WOMEN AS A VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR OF VIOLENCE IN POPULAR CULTURE

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Abstract

With a particular emphasis on the superhero movies Captain Marvel (2019) and Wonder Woman (2017), the paper analyzes the representation of superwoman to examine the claim by liberal feminism that equal representation of women in numbers causes emancipation. Using post-structural feminism, the study investigates how language creates and places female characters in discussions of violence, power, and gender conventions. This paper conducts critical discourse analysis by employing the analytical tools of predication, presupposition, and subject positioning to deconstruct the meanings in dialogues of the selected movies. The paper emphasizes how popular culture upholds and challenges conventional gendered stories. Women are often depicted as passive victims molded by patriarchal narratives as well as forceful agents of violence in opposing attitudes. This dual positioning shows more general society debates on the interpretation of female agency in conflict. Using a post-structuralist viewpoint, the study does not treat identity as rigidly fixed having ingrained characteristics instead it observes identity as discursively constructed and motivated by power. By identifying the gap, the liberal feminism ignores the small discursive processes sustaining gendered power systems, the research endorses post-structuralist feminism.

Keywords*: Post-structuralist Feminism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender Representation, Popular Culture, Deconstruction.*

Introduction

Traditionally seen as a man's world, headed by male generals, battled by male soldiers, and shaped by male choices, war has usually cast in the background, women in this well-known story are mourning their loved ones, nursing the injured, or waiting silently. This perspective has always been limited. Women have waged wars throughout history in more complicated and complex ways than as just victims, including as victims as rebels, as warriors and as leaders (Enloe, 2000). Women have armed themselves, fought back against violence on their own. Additionally, very important is how these roles are conveyed. Through movies, books, and media, not just reflects society's attitudes, popular culture actively shapes ideas about gender and power (Hall, 1997). It helps us determine who we are grouped with during times of strife, but it also questions our ideas and presents us with other stories beyond this sphere.

By means of movies, drama series, computer games, and visual art, popular culture shapes how society views gender and violence profoundly. It frequently oscillates between affirming and creating distance from the concepts of gender norms. Broadly, in Western media, women are frequently shown in war as symbolic victims, created as image of innocence and suffering (Žarkov, 2007). Often used to evoke compassion, support political measures, or to humanize the cost of battle are pale representations of widows, rape victims, and displaced mothers. Such depictions were prevalent during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s -- exactly at a time the media was presenting the suffering of Bosnian women in a way that further humanitarian and military responses could be justified (Žarkov, 2007). While these representations drew attention to the gendered harms of war, they did not recognize women's ability to act or resist and often rendered women as a symbol of trauma.

At the same time, the rise of female perpetrators of violence in popular culture threatens the constructed alignment of femininity and passivity. From the accounts of real-life perceptions of

Soviet "Night Witches", to the film depictions of assassins such as La Femme Nikita (Besson, 1990), and female insurgents involved in hostilities across the globe, popular culture has begun to increasingly recognize women in combat roles. These images may be seen romantically, or pathologized along some sensationalist or reductive frame that views violent women as deviant, hypersexualized, mentally deranged, or monstrous (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). For example, both the Killing Eve televisions show (Fennell, 2018–2022) and the film Monster (Campion, 2003) mark and romanticize female violence in similar contexts and even recreate these portrayals as morality tales seeking to explore extremes. While these representations of women that seem outside of normative expectations of gender and violence resonate with the broader cultural unease for women who choose to step outside. Aggression by women is often seen as violated or aberrant rather than systematic or political (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Although women's enhanced visibility in violent roles may seem to push against traditional gender scripts, most of this representation is restricted to the ideology of liberal feminism. Media representations that focus on women's individual empowerment or inclusion in institutions—like female CIA operatives in Homeland (Gansa & Gordon, 2011–2020) or counter-terrorism agents in Zero Dark Thirty (Bigelow, 2012) — rarely interrogate the larger structures that create and sustain gender-based power. By contrast, poststructuralist feminist critiques suggest that these portrayals do not change patriarchal narratives and essentially offer women militarized identities but do not work to challenge the structures that create the marginalization in the first place (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978; McRobbie, 2009). In this sense, feminist critiques stress the discursive construction of identity, and that entailed in the representations of women either as victims or agents are the issues of power, language, and ideology.

