapes behaviours, and creates identification models for individuals from a leading narrative system (Salmon, 2010). Stories fascinate, encourage and get transported over and over again; as for example the Holy Bible. It is more than an extensive collection, as it contains texts about historical events, lessons to learn, moral and ethical advice, is rich in symbolism, poetry and prophecies in a narrative form, shaping religious thought, societal norms and cultural values till today (McGrath, 2016). The storytelling in the Bible is the multiplicity of discursive centres, that get re-transcribed and redistributed over and over again (Salmon, 2007) within the process of narrating, which structures and selects parts of stories with the aim of gaining new perspectives and new points of views on different experiences (Schachtner, 2020). To reproduce reality is not in focus, as nowadays within a pluralist society, narrative spaces are multiplying and unfolding in different cultural and social settings (Schachtner, 2020). Time and space move to another spatial dimension, as the spatial connection, the underlying relations between things, in stories are retelling stories on their own. As a result, narration does not need to be determined to stay with the facts to produce a coherent story, as the narration is more influenced by the expectations towards a certain narration and its meaning and underlying morals, motivations, beliefs and even identity characteristics about human behaviour (Brooks, 2022).

Narration needs the general world of language, the words and expressions and the world of subjective experiences that are bundled together in language. Language is a container for shared symbolisations, similar memories, experiences and knowledge, indicating solidification (Schachtner, 2020). Through language we understand the motifs, symbols and metaphors woven into narratives (Schachtner, 2020) and through language we share them. Chapter 4 discusses more widely the meaning of language towards storytelling in a patriarchal society.

Storytelling sometimes even lies to us, manipulates us. We find the use of storytelling after the so-called narrative turn in the 1990s in a great variety: it is used for political storytelling, corporate storytelling, legal rhetoric, journalism and reportage, autofiction and grand narratives and even marketing (Salmon, 2007).

Especially for marketing, the shift from the stories of the brand, the logos and the brand image, the story behind as the main focus rather than the products and/or services itself seems impressive, knowing that storytelling makes the stories behind the brand fit our expectations and worldview (Salmon, 2007). Especially when it comes to femvertising, or the advertisement of a film like Barbie as feminist, the question can be raised, if it is about the image, that is forced to be sold, a brand that creates a certain image and how much the image does and is capable of manipulating the reality and at what costs or for which specific aim.

As we find ourselves in stories, we experience ourselves within them. Therefore, narrating serves also to construct the Self (Schachtner, 2020) and uses the Other as a reference point. There is a need and a condition to address the other, as Schachtner is quoting Judith Butler. The Other is told by our narration, in the words of our language. The narrative needs to be recognized by the Others' gaze, as all our stories and human behaviours aim to gain the recognition of others. This external recognition is needed to understand ourselves, reveal parts of us, transform and develop as individuals and find validation. Recognition promotes the development of the subject (Schachtner, 2020). Narration creates and needs space, in order to imply interconnectedness. This interconnectedness is also nested in the metaphorical concept of Deleuze and Guattari of the rhizome, mentioned in the beginning. This rhizome consists of intertwined and interwoven heterarchical social and cultural processes, is never a stable form and changes constantly, building up on new lines or old ones. Schachtner uses this example to compare it with the same structure of narrative space that consists of intertwined and corresponding, sometimes contradictory or hostile narratives within. In these nets of narratives, cultural elements and patterns are mixed, differentiating from their different cultural contexts and their specific cultural codes. New cultural codes can arise and create new forms of norms and normality, which accordingly can create new narratives (2020). Storytelling hence might tell more about the actual culture, than the story itself. Storytelling hence might also not stop to change and develop, and new forms of norms and normality can be strategically implemented.

Motifs and Myths of Patriarchal Narratives

Every story contains certain aspects and variables. Usually, stories are a narrative woven around motifs, which can be themes, symbols, images or thoughts. A motif per se is difficult to describe, as it differs from its appearance and style or reinforcement. Nevertheless, motifs either try to create or are formed by coherence and a sense of unity. According to Northrop Frye, motifs create a certain type of coherence and unity, as they work as recurring themes, elements or symbols contributing to an overall structure and meaning. In this respect, a narrative beholds a construction based on patterns that convey unified messages and a meaning (1957, pp.11f, pp. 56f).

We understood that a dominant culture withholds certain societal norms regarding status and an understanding of “normality”. They are manifested through and upheld thanks to a male dominance. Motifs reflect and reinforce this male dominance and show the different outcomes of a patriarchal society. Emphasising the specific power structures within the patriarchal society, an obvious motif of patriarchal narratives is the repetitive and intermittent representation of male authority figures, such as gods, fathers or kings. We read about Zeus, the Patriarchs or Dante in Western tradition in storytelling. Usually, these male figures are portrayed heroically by representing the idea about traditional masculinity as strong, fierce and powerful. As the binary view is upheld in this kind of storytelling, the female is irrevocably automatically subordinated under the male dependence. They act inferior and dependent on the other sex, as the “other” sex. In many stories that show a strong patriarchal narrative, women are not even carrying a name, as we saw in the story about Levite’s concubine in the Old Testament. Within the motif of masculinity, themes such as ownership, control and protection surround the patriarchal narrative. To stress this imbalance, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published numbers, showing that sexual violence

leads four times more often to a mental health disease like PTBS than participating in war. Survivors of wars, most of the time men, are celebrated; help and inclusive re-entering chances to normal societal life are provided. The same cultural narrative is not applied to women, especially, when they experience sexual violence. Women are not celebrated to be heroic survivors of sexual violence; indeed, victims face a tirade of shaming, blaming and downplaying of what was done to them.

Women are under the control of men; they are excluded from certain authority legacies, they get married to a man, and decisions are made upon their bodies. Masculinity and Femininity, as cultural constructions, are in the same way oppositional as the binary selection of sex. Femininity means in patriarchal narratives the constant disappearing, silencing and in too many stories even killing. Oyeronke Oyewumi once said that the existence of a woman is seen as aggression, while her non-existence is understood as a kind and polite compromise (1997, pp. 13f). As Oyewumi, also Rebecca Solnit and many other feminist thinkers understood the existence of women as the existence in the shadow-of-men, producing more room and freedom for the male society, stepping back and disappearing. In some western cultures, the woman still loses her name after marriage; the birth of a male child is understood as a win for the future.

Braidotti understands the motif and myth formed around the family in a patriarchal culture, as its status is encoded in social practices around heterosexism and heterosexuality, inscribing certain gender and sex-roles put upon subjects. In order to belong to the system, to be a part of the society, the idea to perform, maintain and repeat those symbolic and coded practices is grounded in the idea of the constructed nature of human sexuality and under the condemnation of identity falsification (1995). This idea is based on the understanding of women as objects of oppression and appropriation (De Lauretis, 1990), as this system of binarity and the ideology of symmetry leads to the concept of subjective oppression with certain practices upon objectives.

Donna Haraway discusses this myth of the family within Western culture and puts it into a model in order to differentiate historically and ideologically, understanding the development of link between gender and gender roles within a family structure. Her model presents family structures and how they are interconnected with economic, social and especially gender ideologies, reflecting changes over time, but in spite of everything, maintaining and perpetuating variables of gender differentiation and resulting inequalities (1985). This model serves well as an example to understand the interconnection of systems based on oppressing structures. Throughout motifs, certain social practices are maintained and accomplished through language and the constitution. The social subject depends on the interconnection of consciousness-subjectivity-language (De Lauretis, 1990). Writing as a tool to create and maintain certain Western beliefs and myths, like the concept of family and its corresponding gender roles towards its structure, is for Haraway the key. It is the Western focus on phallogocentrism, as discussed before, that symbolises and expresses the motif of a male-dominated, authoritative and monotheistic and singular truths within Western culture (1985, p. 55). Thereupon Haraway stresses the interconnectedness of these myths and social practices as well as abstract concepts, how they influence each other, but also how dependent on each other they are. Understanding the world with certain images and our language, influences our perception of gender roles, societal structures, ideologies, and body images and the way we think and talk about society and politics (Haraway, 1985). Roland Barthes argues the power of cultural myths shaping and strengthening societal ideologies and accordingly norms, by understanding how symbols and motifs can be decontextualized and refilled with new meanings, signs and ideologies (1972). Therefore, motifs and myths must be analysed, understood and challenged, to understand underlying patriarchal norms and values.

Especially for the idea of myths, Barthes sees the perpetuation of gender norms and roles, highlighted by the storytelling. The repetition of these narratives, motifs and images, implant themselves in society like a reversible reality (1972),

as any myth or story, just like films, works as representations of realities. We believe what we see or hear as true.

