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How horror, mystery, and science fiction films construct femmes fatales: misogyny or empowerment?

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MA DISSERTATION: FILM AND TELEVISION.

How horror, mystery, and science fiction films construct femmes fatales

Misogyny or empowerment?

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Abstract

I seek to investigate the representation of gender in film, particularly the ideological meaning of the femme fatale; what it represents. I want to also ask if it challenges the traditionally constructed ideas about gender in cinema? To comprehend the nature of this investigation, questions will be asked on what constitutes objectivization and misogyny on screen, and also importantly, what constitutes a femme fatale. The treating of females as objects, as an idea, shall be investigated in relation to the gaze. In this sense, I want to ask if the representation of the femme fatale is misogynistic or a source of empowerment? I employ a political philosophic interpretation or unmasking of the femme fatale, with a blend of feminist scholarship. I put four films in conversation with each other in an attempt to unmask the ideological meaning of the femme fatale. The films include *My Cousin Rachel* (2017), *Audition* (1999), *Species* (1995), and *Species 2* (1998). The construction of the femme fatale in *My Cousin Rachel* (2017) is misogynistic because it promotes a view that male reasoning is superior to female reasoning. On an ideological level, the femme fatale in the film may be taken to represent a protest against naming and the patriarchal construction of social behaviour. *Audition* (1999) employs the femme fatale to serve as a violent attack on patriarchy. The femme fatale in *Audition* (1999) is presented as an obsessed torturer with a sense of madness attached to her. It is this madness; this other dark side of her that invalidates her resistance. Instead of deploying the femme fatale, *Species 2* (1998) deploys a fatal man/homme fatale. *Species 2* (1998) attempts to shift from patriarchal gender constructions by placing women in positions of power and highlighting issues around body politics in terms of sexual assault and abuse. *Species* (1995) reinforces the traditional gender constructions in a sense that it depicts women as the 'objects of the gaze' and men as the 'bearers of the gaze'. The femmes fatales presented by the films in question are paranoid constructions with a surplus and excess attached to them. The fatal status of the femmes fatales is attached to them not so much because they cause harm to men, but because they are fundamentally fatal to the very order that empower men and oppress women; the patriarchal order. Less than the Gramscian notion of War of maneuver, the notion of War of position is appropriate in dealing with patriarchal cinema. One of the first and fundamental steps in challenging this male centred cinema is to recognize the material conditions of various groups. We have to interrogate the political economy of cinema in terms of who owns the means of production and who does not; the ones with power and the ones without. If the ideological power of the patriarchal cinema is not properly challenged at an ideological level, then cinema for women will always entail struggle.

Introduction

In this paper, I seek to conduct a gender analysis and study on the relationship between gender and genre. I seek to investigate the way gender is represented in film, particularly the ideological meaning of the femme fatale; what it represents. I want to also ask if it challenges the traditionally constructed ideas about gender in cinema? I seek to investigate whether the construction of the femmes fatales is misogynistic or empowering. I want to state that this paper will interrogate how the femme fatale is constructed by the four films while, at the same time, looking at the representation of women in relation to the gaze and gender constructions. These two aspects are not the same and I do not intend to read them as if they are one. Instead, I will put them in conversation with each other during the analysis of the four films. I look at a specific genre film and if that film adheres to or disrupts that construction. I want to go through the debates on how gender survives and is reinforced through genre; how genre reproduces gender and how gender relations define genre. I want to employ a political philosophic interpretation or unmasking of the femme fatale, with a blend of feminist scholarship. I want to state, from the beginning, that I seek to approach the study of films in this paper with a Marxist view on cinema. That is an approach that treats cinema as a tool of power, advancing a certain ideological understanding of reality.

I want to read *My cousin Rachel* (2017) in relation to the debates about gender and the femme fatale. In the event of such a reading, I seek to put the film in conversation with Takashi Miike's *Audition* (1999), Roger Donaldson's *Species* (1995), and Peter Medak's *Species 2* (1998) to explore the evolution of the femme fatale film in its treatment of gender relations. I want to intensely scrutinize the manner in which gender is reimagined and reconstructed through the femme fatale in film. It is worth noting that these four films are drawn from different cultures and communities around the world, and these impacts on the way each film imagines characters and how the ideas they advance may be understood in the analysis of those characters. The analysis of this paper shall involve a political philosophic and psychoanalytic reading of films with Smelik's (1999) ideas on feminist film critique. I use terms such as passionate attachment, voyeuristic and narcissistic visual pleasure, castration anxiety, fetishism, and the three levels of cinematic gaze. The usage of these terms are a reason this paper shall have a psychoanalytic and political philosophic rhythm to it. I also wish to employ Iris Marion Young's "*Five faces of oppression*" to conceptualize oppression in reading the films in question. The analysis of this paper shall include a Grasmcian view of hegemony and ideology.

My analysis will also include an interrogation of the way film grammar is utilized in the films to advance ideas and representations. I want to read these films in terms of the visual, narrative and ideological tropes of their genres. I want to study how each film disrupts these tropes, and also how such disruptions construct ideas about gender. However, it is not only the disruptions I seek to interrogate, but also the ways in which these films adhere or conform to the standards and descriptions of their respective genres.