These gendered representations are also usually racialized and geographically coded. The Western views of women in wartime non-Western perspectives often employ orientalist cliches, portraying them to be either helpless subjects in need of saving or dangerous anomalies when they perpetrate violence (Zarkov, 2007). For example, media accounts about female fighters in ISIS or child soldiers in conflicts in Africa often remove any political agency that these people possess and represent them in terms of cultural backwardness or victimization (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). These images of fighters in ISIS, child soldiers, and women acting with political agency cannot be understood without accounting for global hierarchies of race, gender, and power that restrict possibilities for more complex understanding of women's role in war.

Alternative forms like graphic novels and independent video games have started to give more complicated characterizations alongside conventional media. Titles like This War of Mine (11 bit studios, 2014) examine the moral uncertainty and survival techniques of women in war zones, presenting them neither entirely as heroes nor victims. Nonetheless, the commodification of women's suffering remains a concern, even in these environments. The frequent invocation of sexual violence as a narrative framework is an ethical concern, as some are utilizing the suffering of women to raise awareness or build tension in the plot, is problematic due to the exploitation of that suffering and how these representations are constructed (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; Shepherd, 2013). Scholars push creators to not default to simple stereotype and showcase actual voices and lived experiences, and take on a more responsible and critical engagement with the representations.

This paper aims to investigate following questions by paying special attention to the movies: what is the relationship between popular culture and politics, how the identity of a woman gets militarized in popular culture, and how women are discursively constructed as both victims and

perpetrators of violence in popular culture. Based on a poststructuralist feminist approach, the study offers a critique of how gendered identities are created, negotiated, and constrained within war and conflict stories (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978; Shepherd, 2013). The paper helps to clarify how popular culture not only reflects but actively constitutes social and political imaginaries about gender, violence, and power by questioning the text and narrative techniques by means of which women's roles are built. It hopes to show how seemingly progressive representations can at times reproduce the very hierarchies they seek to combat by carefully examining the chosen movies.

Relation between Popular Culture and World Politics
Understanding the sophisticated portrayals of women as both victims and perpetrators of violence in modern media depends on the interrelation between world politics and popular culture, which offers a critical framework (Hamilton, 2015; Nexon & Neumann, 2006). Once regarded as secondary to the field of International Relations, popular culture has now been acknowledged as a primary place for the production, challenge, and dissemination of political meanings (Weldes, 2003). Challenging the conventional borders of IR, the growth of the academic subject of Popular Culture and World Politics (PCWP) maintains that global politics are woven into daily cultural practices rather than restricted to formal statecraft or institutional diplomacy (Hall, 1997; Hamilton, 2015). Popular entertainment media in the form of movies, television, video games and musical lyrics function not simply as reflections of political events, they actively shape how these events are interpreted, narrated and internalized by audiences on a global level (Robinson, 2015). Popular culture functions as a space where political ideologies most importantly ideologies about gender violence and identity are endorsed or rejected (Doty, 1993; Hall, 1997). In depictions of women in conflict, where dominant discourses often swing between presenting women as passive victims and portraying them as deviant agents of violence, this cultural political interface becomes especially important (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; Shepherd, 2013). These stories are framed by bigger worldwide power dynamics—including colonial histories, racial hierarchies, and patriarchal conventions—not politically neutral (Zarkov, 2007).

The use of gendered imagery in popular culture closely connects with state interests and soft power strategies. For decades, media has been used to further government political objectives, build national sentiment and project ideological narratives, both at home and abroad. Media and popular culture have been deployed as tools of propaganda to develop and advance state interests. The case studies include war-time propaganda films like Casablanca (1942) and The Green Berets (1968) showing all-powerful Americans liberating helpless victims, and more recently, cultural diplomacy projects underway by states such as "Cool Britannia" or "Brand Turkey" (Weldes, 2003). Since media (and culture more generally) become instruments for shaping public opinion and perceptions across the globe from the perspective of states and their interests, culture has become a kind of currency (Nexon & Neumann, 2006). In this vein, one must ponder where the portrayal of women in this political project fits in. The non-Western women are typically reduced to one of two roles in the Western narratives: the helpless victim in need of saving; or the hyper-violent monster represented in a terrorist group (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; Žarkov, 2007). Both orientations serve agendas to advance encounter and frame interventions and pernicious orientalist assumptions. These representations are influenced by the political agendas, historical contexts and lived experiences of these women as distinct from political symbols within a wider geopolitical narrative. In the same vein, female combatants, spies, or counter-terrorism agents are often similarly

represented by the Western media on the same cultural logic. Although characters from Zero Dark Thirty (Bigelow, 2012) or Homeland (Gansa & Gordon, 2011–2020) seem to disrupt gender-based roles, these stories often base the empowerment of women in institutions of state violence and militarism, which simultaneously reproduce societal structures that create gendered inequality (McRobbie, 2009; Butler, 1993).