After Juri Michailowitsch Lotman’s theory of plot typology, mythical text contains two specific characters. The hero, the mythical subject, that moves through the plot-space presenting and maintaining the rules and norms for the place where the story takes place. The second character is the obstacle or boundary, the object to the story that functions as space and is inscribed inanimate, even though the boundary is played through a person (Lotman, 1977). The human subject in the role of the hero is barely played by a woman in classical myth. Her subject identification happens somewhere in between the hero’s plot and the obstacle’s plot. The woman has barely a language; it is not her speaking when there is a fight, nor if she is the substance of violence against herself. For De Lauretis, within myths, the subject is always male, defined by the subject of culture and social behaviour (1987).

A motif of Greek mythology accordingly is, for example, the transformation of women into animals as a result and more often a penalty for their actions. Violating social norms and the disobedience of gods, which are in a hierarchical position over women, end in metamorphosis like for example in the myth of Callisto, where she gets transformed into a bear (Ovid, 2000). It also represents means of survival through escaping situations, such as Io becoming a cow, just to evade the wrath of Zeus and the jealousy of Hera (Ovid, 2000). It seems, following all these mythical stories, that women embody certain animal characteristics, but also that societal norms and attitudes are placed upon women (Apollodorus, 1921), throwing them into dangerous and life-threatening situations and identity crises, that they are just able to escape by being transformed as something, that seems even less subjective than any human body. The transformation of women into animals is just one of many foundational narratives, emphasising the symbolic significance and the cultural meaning underlying ancient Greek storytelling. They also serve as a good example for understanding that myths are constructed through patriarchal narratives, but also in order to support them (Barthes, 1972). They serve

an ideological function that needs to be clearly recognized as this. Normalising gender inequality and even violence, objectivity and different standards for women, with the need to be protected in myths, normalises additionally male dominance under female subordination and trivialises gender-based violence from the very grass root of existence (Barthes, 1972).

As Solnit fears the omnipresence of gender-based violence, the patriarchal narrative with all its motifs and symbols rewrites and describes constantly the narrative normality of women getting abused, mistreated and killed. “It could have been me” matches probably more often to contemporary lyrics, films and literature than ancient Greek myths.

Femicides happen everywhere and at all times, possibly happening to every woman being at the wrong moment in the wrong places and with the wrong accompanies. This traumatic experience of gender-specific violence is present at all times. As perpetrators for women found within the family, the partners, friends, strangers on the street, at work, at university, at parties, during the week and on the weekends, the normalisation or even glorification of violence or silencing against women in art, songs, films and literature from modern and contemporary ages is still present and loud (2021). May it be the hyper-masculine James Bond, who serves as a hero following traditional stereotypes and gender roles (Feasey, 2010) or the aggressive behaviour of the male dominance that gets glorified throughout *The Wolf of Wall Street*. May it be romanticising controlling, dominant and coercive behaviour with *Fifty Shades of Grey*, celebrated as liberal and sex-friendly literature (James, 2011). Or may it be the very *Blurred Lines* when Robin Thicke sings about objectifying women and the absence of female autonomy while promoting rape culture and patriarchal notions and misogyny (Peterson, 2013).

These examples illustrate how patriarchal ideas continue to be embedded in contemporary storytelling across different media, reflecting and perpetuating traditional gender roles and power dynamics. Far away from being neutral, patriarchal myths are deeply woven into linguistic structures and tell their stories from an exclusively male perspective (Irigaray, 2002). Reinforcing patriarchal

structures, stories like myths can work as frameworks for gender roles and stereotypes (Brooks, 2022). Language as a tool of patriarchy itself, encoding those patriarchal assumptions throughout storytelling, shapes subtly our perception and interactions the same way, as linguistic bias does (Brooks, 2022). This idea can be understood as a continuing thought of Luce Irigaray’s argument about language as an unneutral medium embedding patriarchal structures at its very roots and challenging the hidden biases within linguistic practices (2002).

Symbolism and Metaphors of Patriarchal Narratives

The discourse of man, I claim, is in the metaphor of woman. (Spivak, 1993, p. 179-196)

Each language consists of its own figurations, symbolism, expression and metaphors. Language as a powerful tool that shapes subjectivity and perpetuates patriarchal narratives, is never neutral. It is a vehicle for perpetuating gender norms and biases. Braidotti highlights that becoming a subject involves navigating cultural codes that dictate what is acceptable, normal, and desirable. These codes are deeply embedded in language and reinforce patriarchal ideologies (Braidotti, 1995). For Roland Barthes, too, language is at all times mixed up with metaphors and symbols that structure a system of signs in order to communicate something (1972).

A symbol is a picture, a sign that hints a meaning or even belief. Figuration derives from arts and describes a pictorial representation. Language can be figurative, and the picture created is symbolic. All of them transport cultural value and even can bear historical facts in it. For Schachtner, language is the result of symbolisation, as our brain is constantly busy translating sense into symbols for understanding elementary ideas within the cognitive process of transformation

(2022). Language with all its variety and iconographies accomplishes thought, making thought something from the inner and the external world. For everything we understand, see, listen to and speak, we use a broad collection of existing symbols, that we adapt, modify and mould (Schachtner, 2022). As sexuality, as an example, is an important aspect of how women understand themselves and their relation to the world, narratives and especially symbolism play a crucial role in constructing female subjectivity (De Lauretis, 1990).

There are a lot of iconographic symbols, as Brooks names for example crowns, weapons and thrones traditionally linked to male figures. Symbolising strength, power and dominance, reinforcing patriarchal narratives under the separation of gender roles into public and private and hierarchical positionings becomes clear, when we look at symbols linked to female figures: such as domestic things, homes and hearts (Brooks, 2022). Certainly, the *Beauty Myth* (Wolf, 2002) or *Masculine Stereotypes in Popular Television* (Feasey, 2010) are interesting productions of signs and values of Patriarchal Culture. Nevertheless, this thesis does not give the capacity to talk about all symbols, motifs and metaphors deriving from a patriarchal Narrative. Therefore, just a small variety of figurations will be discussed.

Starting with the phallus as a symbol mentioned by several feminist thinkers, it becomes clear, that it is not just a motif from patriarchal culture, but also a symbol of male sexuality as well as a metaphor for authority and power in language keeps its strength in symbolising male dominance at the cost of women who get marginalised (Braidotti, 1995). For De Lauretis it signifies desire (1990). In doing so, she builds her idea on the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan. For Freud the idea of phallus marks the sexual difference and the Oedipus complex, leaving a narcissistic wound for women and a damaged body-ego for females. This wound can be healed for men through the identification with a figure of power, usually fathers; the phallus implies the symbol of sexual and social power. For females, the identification with their mother or the wish to be loved like a mother, as the equivalent of the Oedipal narrative is regarding the culture

given less symbolised with power. For De Lauretis, this oedipal narrative counts as a classical Western narrative and is constantly reproduced by popular media and culture (De Lauretis, 1990). Lacan builds upon this idea; the phallus signifies desire and the education of subjectivity, surrounding the process of identity creation and human desire. In this regard, the phallus signifies power, and as for Freud too, completeness of the human body for men. The desire sources from the lack of phallus and “imprisons” females into objectification, as something or someone that is in a constant position of yearning for something is not able to act autonomously. Aligning with the phallic structure of desire, for De Lauretis the male gaze manifests in the symbolic power of men for objectifying women with their gaze and puts the point of view just to male desire as the primary (1990). The problem of phallogocentrism is not just the psycho-socio-sexual behaviour that results from it, but also the production and reproduction of reference and meaning (De Lauretis, 1987). The woman is understood automatically as the lack of men. She is both the object but also the sign in Western culture (De Lauretis, 1987). This “authoritative male gaze” goes along with “woman-as-image” (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 4), showing the interconnectedness and correlation between the gaze of males under marginalisation and the objectification of women to something less than a symbol. Females simply cannot pay with their phallic capital; they just act as “commodities that circulate in” the marketplace of desire (De Lauretis, 1990, p. 92). Excluding diverse experiences and identities, the construct around the phallus feeds patriarchal narratives and upholds patriarchal structures. Male desire gets privileged under the marginalisation of women. The phallus therefore is a cultural construct organising social relations and human sexuality (De Lauretis, 1990), serving as a motif, metaphor and symbol and, in this sense, is also analysed by Luce Irigaray. For her, the recurring motif of the phallus represents patriarchal ideology through its symbolism in linguistic structures. It symbolises sexuality, and metaphorized power within language, authority and dominance (Irigaray, 2002). But there is additionally the fear from the phallogocentric view and the sexuality of women, depicted for example in the visual depiction of the toothed