Furthermore, the global political economy of cultural production is the context within which stories can be told, amplified, or commodified (Enloe, 2000; McRobbie, 2009). As cultural products are produced and consumed in increasingly transnational and trans-local formats, the spaces between politics, entertainment, and economy become hazardous and unstable, not just hypothetical or theoretical (Hall, 1997). In terms of production, multinational corporations demonstrate the outcome of interactions between political agency and economic development. There are, however, millions of hidden processes behind the products served up by platforms like Disney or Netflix. These global platforms not only produce and distribute global content but also shape cultural labor conditions. The gendered and racialized divisions of labor in the global media industries are often adapted and expanded from other inequities, revealing the gendered and racialized political economy of cultural production (Robinson, 2015). To illustrate using Cynthia Enloe's work "The Globetrotting Sneaker," we see examples of gendered labor relations and the processes of producing commodities; this understanding holds true in the production of cultural commodities, whereby women's trauma and pain is turned into a commodity to be sold for political or economic power. Treatment of sexual violence in war-torn regions, exemplified by violence in "Hotel Rwanda" and in the "Beasts of No Nation", focuses on shock and grief, neglecting the elements of defiance, strength, or agency. As a result, such portrayals can reduce women to mere symbols of suffering, stripped of any political imagery (Žarkov, 2007; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007).

The politics of culture complicates the already existing frameworks of how these stories are understood. Comprehension changes as audiences decode and reinterpret materials based on their social, cultural and political environment. While some view a movie as patriotic, others see it as subversive and hazardous. Such interpretation and meaning making highlight the instability stressed by postmodern feminism (Butler, 1990; Derrida, 1976). From this point of view, one's identity—which can take the shape of language, influence, and social behavior—is changeable rather than stable. Seen through the eyes of women—as heroic warriors, as terrible murderers, or as attacked victims—the images capture conflict but also a bigger context that shapes women, agency, and violence.

Cultural Liberalism insists on the significance of popular culture that how it provides space for freedom of individual expression and helps us to experiment new cultural meanings. As Storey (2015) puts, popular culture "functions as a site of identity construction and social meaning-making," therefore allowing space for marginalized groups to question dominant cultural representations. Moreover, liberal feminism observes popular representations to inspect whether woman is having an agency within the movies and behind the cameras. The liberal feminists rely, mostly, on quantitative and object data, the focus is on equal representation of females in different institutions. Similarly, in movies, Kaplan (2000) emphasizes the importance of portraying woman as an independent individual rather than passive character lacking agency, while advocating equal participation of women in movies concerning acting and filmmaking. Thus, both theories direct our attention towards freedom of expression for woman although liberal feminism asks for equal participation of women after identifying the less active role and gender disparity in filmmaking.

Troubled by the flaws of liberal feminist depictions that highlight individual empowerment inside established power dynamics, the post-structuralist feminism finds the liberal account incomplete to understand the process of construction of women identity. The freedom of women is not limited to equal representation and active role having apparent agency. Women involved in typically male dominated professions like intelligence services or the army run the danger of reinforcing the same patriarchal ideas they are seeking to contradict (Tickner, 2001). Sometimes they provide a sort of metaphorical inclusion that supports the underlying hierarchies instead of destroying structures that exclude women. Common in modern popular culture, the empowered victim is this paradox: women are depicted as strong and capable, yet their strength is founded on suffering and their agency is constrained by the very institutions that perpetuate violence. These pictures conceal the structural power and disparity by disregarding the language in which gendered identities are created and limited (Foucault, 1978; Hall, 1997).

Furthermore, in the context of Western induced filmmaking, the central observation follows: how women in conflict are portrayed in international media is racial, cultural and geographic. The Western gaze views non-Western women in violence as victims needing humanitarian assistance or as threats to be eliminated via reductive binaries. Women warriors in organizations such ISIS or FARC are frequently portrayed as having no political or strategic impact; their conduct is explained by brainwashing, personal trauma, or cultural sickness (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Not granting political subjectivity to these women and portraying the West as the normative standard of agency and reason strengthens global hierarchies by means of these pictures. Authenticity and commercialization clash even in contexts when resistance and survival are portrayed—like in indie movies, graphic novels or video games such as This War of Mine — while some pieces try to depict the complexity of conflict from a woman's angle, others lessen female suffering to amusement for consumption.