vagina. Deriving from the idea that women’s sexuality is solely existent for male pleasure, the vaginal imagery reinforced the binary oppositions of the good and the evil. The fear results from the idea that women may castrate or eat the phallus during intercourse. Additionally, the symbol also connects back to the Anglo-Saxon word roots of “mouth” and “mother”; vulvas have “labiae”, lips that hide the teeth. Rene Magritte’s *The Rape* connects visually this interconnection between the vagina and the mouth, illustrating women as sexual vehicles, the dualism of desire and fear, euphoria and pain. The woman and her sexuality get throughout history, may it be Greek mythology or today’s science fiction genre, infiltrated by phallogocentric attitudes, influenced by patriarchal Narratives and therefore demonised (Hobby, 2000). Judith Butler understands that if sexuality is culturally constructed through those power relations signified by the phallus, everything that is outside of this power, may appear as a cultural impossibility. This idea entails that constructing and seeing sexuality should happen less male-centred and with the common sense of sexuality being highly influenced by power and dominance relations. She claims reworking and redistributing these dynamics of power and dominance through identification processes (Butler, 1990).

There are two symbols, moving through different cultures and genres. It is the appearance of a *Doppelgänger*, signifying imminent death but also narcissism and the desire to avoid responsibility for the wishes of someone that are not accepted by society. Mr. Hyde comes immediately to mind. At the very same time there is the symbol of mirrors; we find them in fairy tales and proverbs and in a way, a doppelganger is the mirror-like picture of a second individual. Even language shows a lot of puns regarding mirrors. The “psyche”, a French mirror, that reflects one’s outer appearance but at the same time the inner thoughts, also called reflections (Schanoes, 2014, p. 111). Mirrors combine illusion and truth. When we look at Velazquez’s *Rokeby Venus*, we believe that Venus is watching herself endlessly in the mirror. Regarded as narcissistic, she is, in fact, watching the painter (Bertamini, 2010). We see a confluence of thought and seeming; similarity and difference seem fully integrated within the mirrors but also the

appearance of a *Doppelgänger* (Schanoes, 2014). Later, the case study of the film *Poor Things* will be discussed. Anyways both symbols flow together into the figure of “Bella”. She is the *Doppelgänger* of her mother, the look-a-like mirror picture of her. It seems she does all the things society condemns. And the connection to Mr. Hide is not only reflected in this motif. She will be hidden, but at the same time she will exploit her mother’s expectations projected onto her to be able to switch between both roles to her advantage. She is at all times the “other”, opposed to the masculine norm, the subject and even to herself and her mother. As the double of equals (Schanoes, 2014), Bella carries the same weight of patriarchal culture as her mother, and like all women. Irigaray calls it the validation of men’s worth through the women used as mirrors. While she is the reflection of him, she cannot own subjectivity (2014).

Metaphors permeate, according to Irigaray, also language and reinforce gender inequalities, where the woman appears as signified. Women are understood as the oppositional, the ones that lack, are damaged, insufficient. In this logic lies the hierarchical dichotomy, spreading into symbols but also metaphors (Irigaray, 2002). A metaphor is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a figure of speech, through which an object or an action is expressed through a word or a phrase. A metaphor is not a literal translation, but opens images in the listener’s mind. It is a representation of a symbolic kind.

De Lauretis and Braidotti speak about a phallogocentric structure in language, a language of men, a language silencing women. For them the necessity to be able to speak outside of the phallogocentric language is part of their work. However, for understanding how to speak outside of this structure, this work aims to show a few examples of metaphors and symbols deriving from patriarchal culture.

Also “the feminine” is a metaphor at the very basis of phallogocentric culture. It is a symptom. It appears as a male disease, as the crisis of self-legitimation and a container to put power and strategy upon womanhood. “The feminine” does not directly belong to real womanhood, as the gap between

patriarchal assumptions about femininity and the existential reality of women's lives and thoughts is big (Braidotti, 1995). Braidotti claims that “the feminine” is assigned in various texts of classical philosophy as a speculative reflection of the inner logic of the phallogocentric discourse (1995). Metaphors have the ability to perpetuate patriarchal views in a very subtle way, from their nature to reinforce a worldview. In this context, metaphors can amplify the worldview where men dominate women who are subjugated. Women are often linked to objects or nature; we already saw that women were transformed into several things and animals within Greek mythology. Women, who need to be tamed on the one said, or women being like jewels, are reduced to beings that are objectified, not autonomous and controlled by men (Brooks, 2022). Women are also linked to psychological diseases and problems, whenever their behaviour seems unreasonable. Suffering from madness (De Lauretis, 1990), or the historically classical symbol of hysteria, used for pathologizing women's emotional expressions under the reinforcement of gender stereotypes (Showalter, 1985). Linked exclusively to the female body within the uterus, hysteria claims women's irrationality and emotional instability. Hysteria, treated as a medical object, marginalised women's experiences, silenced them, stereotyped them linked to the idea of not autonomous objects in need of control, and went so far, that the medical removal of the uterus seemed the better solution rather than understanding the cultural construction of difference in the sense of mental illness.

These dominant cultural ideologies do not just exploit stereotypes and gender norms for women for different genres of cultural artefacts, but also show an exploitation of stereotypes regarding male friendships, male bonding and homosociality (Feasey, 2010). There is the picture of the lonely nerd, the gay best friend, the group of men deriving in connection with team sports, the men who are not able to speak about their emotions and many more. Showing intimacy or reflection is a rather minor motif, and most of the time in combination with subtle homophobia and the fear of same-sex affairs or relationships (Feasey, 2010). In *Promising Young Women* exactly these groups of men can be seen. They play a

type of team sport and stick together even after they graduate. They meet, party and drink, mild aggression and subtle anti-queer jokes are part of everyday life. They only talk about their feelings superficially, an incident from their youth is never dealt with and it can be assumed that the dynamics of the group even made it happen in the first place. The group acts anti-women and anti-queer, but sticks together, even if their individual opinions differ. The film will be discussed further in the second Case Study later.

When we think about the omnipresence of those metaphors, symbols and figurations, or even just the most famous myths, it becomes clear what Laurie Anderson was saying: “Language is a virus.” (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 89). For sure this chapter just named a few symbols, motifs and metaphors but it became clear how language influences and controls people by societal norms and creates expectations. Therefore, becoming a subject in language gives the subject the power to decide and define their subjectivity within this language (De Lauretis, 1987).

Patriarchal Narratives and Counter-Narratives

Stereotypical presentation, dominance and power relation favouring just one of two sexes within a binary worldview and resulting gender inequalities as well as predominated gender roles are communicated, transmitted and maintained through cultural frameworks and their presentation through metaphors, symbols, motifs and myths. The binarism works as a semiotic production of subjectivity, as the terms “woman” and “man” are socially constructed and rhetorically charged with symbolism through the idea of oppositions, contrast and positive and negative poles, fulfilling its symbolism to hide that the actual difference between them is not difference at all, but constructed gender (De Lauretis, 1987). Several examples were given, showing “traditional” narratives of male authority, control, dominance

and social privilege and the oppositional and subordinate predefined “classical” role of women as weak, forced to do domestic work, under control, oppressed, not autonomous, silenced, abused. Gender, just like sexuality and accordingly subjectivity is located in the private sphere under the container’s reproduction and family (De Lauretis, 1987), a myth and symbol discussed before. The private, or also domestic sphere works almost like an oppositional force towards the public sphere, which contains ideology determined by work and the idea of productivity in terms of capitalism (De Lauretis, 1987). There are several interconnected sets within this concept of social relations, categorised by work, class, sex and gender, and race. For De Lauretis it is not just the differently positioned organisation of men and women within these relations, but also the different effects on women regarding those different sets (1987). These patriarchal structures find their way in everyday social interactions, relations, but also in everyday cultural forms like literature, film or even media. The narratives build up on these deeply manifested social structures and find their legitimation and reinforcement within culture. As the omnipresence of these narratives is based on the patriarchal system we live in Western societies, the term of patriarchal narratives is used. De Lauretis notices the favoured figure or object of knowledge in medical scientific, religious discourses, or those of art, popular culture or literature of the sexualised female body (1987). There is a tension, as de Lauretis discusses, as the contradictory position of women in our society lies in a duality of women portrayed as representation through the use of stereotypes and symbols, but at the same time their representation as historically real beings. This contradiction is rooted fundamentally in our culture, women exist both inside and outside the idea of gender – constructed and shaped by societal norms, the representation of it and experiences of social relations (De Lauretis, 1987). This narrative, carrying the patriarchal ideology, maintains and reproduces gender stereotypes and norms over and over again, in different contexts, variations and at all times (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 13): “Sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance.” For Lauretis,

Western Art and high culture are basically built upon the history of the construction and resulting representation of gender, which goes back till Victorian era but continues over avant-garde artistic practices, academia, radical theories and feminist ideas till today (De Lauretis, 1987). The idea of gender in asymmetry is placed in a symbolic system, correlating sex to cultural content according to hierarchies and social values resulting in inequality (De Lauretis, 1987).