Then the connected lines between popular culture and global politics are forever going to be an arena of negotiation, where in names around gender, violence, and power intersections are always created and contested. The digital age has merely been a catalyst to make open new sites for political expression and cultural production. Activists remix popular cultural artifacts and unleash viral campaigns to channel counter-hegemonic narratives through social media while risking turning political messages into mere trends or aesthetic moments. Undoubtedly, as AI, virtual reality, and algorithmic recommendation systems penetrate and permeate all cultures, even the political role for pop culture will be more pronounced. The technologies mentioned here can strengthen existing hierarchies or make space for new dissent and innovation (Hamilton, 2015). Understanding how popular culture helps to build women in conflict hence demands more than merely noting stereotypes or characters; it demands an investigation of the discursive, political, and economic structures bearing upon culture making and cultural acceptability. One major philosophical point of entry to grasp this project is poststructuralist feminism, which offers for a study into the intricacies of how meaning is built and experienced through identity and agency as they travel the international structures of culture and power.

Conceptualizing Identity

A theoretical approach that explains discursive construction, fluidity, and change in identity is required for the complexity of women's roles in war and conflict as well as how they are depicted in popular culture. The post structural feminism is quite relevant to deal identity as something built

discursively—through language, depiction, and power—not as a natural given or fixed entity (Hall, 1997). This point directly challenges essentialist view of gender that define woman based on biology or universally classify women as "the victim" or "the empowered woman"(Butler, 1993). Instead, poststructuralist feminism views gender identities as constructed by discourse - that is, the repeated ways women are spoken about, seen, and positioned in social and cultural texts (Butler, 1990; Hall, 1997). These representations are never neutral, however, because they are determined by power, ideology, and narratives that are historically situated in time, shaping what kind of woman is understood as rational, dangerous, innocent, or politically meaningful (Foucault, 1978; Shepherd, 2013).

The poststructuralist feminist theorists, including Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, emphasize how meaning is produced through discourse, and how subjects are subjectified within discourses. In this perspective, identity is an unstable process that is performative rather than having a stable essence. The cultural portrayal of women in mainstream culture as victims of sexual violence in war films (or as assailants and warriors in action films) is not simply a reflection of reality but is also a venue of meaning making and debate regarding gender and power (Shepherd, 2013). Such depictions help to shape a more general knowledge of what it means to be a woman during war. They allocate roles, situate agency, and frequently reimagine deeper political and ideological assumptions regarding femininity, militarism, and heroism (Doty, 1993; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007).

In opposition and in tension with this critical perspective, liberal feminism has a tendency to focus its reform efforts on getting women noticed and included in existing institutions, whether it is military, political or cultural (McRobbie, 2009; Tickner, 2001). Liberal feminists engage with institutions in order to empower women by depicting them as equals in public life, including in representations of war and security. These portrayals have legitimate expanded female representation and broken out of the patriarchal box, they are only partial (Tickner, 2001). Post-structuralist feminists ask these questions because they interrogate the institutions and discourses that produce gendered power in the first place and because they want to do so, among other reasons. Liberal feminism often relies on stable categories, assuming that "woman" is a stable identity that can be inserted into power systems without altering the logic of those systems at all (Butler, 1993; McRobbie, 2009).This is why many of the popular culture narratives of "empowered women" simply reproduce hegemonic patriarchal ideals disguised as female strength, especially when women's agency can be effective only when emulating various masculine forms of violence, control, or rationality.

This critical position becomes clearer when we look at identity itself, and how it is defined. Post-structuralism denies an essential and stable conception of identity, instead suggesting that identity is constructed through discourse, and is always constructed as differential. For instance, a female character in a film may simply be positioned as a "victim," not because she is necessarily a victim, but simply because the narrative might employ some textual and visual indicators, emotional tones, and stereotypes, based on culture, that constitute the female character as a victim (Hall, 1997; Shepherd, 2013). For example, women represented as terrorists or violent participants may be constructed through associations related to irrationality, sexuality, or madness—all of which are conventionally coded as deviations of normative femininity. In either case, identity is not located but produced through systems of representation that circulate through film, television, journalism, and political speech. By treating identity as contingent, performative, and relational,

researchers may investigate how gendered subjects are made legible through dominant discourses and why certain identity formations are made visible while others are silenced (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978).

To comprehend, the use of language as political and social, discourse analysis serves as an invaluable practice to unfold the mechanism by which subjects are assigned or denied agency. Discourse analysis does not treat language and imagery as transparent representations, but examine the processes of constructing meaning and power exercised through representation (Hall, 1997; Foucault, 1978). The current research makes use of three tools of discourse analysis, given by Richard Doty (1993), which are *predication, presupposition*, and *subject-positioning* in this text. Predication refers to the attributes or qualities associated with a subject. For example, calling a female soldier emotional or volatile is not a neutral description, but rather a culturally laden indication that affects how her behavior is perceived. In ways that support stereotypes or undermine women's validity as political actors, predication helps to illustrate how particular traits are linked to women.

Presupposition is concerned with the assumptions underlying texts or stories—those things that are accepted as truth or never questioned. For instance, think about when media descriptions assume that a woman engaged in political violence must have been manipulated or traumatized into joining the violence, which also implies that women do not engage in rational political agency of their own accord. It essentially depoliticizes their actions while representing them instead as personal pathology, or as victims. When researchers can identify presuppositions, they can help reveal the underlying logics that support gender-specific norms of power within production protocol of representation (Butler, 1993).

Subject-positioning refers to the roles that discourse makes available to people in some narrative. In a war film or political drama, women are typically positioned in generally passive roles, as witnesses, grieving mothers, or vengeful angels. Note that these are not neutral roles, but are constructed to place women into acceptable forms of femininity, even though they appear to defy gender restrictions. A woman perpetrating violence may be construed as monstrous or seductive, thereby diminishing her threat to gender norms, allowing the viewer to consider her as an aberration and not a political subject. By exploring subjects' positions, we can see how cultural texts mediate the violence of which types of actions or identities are considered appropriate or deviant violence, or if it is simply violence that is threatening (Hall, 1997; Foucault, 1978).

When used together, these tools open up possibilities for analyzing the representations of women in popular culture in ways that mirror and maintain larger political and ideological structures (Shepherd, 2013; Doty, 1993). Instead of simply marginalizing women's performances in ways that skate over celebrating the gender equality and ignore the persisting unequal representations, scholars may engage in deeper analyses of the discursive formations of gender, violence, and identity. In the growing popular culture site marked by political meaning-making, that is where the analysis is important. This research situates itself within poststructuralist feminism and conduct discourse analysis, and is not simply about listing representations of women in war, but also about understanding the complicated and contradictory politically laden processes by which those representations were produced and come to be valued (Foucault, 1978; Shepherd, 2013).

Analyses of the Representations of Superwoman in Film: Captain Marvel and Wonder Woman

Superhero movies offer more than simply amusement. They reflect and mold society's views on power, identity, and gender (Hall, 1997). The constitutive power of a Superhero movies, due to access to a large audience, highlights their significance for the critical examination. More specifically, Captain Marvel (2019) and Wonder Woman (2017) are significant as two films that feature female protagonists in masculine roles, but their significance extends beyond that to how they enter cultural discourses about what it means to be a woman and how meanings about being a woman are always constructed, contested and negotiated.

Discourse analysis enables us to apply techniques such as predication, presupposition, and subject positioning that helps to unravel and critically examine how these movies interpolate the viewer to understand female subjectivity (Shepherd, 2013; Doty, 1993). Poststructuralist feminist theory, particularly the work of writers such Judith Butler will help us examine how gender is performed and constructed through visual and textual representations rather than being fixed. These movies show how identity is something one constructs rather than something one already has, in connection with others, institutions, and social standards.

Interpreting Femininity in *Captain Marvel (2019)*
Predication
As we have discussed above, predication refers to the qualities or characteristics endowed to a character. In Captain Marvel, Carol Danvers is presented as impulsive and emotional, traits that her Kree (a blue-skinned militaristic alien race) instructor refers to as her flaws. In a scene when Yon Rogg trains Carol and says, "There's nothing more dangerous to a warrior" and "Anger only serves the enemy", the quality of being emotionless is endowed with the effective warrior. The use of word "emotions" while specifying it to the "anger" disregards other emotions such as compassion, kindness, and forgiveness. This indicates that Carol's femininity is something to be suppressed as a fault. This establishes a dialogue that situates Carol within the patriarchal, militarized authority and equates discipline and self-control with military power.

Furthermore, the importance of learning from past and doubt have been neglected while constructing the ideal character of a warrior. The following dialogues are clear expressions:

Yon Rogg: You have to let go of the past.
Carol Danvers: I don't remember my past.
Yon Rogg: It's causing you doubt and doubt makes you vulnerable.