Patriarchal structures define also the spheres men and women are culturally supposed to act in, told in stories as we saw before, transmitting the message that women are subscribed to the domestic sphere. Rosi Braidotti brings the example of Plato's metaphor of the eye as a metaphor for the mind, to describe the idea of “what I see, I know”. The gaze therefore is linked to a profound psychological impulse; the “scopic drive”, the drive to look and see, describing the ways of looking and the narrated need to see in order to understand the world and gain knowledge. This idea is not just influencing the scientific discourse, but also the understanding and representation of bodies. This visualisation techniques, deriving from the gaze, have a significant influence on how we think, see and speak (Braidotti, 1995, pp. 49f). As Irigaray claims that language is rarely, while speaking is neutral, Braidotti and De Lauretis claim that the act of looking is neither. The gaze, a mechanism for control and a definition for knowledge if we follow the idea of rationality, works at the expense of what is ignored or stays unnoticed. Reinforcing patriarchal narratives in its violent dynamic, the gaze, the act of seeing and the visual culture around it, objectifies on the one hand bodies, especially females, and marginalises them (De Lauretis, 1987). There is a differentiation between and within the gaze and Braidotti brings the example of a shift within the gaze from contemporary culture that is fascinated by monsters and anomalies, that were historically used for entertainment and based on racist and discriminating structures of eugenic ideas and “breeding”-prevention laws from fascist ideologies. The shift towards a pop cultural phenomenon happened in the sixties, and monsters and freaks find their popularity in subcultures like cyberpunk and science fiction, horror narration and Rock 'n' Roll comics; the gaze onto the

anomaly moves from an exclusion mechanism to an act as social rebellion, not losing its touch of violence, that comes with the gaze and its mechanism of displacement, the separation of “the Other”, the border of the defined normal versus abnormal (Braidotti, 1995). The gaze used the various possibilities to form and shape the metaphorization of the “the Other”: monsters, freaks and rebels. As Eve is the extrapolation of Adam’s rib, the patriarchal and male-centred mind and the idea of women as projection of the males as the complementary opposite, leads to the conclusion that also sexuality is perceived as a property of the male (De Lauretis, 1987). In this idea of the gaze, De Lauretis also understands variations in the visual culture of cinema. Therefore, the image of women is constructed within cinematic codes as the object of visual pleasure and the female body as a representation of sexuality (1987). Donna Haraway uses this shift and the power of the gaze, making the unrepresentable representable within the biotechnological gaze (Braidotti, 1995) and her cyborg feminism, working as a counter-narrative.

The cyborg is a myth, dismantling traditional ideas and notions of gender and sex within a narrative framework, that avoids the “phallic innocence” (Haraway, 1991, p. 55) as well as the oppositional constructed idea of binarities and constructs the abnormal, the monstrous additionally on women of colour, in order to narrate outside of patriarchal culture. Traditional notions of gender, race and capital are challenged within the cyborg writing as structures dissolve into fragments and the traditional understanding of gender decomposes (Haraway, 1991).

Writing from another perspective, the cyborg also offers to change manifested ideas about identities and contradictions within new possibilities and imaginations (Haraway, 1991). As a creature living in a post-gender world, classical motifs of Western culture are left behind: pre-oedipal symbiosis and categorisation into hetero, bi or homosexuality, unequal labour and work, the dream of an organic family, the idea of binarity in oppositions and a different logic of repression (Haraway, 1991). Race, gender and capital are thought into “wholes and parts”, Donna Haraway (1991, p. 66), and gender is not understood as a global

identity. Sex and sexual embodiment remain partial and fluid, inconsistent and sometimes interconnected. The ideology of sexual reproduction is no longer based on sex and sex roles as an organic and natural aspect of the construct of families. It becomes an organism, as a counter-narrative towards the oppressive structures by marking out the partiality and multiplicity of identity. With this new narrative Haraway challenges the dominant culture and puts her new figuration as a start to form new figures for a political language outside of classical narratives in Western Society, against the “one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism” (Haraway, 199, p. 57). Imagining a new language and gender and turning the Western culture and its idea about identity, transform the cyborg myth into cyborg politics with all its struggle through language and culture.

The cyborg makes it clear: bodies and gender are constructs of the present social and cultural system, constructed under our very eyes (Braidotti, 1995). It is a system of representation assigning meaning to individuals in the form of prestige, identity, status in the social hierarchy, and value (De Lauretis, 1987). The implications of different meanings, when it comes to gender representation within a cultural narrative, lead to assumptions about the presented gender, matching the reality or not (De Lauretis, 1987). In this respect “the construction of gender (...) is both the product and the process of its representation” (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 5) and must be understood in its systematic nature, effects on individuals and the rethinking of representation of gender. May it be a new myth like the Cyborg, or Braidotti’s nomadic subject, descending from the polyglot as a linguistic nomad, portraying the different levels and interactions of subjectivity. Another myth, a political fiction gives a possibility to move and think freely in between heterogeneous and deeply culturally rooted understandings of subjectivity and women, triggering conventional theoretical and philosophical thinking (Braidotti, 1995). Translating the desire to explore and legitimate at the same time political agency, the nomadic subject prevents the idea of metaphysically fixed and steady identities and therefore moves against the myths and figurations we always used (Braidotti, 1995). May it be new narratives in any cultural representations, as De

Lauretis claims, especially for cinema. May it be any new narrative, associated with motifs, symbols and metaphors that reject the binary structure and offer new ideas and thoughts about identity and gender. Figures between different languages, migrants as moving entities with their capacity and space for inventions (Braidotti, 1995). Figures of resistance instead of figures of female freedom in the form of figures denying their sexuality in order to become a subject like nuns (De Lauretis, 1990). Fluid identities and fragmented subjectivity; identities understood as retrospective notions, foreign, critical, distanced but conscious (Braidotti, 1995). Counter-narratives and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) that dismantle the patriarchal and traditional narratives transporting the male gaze and motifs to contemporary culture and produce new ideas, new social structures and new models of cultural production (Jenkins, 2006).

Poor Things

The film *Poor Things*, released in 2023 and directed by Yorgos Lanthimos, is based on the novel of the same name by Alasdair Gray from 1992. In the novel, Bella Baxter's truth and her “mysterious” behaviour, which does not seem to fit the Victorian standard in which the story takes place, is told by her husband Archibald McCandless in a self-narrative style. McCandless is a Scottish health officer who describes his life with Bella Baxter, while he describes her infant's mind caused by the work of the scientist Dr. Godwin Baxter. Dr. Baxter found the corpse of a pregnant woman and quickly operated the still-living brain of the fetus into the body of the dead young woman, in order to design a companion to his lonely and from society rejected life. The narration spins around Bella Baxter's ambiguity, her development, especially of her sexuality, that leads her to follow another man to travel around the world. Described as a hedonistic odyssey, leaving her “poor fool” of a husband back, as well as the societal norms and cultural

customs of the Victorian era. During the novel, Bella Baxter does not match into time; she seems put into the wrong place, the same way she was put together like a female version of Frankenstein or the incorporation of both – Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Gray’s fictive novel walks on the blurry line between fantasy and realism, as the underlying narrative from the Victorian era is put into contrast with concerns about identity, gender inequalities and relationships within the figuration of Bella Baxter (Gray, 1992).

The film differs in details, but the main plot stays the same about a woman who raises more questions and appears uncontrollable, who makes men cry and drives them crazy, a woman whose actions seem incomprehensible, but also the medical intervention Dr. Baxter, the sadistic husband of the suicidal pregnant wife, the loyal-naïve husband as well as the journey around the world and the great, uncontrollable sexual desire of Bella.