In another scene, the supreme intelligence of Kree reiterates its power when it claims, "Without us, you're only human. You must learn to master yourself. Master your emotions". Within that frameset, Carol appears helpless, reliant, and weaker unless something larger miraculously energizes her. Again, mastering yourself is conflated with being emotionless. The film maintains that actual domination necessitates the repression of emotions and human feelings.

Pre-supposition
The assumptions within a tale, what the story accepts—presuppositions are those The Supreme Intelligence echoes this sentiment in saying, "Without us, you're only human," working its way around to claim that humanity itself is a weakness. Such constructs further demonstrate the military logic that holds emotions and obedience above individuality. Carol has been at odds with some of

those ideologies.

Conceding: "I've been fighting with one arm tied behind my back"; actually, she's taking the contrary: it is not equal to control strength. Rather, she asserts that declaring herself would fetch the strength as any normal human being from doing so. Yet her empowerment is practically married to her physical violence against the Kree, exposing the complex workings of the movie whose relationship with militarized orders is both contesting and reproducing.

At another point in the film, Talos Keller (head of Skrulls) entered the house and educate with moral logic which presupposes kindness as merely a mean to fulfil material ends:

Talos: You know, you really should be kinder to your neighbors,

　　　You never know when you are gonna need to borrow some sugar.

It has been presupposed in the above text that material consequences determine the moral conducts. The relation with neighbors is prescribed to be dependent on what one gets in return materially. The morality loses its own value and only serves as a mean to obtain the material goals.

Subject positioning

Subject positioning clarifies how audiences are prompted to see characters positioned inside power structures and how these characters are arranged. Initially shown as a tool of the Kree Empire, Carol's consciousness molded by obedience. The dialogue is as follow to identify the certain masculine favored subject positioning:

Carol: What is the point of giving me these (powerful and destructive hands) if you don't want me to use them?

Yon Rogg: I want you to use them. The Supreme intelligence gave me responsibility to show you how to use them

Carol: I know how.

Yon Rogg: Yeah, if that were true you would be able to knock me down without them (in the preceding scene she used the lightening hands emitting strong rays to knock him in reaction to when he threw her down humanly)

In this dialogue, Yon Rogg is positioned as the masculine one who is expert at skillful fighting and is unbeaten unless Carol (a feminine character) used her non-human power to subdue him. It reflects that masculine character has fighting skills and his task is to teach them to the feminine character which puts Yon Rogg at a superior position and he needs to be obeyed. Later on, Yon Rogg insisted that he wants Carol to get 'best version of yourself'. This places her chronologically within patriarchal standards of value; validity is a matter of battle governed under masculine rules. Addressing such matters, Carol rebuffs him, at another point in the film: "I have nothing to prove to you." By doing so, she gets to establish herself as not necessarily subject to patriarchal validation.

Her claim that "I've been fighting with one arm behind my back" reframes her subjectivity since it discloses how the systems in power, those being patriarchal and militarized, have undermined her individuality. Even so, while she is fighting against these systems, her liberation comes through massive violence against the Kree. It reveals the contradiction: while Carol reproduces patriarchic subject positions, she also conforms to militarized violence.

Interpreting Femininity in *Wonder Woman* (2017)
Predication

Diana is projected in Wonder Woman as compassionate and fiercely independent, therefore

embodying contradictions that challenge conventional divisions. When she informs Steve Trevor, "What I do is not up to you," her independence is established. Diana is presented as a self-determining person whose decisions are not controlled by male authority, therefore rejecting Steve's attempts to restrict her agency directly. By means of this conversation, the film builds her character as an independent and forceful individual, connecting her with attributes coded as masculine.

Her predication is further developed in the No Man's Land scene. Steve asserts, "No, we cannot save everyone in this conflict." We came here not to do this," Diana responds, "No. But it is what I am going to do." Diana here is predicted as a heroic character who rejects militarized pragmatism for moral responsibility. Her conversation presents her as a fighter working outside of patriarchal reasoning, therefore emphasizing her uniqueness and resistance.

Another instance underlines her freedom when Steve observes, "No man can cross that. It cannot be possible. Diana defies this assumption by action; she enters No Man's Land even though she is instructed it is impossible. This undermining of "no man" moves her quality to be transcending gendered constraints, therefore embodying the paradox of being simultaneously kind and fierce.

At last, her statement, "Men are necessary for procreation; but when it comes to pleasure… needless," underlines her sexual freedom. This line distances femininity from men and presents Diana as self-reliant and defying patriarchal expectations on love. Although her conversations together build her character as paradoxical and freeing, her heavenly ancestry infers exceptionalism, suggesting that only remarkable women might represent such power.

Presupposition

The presuppositions in Wonder Woman expose the assumptions that undergird its discussions of war, love, and agency. For instance, Steve says, "No man can cross that. It's not possible," presupposing masculine limitations are the criterion for demarcating possibility. Diana destabilizes Steve's comment by saying, "So… what? So we do nothing?" Essentially, she rejects his logic. Her rejection, therefore, reworks the presupposition that structurally supports a militarized way of equating impossibility with inaction. This comment expresses how patriarchal war systems work to suppress alternative possibilities of action and compassion. "None of us is able to save everyone in this war," Steve says; and another presumption is born; it presupposes that there can be no other sensible alternative other than selective intervention and militarized pragmatism. It resists Diana, painfully demanding that she still needs life-saving measures, notwithstanding the logic of war, pointing out how militarization crushes human instincts.

Diana's claim that "Men are essential for procreation, but when it comes to pleasure... superfluous," challenges the assumption that women must define their happiness in connection with men. It describes independence in strictly sexual and emotional terms. Diana's desire for autonomy is inescapably tied to Steve's death later on; although she renounces this dependency, her agency is still wrapped in romantic and sacrificial narratives. Thus, her actions illustrate how ideals of female self-determination remain haunted by the orthodoxies they oppose, exemplifying the tensions emphasized by poststructuralist critique.

Subject positioning

Diana is presented as an outsider to patriarchy as well as to modernity. Her query, "Why can't I fight?" prepares the audience to view gender limits as random and socially created. Steve declares in No Man's Land, "No man can cross that," therefore Diana is unable according to male defined

logic. She challenges this stance by entering battle, leading the charge, and redefining herself as the transformer rather than the passive observer Steve dreams.

Later, Ares exclaimed, "They do not deserve your protection!" Ares' comments place Diana in the position of a naive one attempting to protect imperfect humanity; she argues back, saying, "It's not about deserve. It's about what you believe. And I believe in love." Through this dialogue, Diana again poses herself against Ares' nihilism. However, her empowerment is still mediated by militarized heroism and through combat and destruction occupies the realm of masculinized violence. Thus, her subject positioning indicates a disobedience to patriarchal norms while complicating them with militarized logics.

Feminist Implications and Theoretical Reflections

The notion of a constant or natural identity, especially gender identity, is rejected by poststructuralist feminism. Instead, it views identity as a fluid construct shaped by social norms, language and power. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is relevant here; Butler suggests that gender is not something we are but something we do—a performance that is repeated over time in response to social expectations.

This is what Carol Danvers represents. Her identity is not simple. She finds being human and Kree, soldier and rebel, emotionally regulated rather difficult. Rejecting the expectations placed on her helps her to create her own identity; it is not about finding a "true self" buried beneath. Choosing her own name, attire (U.S. air force), and mission is an act of revolt (Butler, 1990). By rebelling against how others see her—particularly the Kree—she regains agency over her story.

Captain Marvel distinguishes itself by presenting a "strong woman" not only in the conventional sense, rather it presents a more sophisticated, tiered view of strength that does not depend on becoming more macho. It questions the idea that there is one approach to be a woman by pointing to the way people actively shape their identity through struggle, will, and resistance. Carol's strong desire from the start of movie to join the U.S. air force shows how the movie follows liberal feminism and its motivation to becoming part of the same militarized and masculinized structure. As liberal feminism proposes equality of genders in different spheres of life as an alternative of patriarchy, the representations in Captain Marvel (2019) are not a fine example of liberal feminism as it reproduces the patriarchal militarized logics: disregarding doubt to learn from the past, the value of kindness for its own sake, and sense of emotional bonding.

Similarly, in Wonder Woman (2017), Diana is positioned as a character serves for liberal feminism and that is easily identifiable, which emphasizes inclusiveness and equal participation. It introduces a powerful woman who joins a man's world but does not totally subvert the hierarchy of that world. Still functioning within a paradigm accepting war, sacrifice, and romantic love. It seems, initially, Wonder Woman (2017) is much more of a critical feminist film that questions the patriarchal norms and principles. But as we dig into further the politics of 'othering', militarism, and obsession for heroes gets on the surface. In the same way to Carol, Diana is also powerful by getting inhuman powers – Zeus who created her to kill the God. The power Steve holds, is realistic, fighting and taking risks to save humanity. On the other hand, Diana is given the power by God and later in the film she gets empowered and wins the fight against Ares by getting power from the love she has for Steve.