During the entire film, Bella Baxter calls her “father”, the scientist Dr. Godwin Baxter, God. In the beginning it is narrated for her infantile mind, her behaviour that lets assume that she has psychological and mental disabilities. She is forgiven on both sides. On the one hand, she is Dr. Baxter created a creature, the adult body with the brain of a small child. The body of the dead woman, the mother of the foetus, works as an alchemist jar, her uterus becomes unnecessary, and her role as a mother vanishes. This body is treated as something without any kind of value, not even for the value of reproduction. Death is not respected, instead the mastermind, which we also find in Shelley’s Frankenstein, overcomes death and even imitates women’s work.

The basic assumption is that the alchemists can not only imitate the work of woman, they can also do it much better because the artefact, the artificial process of science and technique, perfects the imperfection of the natural course of events and thus avoids mistakes. Once reproduction becomes the pure result of mental efforts, the appropriation of the feminine is complete. (Braidotti, 1995)

Understood as God, the person who constructed Bella Baxter and overcame death is portrayed as a classical figure of god complex. It is the superiority over others, the omnipotence and infallibility. Dismissing others' opinions or needs, like, for example, Bella Baxter being a child in need of education, the only aspect that bothers Dr. Godwin is, if people recognize him as the genius he is. As he is shown as an impotent man, Freud's narcissistic wound from the Oedipal complex, which is shown here as well, with a sadistic father he had on his own, is healed by creating a new human being. The realisation of the protagonist of *M. Butterfly*, David Cronenberg's 1993 film adaptation, in which Butterfly is a woman he created, can also be applied to Bella Baxter. A woman that is loved by a man but that is created by a man at the very same time, and created into a man's world. Because her behaviour, which does not correspond to the norms, is narratively attributed to this superhuman intervention. On the other hand, her questionable behaviour is accepted because of her beauty and the fact that she is a woman.

Bella Baxter is, as De Lauretis would put it, seen as a spectacle, an object of interest and at the same time under the control of the master's, Dr. Baxter's, gaze (1987). She is narrated from the point of view of the men in her life. It starts with the objectification of two bodies and two lives, of two women. The dead mother and herself as a foetus. Then she gets sexualised. It is this beautiful young woman who does not behave like it is awaited from her. Max, the companion of Dr. Baxter, and later husband of Bella, looks at her and describes her as “a bit stupid”, as wrong, as disabled. Nonetheless, he starts from this point of view and thinks about her beauty. Dr. Baxter, her father, sees her as a child, knowing that it is a child's mind in a woman's body. The way Bella Baxter is portrayed, is a grotesque way of showing a person with disabilities, a person of minor value, besides her outstanding beauty. She is barely able to speak or to walk at the beginning. She does not have a language and during the film, when she is trying to find her language, she can just do through the male gaze. He isolates her from society, knowing that she does not fit in. Before she can find subjectivity, she is under constant control – starting with Dr. Baxter, Max, the lawyer she starts

travelling with, the brothel's-house-mother and the way of the money that she needs to be independent. Her sexuality is framed constantly by others: she gets sexualised and is portrayed as a nymphomaniac. She gets further created by men. Men around her are afraid of her sexuality but nevertheless enjoy her company. The film has almost one hour of sex scenes with the lawyer, who kidnaps her and sexually exploits her under the guise of wanting to show her the world. At this point, Bella is still portrayed as a woman somewhere between toddler behaviour and mental disability. There is no comment on the portrayed paedophilia or the abuse of power based on gender-based violence and ableism. The creation of her as a desirable woman from the perspective of the men around her, completely ignores her lack of subjectivity and even makes it impossible. Later, when she leaves the lawyer, she has to make ends meet with sex work. The film shows this as a free choice, a decision to have power over her own body. But how much power over her body does Bella have when other men choose her, at their convenience and according to their desires? How much power does she have over her own body when she's under the brothel's mother's thumb? How much power does she have over her own body, a body assembled by another hand, constantly viewed under the male gaze, a body that is sexualized, kidnapped, instrumentalized and exploited when she needs sex work to survive?

As she discovers that sex work does not give her the agency and sexual freedom she wants, the same as the same-sex relationship she suddenly ends, she returns home and accepts the deal of the marriage with Max, the fellow companion of her father Dr. Baxter. The ceremony is interrupted by Bella's mother's husband, who now claims ownership of Bella. He hasn't yet understood that Bella is merely in his wife's body, but since his wife's body is seen as nothing more than an object to be possessed over, this objection seems of little relevance. Bella follows him because she wants to know more about her mother. She finds herself once again at the hands of a sadistic man who wants to rule over her with various complexes. She is locked up and controlled and has to endure this man's sadistic games. Even if it becomes indirectly clear why her mother took her own life, her death is

accepted by all sides. A parallel to gender-based violence coming from intimate partners? The death of a pregnant young woman, the suicide, is not only simply accepted, but also instrumentalized to assert claims of ownership and control. What world do we live in when we can accept that a pregnant woman takes her own life to escape the clutches of a patriarchal culture and monsters in the form of men? What kind of world do we live in when another man comes and throws a dead body back into this world against the mother’s decision?

Bella is trapped in all phases of her life. In her body, which is misunderstood and misinterpreted, in her father’s house, travelling with the lawyer, in the brothel, within the walls of her sadistic father-husband-figure, among society and its norms. The same norms that see it as inspiring when the outcast man, who looks something like Frankenstein himself, comes up with the idea of playing God, but examines the long path to subjectivity and sexuality in a pejorative and voyeuristic way. The showiness of society is assessed, but on different parameters. The binarism, the dichotomy between good and bad, male and female is characterised by the way the characters move during the film. Bella Baxter lives like all women in a culture, that is but is not her own (De Lauretis, 1990). The ambiguity of Bella Baxter’s character lies also in the ambiguity to trait traditional ideas about gender one the one hand within the narrative of the Victorian era that at least in the film is shown in a science-fiction post-future world and the concept of sexuality understood in a classical Victorian manner. On the other hand, the concept of reproduction is challenged and changed from its original connotation, the biological sex did not matter for the recreation of the “poor creature” (De Lauretis, 1990).

The film adaptation of the fictional novel was, like the Barbie film, advertised as feminist. And you can certainly accompany the main character on her rocky path to self-discovery and subjectivity. Certainly, the events in which Bella Baxter recognizes herself as a subject are relatively real and not very fictional and invite reflection. De Beauvoir’s famous sentence also applies here: one is not born, but becomes a woman (2012, p. 202), because in Western society and its patriarchal culture, as a woman you are not automatically born as a subject. The

path to subjectivity takes place through reflection, education, representation and exchange of experiences.

Following De Lauretis, stereotypes become a fetish (1990). *Poor Things* elaborates on fragile relationships between fathers and daughters, husbands and wives, and men and women. From sexualising a perceived childish or disabled mind, without being an agent, paedophilia, over abuse on several levels, exploitation from men and a system, to incestuous fantasies. In *Poor Things*, the woman is born without a language, bothers the society when she uses the language of men and is put upon the level of a malevolent god of a self-created matriarchal world, when she finds her own language. Her female body is constructed under the gaze – it is beautiful, and is objectified. It is an object that is operated on, used, exploited, judged. Her body finds itself in a masquerade – due to beautifully designed and exaggerated costumes, complete nudity during performative choreography, in focus on fetishized body parts like her mouth and eyes. If the figure is not wearing a costume, she is shown completely naked. In comparison stands the male body, which is never shown without mistakes during the narration but nevertheless the societal acceptance and dominance either way. It is also never shown completely naked and safe from the viewer’s eyes. Dr. Godwin Baxter’s body, narrated as furrowed and destroyed by the hands of his fathers, disabled and “ugly” does not change his status of authority or control. Every apparent flaw in a male character is later the reason for that character’s success. The mistakes in behaviour can be overlooked. In the end, the character Bella Baxter tries to correct these mistakes. Power is shown from the start through objectification, the violation of not playing according to the lawyer’s rules, the excessive demands on Max or the imprisonment and possession of her late mother’s original husband. Males come more often in number on the screen, as well as they have the higher speaking part in the beginning. When the power shifts during the discovery of Bella Baxter’s subjectivity, it ends in the total reversal of power and a mirrored reproduction of gender inequalities. Nonetheless, De Lauretis asks the right questions when it comes to how women and female roles are portrayed: is the dominant cultural

narrative used? (1990). Are questions of desire, racial or cultural others and the differences of the sexes the “universal” problem; the plot driver, the climax or the story? Is femininity a stereotyped image? Is there a hero saving the female character? Are hierarchies of gender, race, colonial and political domination deconstructed? Is a cultural imaginary interpreted as a deeply felt fantasy portrayed? (De Lauretis, 1990). Is the experience of women the same way included as the experience of men?