Both Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel aim to redefine the female superhero. They go about it differently, although each have strengths and weaknesses. Still, the limitations of

mainstream media mold both of these movies. The both characters of superwomen provide instances of resistance, nevertheless they also show the boundaries of conveying feminist narratives inside corporate brands. Though it sometimes questions the underlying power dynamics driving male coded roles, liberal feminism frequently honors women. As a result, the empowerment it provides might feel limited or shallow. In contrast, poststructuralist feminism's emphasis on the building of identity and power enables a more critical, adaptable approach of gender. It challenges us to consider bigger questions: Who gets to define strength? What kinds of stories are we telling? And what kinds of identities are we allowed to imagine? (Butler, 1990; Shepherd, 2013; Hall, 1997).

Addressing the Potential Criticism

As we know, the discourse analysis, in particular CDA, deals with the visual and textual representations while critically examining the possible interpretations of them and their relation with broader discourses. In case of films, might it would be observed that the whole film, in the end, gives a different message contrary to the interpretation of the authors at the level of scene-analysis. It is suggested that the authors believe unfolding the processes at scenes-level is necessary to understand its impact completely rather observing movie and taking its message taken for granted as a whole unit. In other words, the reproduction of discourses (Macro level) occurs in scenes/dialogues (Micro level), therefore the micro representations need to be inspected instead simply focusing on the whole message of the film. Although, the films have positive message consciously in feminist sense but the authors are more concerned with unconscious logics the scenes activate among the audiences. As Roland Barthes described: 'what-goes-without-saying' (Barthes, 1972).

Conclusion

Focusing on their depiction in Captain Marvel (2019) and Wonder Woman (2017), this study investigated how women are shown in popular culture as both victims and perpetrators of violence. Using the poststructuralist feminism to understand construction of identity and discourse analysis to provide tools for analysis, it was demonstrated that in media the gendered identities are constructed and always negotiated rather than being fixed or natural. The study found that although popular culture has moved to provide women with more representations in quantitative terms but these representations are still shaped by dominant ideas usually taken without question.

Starting with a close examination of the general scene of women's portrayal in media, the research pointed out how women in combat are often portrayed as passive victims of sexual assault or as violent outliers. These simplified interpretations do not encompass the complex realities which shape the experiences of women in conflict. The attention then shifted onto the academics' discourses of popular culture and global politics, pointing out how feminist inputs have moved on, often becoming entrapped within binary and essentialist frameworks. At its core, poststructuralist feminist theory became the basis for engaging the debates on gender toward a more critical approach that would examine not only the content of the representations in question but also the larger discourses that sustain them.

In the course of this investigation, liberal feminism received a great deal of criticism for simplifying the objective to achieve equality – equal representation quantitatively. Although liberal feminism has been able to call for women's representation in sites of power, it sometimes assumes

"woman" as a universal, permanent category, which therefore neglects differences formed by race, class, sexual orientation, or geographical environment. Moreover, it advocates inclusion without confronting patriarchal institutions, as well as sanctioning a concept of personal empowerment that serves to legitimize the belief that personal empowerment is sufficient. It creates a reality in which individual success stories become a reinforcement of the very systems that liberal feminism professes to critique. Generally, liberal feminism alienates all women's experiences into either empowered agents or vulnerable victims, without taking into consideration what complicates this continuum.

This study is important since it not only adds to feminist theory but also encourages readers to think carefully about the cultural stories the women absorb. Depictions of women in conflict and violence are profoundly political, influencing public interpretation of gender, power, and agency rather than just entertainment. Using poststructuralist feminism enabled to reveal how apparently progressive representations might still depend on ancient power structures, thereby portraying women as "empowered" yet constrained inside patriarchal and militaristic settings.

Ultimately, the paper seeks to unfold the characterization of women in war are still contentious areas, influenced by the interaction of gender, race, and international politics. It's important to be wary of how gendered representations are created and the power relations they perpetuate as popular culture changes. It matters to interrogate from what structures brings meaning to these representations and to strive for narratives that robustly represent the complex, contradictory and powerful roles of women in conflict and society, instead of just glorifying the achievement of strong female characters.

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