From answering these questions, it is difficult to classify it as a feminist work. Interesting topics are discussed, but under the narrative of a male perspective. We find a heteronormative beautiful woman matching the beauty standards of contemporary times. Our hero does not wear a cape, but he is still willing to marry Bella Baxter, even though she was discovering her sexuality around the world in different contexts and not according to the accepted societal norm. During the 142 minutes, there is no dismantling of patriarchal, colonial and capitalist structures. Instead, we find a reproduction of stereotypes, in the idea of science fiction highly exaggerated and bizarre. Of course, Bella Baxter ends up at some point in the film in the brothel, because there is no other way to understand what it feels like to have agency over one’s own body. Obviously, there is a black colleague, becoming her friend, giving her socialist literature and starting a same-sex relationship with her. Of course, Bella Baxter seeks revenge in gaining her agency by doing the same harm that she learned from her father, when she decides to operate the head of her real father and the husband of her mum to a goat’s body. Is it because in a man’s world, a woman can just have subjectivity, when she crosses humane boundaries and reverses the God complex like the narrative of an eye for an eye?

Promising Young Woman

Cassandra, the protagonist of Emerald Fennell’s movie *Promising Young Woman* appears on the screen as a naive, drunk and helpless woman. Her dresses are provoking, she seems lost in time and space. Her makeup tells a story about a tough party night. We see how different men are “trying” to help her, taking care of her. But when these gentlemen touch her, undress her, kiss her and start having sex with her, Cassandra suddenly “wakes up”; there is nothing in her behaviour or action that seems drunk anymore. She is completely sane and shows the men off, sarcastically questioning them about the consensus, or her name, that is missing in the current situation. In another take, the viewer sees a list of the “victims” of all the men who fell for Cassandra’s scam: the drunk woman who is no longer with herself and seems an easy prey, who no longer has the opportunity to say or the possibility of defending herself. Her strategy always works. Her list keeps getting longer. It is just that men’s excuses are always different. Sometimes it is the nice guy who just wanted to help, sometimes it is the one who accuses her of ruining his fun, other times it is the mere misunderstanding or the “close connection” that the man had previously felt. One thing is always the same: the victim-perpetrator reversal and the sexual violence put upon the Other, seen as weaker. As soon as Cassandra confronts the men about her crime, they portray themselves as victims. Cassandra, also known as Cassie, is the cold-blooded, revenge-seeking, crazy and hysterical woman. The one that overreacts, exaggerates and covers herself in guilt. The topic is never clearly stated but it seems so clear. The debate about sexual violence, consensus and gender-based violence. Instead of giving the unknown drunk woman a glass of water, ordering her a taxi home or simply letting her sleep off her intoxication in peace, she is offered more alcohol, groped and sexually harassed in bed.

There are these patterns that appear on so many levels. The pattern of men forcing themselves on seemingly vulnerable women under the guise of caring, the aggression when they realise, they were never in control, but also Cassandra’s

strategy, which seems less and less like a campaign of revenge. Because the back story of Cassie is told little by little. How she dropped out of her medical studies even though she was a high achiever. That she lost a friend and hasn't gotten over that loss yet. That her parents are worried because Cassandra's life has fallen apart. Because she does not have her own apartment, she doesn't have a car, she doesn't have a “real” job that would be recognized by her parents and society, she doesn't have a partner and it looks as if she has no prospects. The path to her destined career or becoming a mother – hopeless in the eyes of her parents. Cassandra is the black sheep in this floral-adorned suburban life surrounded by social norms and expectations. But then it becomes clear that this friend, whose death she cannot get over, Nina, committed suicide, after she got raped. When she stood up to it, she was silenced, not believed, the rapist was not punished and at all time, she was even blamed for it. Cassandra feels guilty, because she too had her doubts about the rape and her difficulties in empathizing with the pain. The reality hits her after the committed suicide. She understands that a woman's life has been snuffed out while the perpetrator's lives continue unconcerned.

Her campaign of revenge, the hungover game and her personal vendetta of instructive lessons that she gives to the men after they try to have fun with the drunk, insane Cassandra, is a proof of how real sexual violence is. How real it is in frequency rather than chance, how real the line between help and assault is, and how real the apparent misunderstanding of consensus or respect.

In the middle of her game, however, she meets an old fellow student. She resists a closer relationship with him because this relationship could make her game more difficult. Maybe she is also reluctant because she is afraid of being together, of losing control, of trusting a gender that has already caused her so much suffering. But this former fellow student seems sincere, without evil ulterior motives, enlightened and even partly feminist. While she is in a relationship with this man, everything seems a little good. She even gives up on her game for a moment; she becomes interested again in continuing her medical studies and her parents meet her new partner. Until she finds out that her partner was involved in

the rape of her friend Nina and even filmed it. A gang rape can be seen on the tape. Cassandra’s temporarily ideal world collapses. She is planning her last big move.

There is the obvious critique of the debate deriving from the *Me Too* movement, with the reflections of the presumption of innocence, exaggeration, perpetrator-victim reversal, trivialization and silencing that the *Me Too* debate also proclaimed at the time in the film. But there is also the critique about the structuralism and the system behind, about the institutions, such as for example the medical school or the justice system, that fail to address sexual violence correctly. Nina’s rapist finishes school, because, according to the headmaster, such accusations come almost every day and the young man is so successful, rich and also a figurehead, so the presumption of innocence applies. Cassie understands the flaws of the system, she is forming resistance against this system and the systemic societal failures. The incident welds itself into her identity, it creates a new identity, one that has agency. Cassie’s subjectivity is formed out of the oppositional attitude she forms towards institutions and their incompetence to prevent and understand sexual violence. The death of Nina, the resulting mission, all these things are now part of her identity. The personal history, experience as well as the societal injustice and the play of norms to fulfil, create Cassie’s subjectivity. The naive young woman, that she was before this incident, is first her costume for the game, but becomes her identity. She grows into being-a-subject and no one around her likes it. When she tries to fit into the normative role of having a romantic relationship, she finds acceptance for a short time for having a boyfriend. But sooner than later we do not recognize the woman with agency but a naive, pink copy of her. Dancing to music of female musicians, that suffered from sexual violence and silencing. *Me Too* is everywhere and still so subtle. Also, the rape is never shown, not even with the appearance of the video that Cassandra finds. There is no need for this traumatic and certainly triggering content, because the message becomes clear either way. There is no need for visual evidence and justification that the rape “really” happened, even if the characters around Cassie

try to deny the act. The critique about the patriarchal culture is everywhere and still so subtle.

Cassie leads a double life. This is even reflected in her choice of clothing. At one point she plays with her subjectivity, and at another time she takes advantage of the fact that she is becoming object-infected. However, your choice of clothing never matters to the attackers. It was never about the length of the skirt, nor was the amount of alcohol for a conscious decision. The same dualism can also be found in her life so far, from the promising woman with a great career to the now aimless, without a relationship and childless woman. The dualism between their lives before and after, their lives day and night. There are two different Cassie's and Nina's experience in her, performing throughout day and night. And Cassie's figure exploits both societal expectations and norms towards gender. She acts the stereotype of femininity as the helpless, passive woman who needs to be hunted by predatory, strong, men. She does not just perform her gender, but she also performs subjectivity. And even her act of revenge, her strategy seems like reclaiming agency. For herself, for Nina and for all women.

Cassie understands and reflects how a woman's role is culturally, socially and politically influenced and reproduced. And in fact, she reproduces all these stereotypes and builds up her individual storytelling, to fight back against the patriarchal culture that oppressed her based on her gender. But it is also the patriarchal culture that took her best friend's life. The same culture that constantly judges, norms and sexualises women, “like all women (...) whose relation to living matter is one of concomitance and adoration” (Braidotti, 1995, p. 193). Cassie narrates her identity and performs her gender as someone with the world, as a woman like all women perceived through the male gaze (Braidotti, 1995).

She plays with the fact that women get all the time undermined, their experience does not count as valid, their no is not respected and neither is their life. Whenever she changes the roles and acts with agency, there is this glitch in the mood of the men. This weird moment that something went wrong. Having agency, acting as a subject, telling one's own story – it seems frightening, refreshing,

strong, courageous and in the end deadly. In her last game, when she acted completely as a subject, fights back against the patriarchal culture and the sexual violence that screams so loud, that she pays with her life. And she knew it. Dehumanized, from the same people that raped her friend Nina, she carries a life, “that does not carry her name” (Braidotti, 1995, p. 192), but just the one of a woman. In fact, she is wearing the bracelet with Nina’s name on it, but she does not get recognised. She is a piece of meat that gets killed without any kind of guilty conscience, after she was bought for her services like an object. And in the end, maybe she becomes fully subjective, when it turns out that she was aware of not surviving her last game and confronting the rapist with what he did and how it ended. She meticulously planned the fall of the rapist era and empire, his perfect life and honour everywhere, at the price of reaching full agency, to have made herself and Nina’s voice heard, at her life dying, and the dualism does not stop here, as Nina.

The motive for revenge can certainly be debated. Yet this film never described itself as feminist and was never advertised as such, and yet it plays so brilliantly with the motifs and figurations of the storytelling of the patriarchy. And more than that, the protagonist creates her subjectivity and a storytelling that plays precisely with the symptoms and symbols of the patriarchal narrative. As a result, she gains agency and at the same time, she plays the patriarchy against herself. Certainly, one’s own death or revenge cannot be the goal of feminist action, but the patriarchal narrative has never been told so clearly and bluntly, and a woman’s subjectivity has never been presented so drastically but at the same time visually, almost iconic.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis explored deeply entrenched patriarchal structures within Western cultural narratives, specifically examining myths, symbols, and motifs that perpetuate gender inequality and gender-based violence. The theoretical framework includes feminist theories from thinkers like Simone De Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti, Françoise Vergès, Donna Haraway and Teresa De Lauretis, taken for their main ideas and put into a chronological context. Illuminating how patriarchal ideologies are embedded and sustained in the societal narratives of Western culture, some historical and contemporary texts, media and films were analysed and deconstructed.

Focussing on dismantling patriarchy, this system represents a hierarchically ordered structure of male dominance, that is reflected by culture and institutions and affects especially positions and gender within gender inequality and practices and perceptions of sexual violence (Santos *et al.*, 2021). Gender is socially constructed within the binary thinking of oppositions and finds generalisation within a patriarchal structure. The paradigm of the binary subject-object dialectic and the assumption of sexual difference based on it, about the definition of the human subject as male, are deeply rooted within Western culture. Starting from the classical myth and the human creation story, language, history, art and symbolic capacity are based on the binary opposition and the modelling of the female as the contradiction and the lack from the male (De Lauretis, 1987). From this perspective, societal structures, belief-systems and norms are generated,

forming a patriarchal system that is propagated through culture and media. Speaking of Irigaray’s language of man, language itself reinforces patriarchal ideologies and can exclude certain marginalised groups through its grammar. But language is more than grammar. Language is a container for words creating rooms for narration. Those narratives consist of figurations such as motifs, myths and symbols, producing and reproducing gender stereotypes and norms within the patriarchal culture they exist in. Some cultural artefacts were analysed based on assuming a storytelling of patriarchy.

This thesis cannot provide a full examination of all patriarchal narratives and all mechanisms behind patriarchal structures. For sure, the future can provide more detailed research and strategies to dismantle patriarchy. Another critique mentioned in this thesis, is the potential oversimplification of the topic. This work cannot be ruled out of this. Patriarchy describes a complex cultural dynamic, containing patriarchal context. For certain societies it looks different than for the subject of this work, the Western society with its patriarchal patterns. At this point, I would like to make clear that this work results from the privilege of being read as a white, cis-woman living in Europe. Nevertheless, it needs to be clear that patriarchy and its intersectional nature is interconnected with its way of understanding and doing race, class and identity. Any analysis including this one could and would benefit from the inclusion of non-Western perspectives, in order to understand patriarchal narratives in a global context. It would also provide an understanding of the intersection of colonialism and capitalism into the topic of patriarchy and give a view to those who suffered the most and were even more invisible in Western’s society culture.

Another point is the use of the term *patriarchy* as a polarising marketing strategy and the trend of femvertising, pink washing and pop feminism. By printing and claiming artefacts as feminist, the possibility for a critical moment of reflection and discourse is gone. Patriarchy is not just a claim and feminism are not a marketing strategy. It is a need. Because the violence deriving from patriarchy is real. A femicide is the killing of a woman due to her gender. A femicide happens

worldwide every eleven minutes. Violence against women starts earlier, and for most of them within intimate (ex-)partnerships or the family due to beliefs of ownership. Gender-based violence also includes transgender women, who are most of the time not considered in crime statistics. Gender-based violence is a structural and societal problem (Bildung, 2024)

Rewrite Storytelling

Sexual violence is used and perceived as a tool to prove control and oppression within a patriarchal system; rape is not only perceived by a patriarchal culture, but is also judged and trivialized under the guise of male sexual urge (Santos et al., 2021). This trivialization, certain patriarchal norms and ideas are communicated, manifested and spread primarily through language and figurations, such as rape myths. These stereotypes, symbols and motifs are trivialised, justified by such myths, the use of a certain language and deeply rooted in our culture and social structure. Normalised and maintained through discourse, reproduced by media acting as a mirror of reality. In these media, social norms, gender stereotypes and prejudices can be reproduced, manifested and even heightened. A woman's role is socially, culturally and politically influenced, advocated and reproduced. Oppression, particularly based on gender, is understood to be as much oppression as those based on, for example, race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion (Santos et al., 2021). Therefore, feminism must be more than a trivial marketing tool. And the media is in need to analyse the deeply rooted patriarchal structures in order to fulfil its role as a mirror of society.

Future research could expand to the exploration of comparing patriarchal narratives across different cultures and societies. A universal or particular aspect of patriarchy could be explored. Another point is the analysis and resulting development of a language that includes all and does not work to the benefit of one

majority. Digital Media and its fast developments are certainly an interesting topic for research, as well as the construction and the effectiveness of counter-narratives to intersect narration with issues of race, class and identity, inside and outside of the Western context, but also to transform societal attitudes and reduce gender-based violence. For De Lauretis, for example, the aim must be reconstructing other objects and subjects within a new condition of representability (1987). The representation of all genders in their variety is a concern, that has moved institutions and media for some years by now, is another strategy. Equal representation without using gender stereotypes is crucial, but seems like just a minor step to reduce gender inequality and gender-based violence. Intersectionality describes the way various forms of discriminations, as for example ageism, racism or ableism, are working together and added up, rather than individually. For future research, all parts to provide an intersectional approach need to be included.

Breaking free from the traditional but restrictive ideas of femininity and the force to fit into a specific identity prescribed for “women” under the liberation of identity into a more fluid, impersonal and diverse existence is for Braidotti the only way to let women act as subjects (1995). She calls the process of subjectification “assujettissement” within a specific political and social context, deriving from the assumption that gender and identity are influenced and shaped by societal norms and rules and constructed through an interplay of societal influences and personal agency. Identity is created, manifested and internalised through social processes where gender, which is something we perform based on the rules of the society we live in, helps to constitute identities in a flexible and fluid way. Through the acquisition of subjectivity, individuals have self-awareness and agency (Braidotti, 1995, pp. 99f). “Assujettissement” is therefore the “redefinition of gender as the technology of the self within a guided politic of subjectivity”, (Braidotti, 1995, p. 157) under the intersection of agency and being-subject. Having agency means having the autonomy and control over their own actions and decisions regarding lives, bodies and futures without falling for stereotypes and structures perpetuating

gender inequality and oppressional mechanisms. It also means understanding your own identity and experiences and to be able to reflect and express these. Acting as an active participant, self-aware and empowered means recognizing oneself as a subject. Identity and agency are understood within their interrelationships with cultural, social and political contexts. Experiences are articulated, perspectives shared and subjects are represented equally in the world. For this, Braidotti suggests to unlearn standards of masculinization and femininity, to understand normality differently and think “difference” differently (1995). Having agency and being a subject are therefore interconnected. Power dynamics need to be negotiated and structural mechanisms of oppression based on patriarchy, racism and classism are challenged constantly and redefined through the transformation of structures and norms. This transformation is for Braidotti just archived, when a working-through the multi-layered structures from all individuals and institutions are done, discussed, developed and shifted (1995). For De Lauretis, it needs additionally a better understanding of the difference of women/Woman, as well as the differences among women. The different stories of women, their different lives, perspectives and experiences do not find a representation. They are so badly misunderstood, that some women are even invisible to other women (1990). The female subject needs a redefinition as sexual difference is not biological, but biocultural and historical given (De Lauretis, 1990). The “utopia of our century”, (1995, p. 145) as Braidotti calls it, about the radical definition of asymmetry between sexes for manifesting sexual difference, does not help females to achieve female subjectivity. In this respect, subjectivity cannot be understood as gender-free for Braidotti, as identity is deeply connected with our corporeal body. Sexual difference needs to be made operative, as it means recognizing the differences we all act collectively on (1995). For Schachtner it is the idea of a transcultural society, including all perspectives and as well the differences between the foreign and the own, acknowledging the hybridity of cultures and accepting the differences in between, and “Otherness” is given a different value, namely no longer that of a lack but of enrichment (2020).

Unlearn Patriarchy

However, some claim that patriarchy cannot be combated. Being socialised within a system and a culture, where the dominant narrative is the male one, male authority and control through certain power structures, a language and patriarchal patterns exist in all of us. In this respect, patriarchy needs to be understood, analysed and then unlearned. It needs to be replaced piece by piece (Jaspers & Ryland, 2022). Dismantling patriarchy in all its facets asks for a multifaceted approach and a piece by piece deconstruction of entrenched patriarchal narratives and our patriarchal culture. For De Lauretis it is dominant cultural discourses that are underlying the “master narratives” trapping new ideas under the argumentation of medical, legal, biological and philosophical frameworks of patriarchal culture (1987). Understanding the apparatus behind those cultural and societal systems and how it manifests and propagates certain values and discourses, helps to create new narratives and rewrite the old ones. New approaches speak about unlearning patriarchy after dismantling it from a multifaceted perspective. Patriarchal structures and patterns are therefore identified in daily life, reflected and slowly displaced.

Kübra Gümüşay speaks about unlearning racism, class and the patriarchy without denying their existence (Jaspers & Ryland, 2022). It is the opposite, understanding the structural nature of the system and the violence deriving from it. Françoise Vergès speaks about the *Decolonization of the Self* and means the unlearning of the social structures and relearning new ones, that are more equitable for the collective. Decolonization needs to be done by all of us, not just by colonised minorities and it requires a total deprogramming of the world we live in. Asking how we can humanise the world, decolonial feminism does not offer an answer or a direct solution, but it gives multidirectional and multidimensional methods and approaches. Decolonization is a historical process, as it uses

supremacist ideology to normalise inequality to uphold certain power structures. As a result, it makes up not just historical environments, but also economic, social, cultural and political. Domination, Exploitation, dispossession and devastation, but also patriarchy, according to Vergès, results from colonial slavery and imperialism, that did not stop after the abolition of colonialism (2021). As Haraway claims, the intersection of race and culture is crucial, as the culture of minorities is based on inducing affinity. History shows that race and culture are deeply interwoven, relying on the logic of appropriation, incorporation and identification (1985). For Kübra Gümüşay and Luce Irigaray, oppression is also deeply rooted in language. It goes one way back to the way we speak about language, oppression and systematic violence and inequality. Gümüşay describes the way we speak about racism or feminism stays with the question whether those crises, problems and challenges are real, or whether they stay with the “if” of the topics (Jaspers & Ryland, 2022). For her, language needs to be flexible, as for Braidotti identities need to be fluid. Words are rooms that are created to meet in them, to work as bridges and agreements for meanings. If there are no words that describe the grievances of society, a political gap within the society is created. As language expresses power structures and authorities of a society, words are not just describing problems, but they also let disappear or even silence those, who do not have the words to talk about the grievances oppressing them. The grammatical binary view stays resistant while speaking, and presents its face later (Jaspers & Ryland; Gümüşay, 2022). It also presents its face when it comes to gender and sex. Rather than being biologically given, gender attributes are given culturally and socially. It is doctors who are looking at the sex of a new born to understand if it is female or male. But the expectation to be strong, rational and dominant as a man and emphatic, emotional, caring and passive, even desirable as a woman derives from deeply rooted and embodied patriarchal culture and its narratives based on oppositional binaries. The very same stereotypes produced and reproduced by the culture, distort the reality under which most minorities suffer (Jaspers & Ryland; Giese 2022). If we want to unlearn patriarchy, we need to unlearn identity, gender,

sex, power, labour, motherhood, language, science, love, racism, family, capitalism and politics (Jaspers & Ryland; Giese 2022), but also colonisation (Verges, 2021), film and representation (De Lauretis, 1990), subjectivity (Braidotti, 1995), binary thinking and technologies (Haraway, 1985) and storytelling. For unlearning, we need to dismantle, discuss, reflect and learn something new.

Storytelling has the power to link the past and the future, the close and the distanced objects, and integrates experiences with imagination; it transcends the immediacy of human existence (Schachtner, 2020). Language plays a crucial role when it comes to social change, as language frames and therefore influences the public perception (Gümüşay, 2020). Within the frameworks created by the expectations and norms of a society, people can actively shape their own identities – narrating or telling stories about oneself can either confirm or challenge these societal expectations (Butler, 1990). De Lauretis speaks about the reformulation of the idea of the gendered social subject when it comes to the production of narrative. She claims that the social subject needs to be rethought, reread, rewritten and re-envisioned (1990). Constructing and rewriting narratives, especially counter-memory, is not new, but comes from Foucault. Within the idea of counter-memory, Foucault resists the assimilation of dominant ways, the male dominance and its narrative. Because of our subjugated knowledge, all learned narratives, all myths, motifs and symbols are infiltrated by patriarchal structures and reinforce patriarchal narratives (Braidotti, 1995). Schachtner invents, based on the process of subjectification, the narrative subject. Starting from the assumption that we are born into a world which arises and rises to narratives, this narration mirrors societal structures but gives space for new narratives containing all experiences we created on our own (2020). Haraway calls it the retelling of stories as a tool to reverse and displace the hierarchical dualism of naturalised identities. She places the cyborg as an example, to subvert central myths of Western culture that colonise phallogocentric values and patterns (1985). Deriving from the idea that there is no symmetry between the sexes, Braidotti asks for women to speak the feminine, to

think it, write it and represent it in their own terms. Just like this, differences can be engendered (1995). Especially for cinema and popular culture, where visibility and the ways of looking, the gaze play so much about the dismemberment of the body, asking for a rethinking of narration (Braidotti, 1995). As the constitution of the social subject depends on the political, the language and the consciousness of subjectivity, the political becomes personal. The ways of consciousness and knowledge are therefore caught in the paradox of woman, but also can be cracked up. Popular culture performs on a societal level in the public sphere and accordingly has the power to transport something deeply experienced and felt. De Lauretis calls them public fantasies, complete with characters, passions, conflict and resolutions within blurry lines of private fantasies and a subject's aspiration (1990). And in this momentum, women can confront the specific image of “Woman”, understand the biased representation and demand a retelling of the image for a more adequate representation (De Lauretis, 1990). This momentum of a dismantled patriarchy, allows rewriting the culture's “master narrative” (de Lauretis, 1987, pp. 26f).

The storytelling must be changed, myths need to be rewritten. Rewriting the storytelling after dismantling the narratives goes along and under the need to unlearn patriarchy. The normality of violence against women in particular must be abolished. As the roles of women must be redefined and rewritten, so must the ones of men be (Solnit, 2021). Women need to become active producers of signs, and not those who are acted upon (Braidotti, 1995). What it means to be human, as well as being-a-woman needs to be redefined and the myth of *Woman* offers a place for the political practice to redefine and explore becoming-subjects. Cultural codes represent experiences. When a culture with its figurations excludes certain experiences, the representation of exactly those experiences is not given (De Lauretis, 1990). Not proceeding linearly, but with the need to be as repetitive as the current Narrative, the social transformation and the retelling of myths need to be nomadic, fluid and intersectional (Braidotti, 1995). Narrating within a transcultural society, includes different interwoven cultural contexts with their

specific codes in a net connecting all ends. Just within this new codes and values can arise, creating new narrations and shaping other cultural contexts (Schachtner, 2020). Various aspects of identity need to find their space within language and storytelling. Language needs to be developed to a point, where it does not exclude systemic anymore certain gender types, without falling into the idea of total engendering. Experiences and knowledge need to intersect and interrelate with aspects like race, class, gender and sexuality. As intersectionality needs to be guaranteed, diversity needs to be recognised. To move beyond monolithic narratives, especially individuals from marginalised groups need to be encouraged and empowered, to speak as their authentic selves and place their identities with their experiences as opposition to privileged voices (Rich, 1986). As De Lauretis asks for the deconstruction, challenging and rethinking of the historical notion of “Woman” (1990), the historical notion of all gender identities and stereotypes, patriarchal narratives seem something that contemporary culture needs to start with now. For all women, for all female read bodies, for all LGBTQI+ people, for all men and male read bodies; for all humans, better now than never.

Culture does not make people. People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture. (Adichie, 2014)

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