My interest on this subject was sparked by ideas, if not debates, about the influence of the femme fatale and also by various readings of Carman in theatrical productions (Jaber 2016:19). Some claims suggest that this genric form is misogynistic and favours the male spectator. Contradicting claims suggests that the femme fatale empowers the female and fatal woman is a personification of the attack on patriarchy. It is in this spirit that I seek to put these claims to question. However, the claim I am most interested in is not the former, but the latter. Is the femme fatale changing accepted ideas about gender? Can it be seen as objectifying or as a feminist instrument in both cinema and theatre to empower the femme? If so, then why? How is it effective in relation to the gaze? Here, I shall argue for a politics rooted in arguments about gender vis-à-vis the gaze.

My idea and hope in thinking comparatively about these films, about gender and genre, is that we might be able to uncover genre films' locus of power vis-à-vis constructing gender. In this case, the paper shall explore issues of representation in film and how the representation in question is interpreted in variously distinct ways.

I want to invoke Anneke Smelik's ideas on feminist film theory and her ideas on gender to theorize the ideas advanced by this paper. I also want to employ Judith Butler's *The psychic life of power* and bell hooks' conception of the gaze. Butler shall also be employed for her ideas on power and the production of subjectivity in relation to gender construction. Rick Altman's ideas on genre are also important for this paper, for they provide an understanding on the notion of genre. This research will also include some feminist ideas and scholarly work. I intend to draw from the work of authors such as Glenda Daniels and Judith Halberstam. I also wish to invoke Chantel Mouffe for her ideas on radical democratic thought, not to discuss the concept of democracy itself, for that will prove extremely irrelevant, but to apply her political concepts in the reading of the films in scrutiny.

Why these films?

There have been debates among feminists about the role and representation of women in film. I do not know if I can contribute to these debates, but I want to interrogate these debates with an approach that includes the dismantling of strongly held feminist views on the femme fatale film. Such an interrogation will require an examination of the change in the representation of women in film. Together, all four films provide us with an exploration of the past and present of this representation in question. With this approach, I do not wish to express or imply that these changes in representation may be observed from four films. Rather, given the nature of this project, this approach provides a framework from which consultations shall be made in this paper's development of arguments, about the change of representation. These films in scrutiny are best suited for my enquiry because they deal with different fatal women, with different characteristics, working towards achieving similar goals. These films give me a range of femme fatale expressions that will allow for a broad investigation. These films are also from different cultural and socio-political settings, drawn from distinct periods. In this case, they will provide diverse representations of the fatal woman.

My Cousin Rachel (2017) and *Audition* (1999) present the fatal woman as someone who uses her gender and innocence to lead men to destruction. In particular, they are centred around the socially expected ways of behaviour; gender expectations. In contrast, *Species* (1995) and *Species 2* (1998) treat the femme fatale as a woman who deploys her sexuality as a tool of power; as a tool to lead men to destruction. Most interesting about *Species 2* (1998) is that it shifts the attention from the femme fatale to the homme fatale. They play around sexual desires and the ignorance of men. They use the idea of dangerous sexuality; sex that hurts. In this sense, these films offer different interpretations and applications of the femme fatale character. There are also elements of revenge in all four films that make them even interesting for investigation. These films are applied to different genres. *My Cousin Rachel* (2017) is a mystery/drama film, *Audition* (1999) is a drama/thriller with a blend of horror, *Species* (1995) is a fantasy/science fiction, and *Species 2* (1998) is a horror/science fiction.

It is important that one proceeds to read film in this way because it helps to uncover its role in reflecting, if not in constructing identities. With this paper, I hope to explore how the femme fatale is positioned throughout different genres. I want to offer an interpretation of the femme fatale in a feminist and political philosophical manner.

Research Question

In this interrogation of an aspect of film noir, I wish to explore and investigate the ideological meaning of the 'fatal woman' and her position in relation to gender construction and representation on screen. I seek to investigate the representation of gender in film, particularly the ideological meaning of the femme fatale; what it represents. I want to also ask if it challenges the traditionally constructed ideas about gender in cinema? To comprehend the nature of this investigation, questions will be asked on what constitutes objectivization and misogyny on screen, and also importantly, what constitutes a femme fatale. The treating of females as objects, as an idea, shall be investigated in relation to the gaze. In this sense, I want to ask if the representation of the femme fatale is misogynistic or a source of empowerment? I intend to think comparatively about four femme fatale films to address these research questions.

This paper shall investigate the meaning of film noir's femme fatale in a political philosophic perspective, which will also include a feminist interrogation of the figure. In other words, I wish to interrogate how the fatal women in all the films are introduced, revealed, and ended. In conjunction with the plethora of debates, psychoanalysis, political philosophy, and feminist scholarship, I seek to offer an interpretation of the femme fatale on an ideological level. Is the femme fatale another form of exploitation cinema at the expense of 'woman' as a category? Is it an issue of identity? What constitutes 'woman'?

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Bulter speaks on the complexity of identity as far as the subject 'woman' is concerned. Butler (1990:01) observes that "feminist theory has had this assumption that there an existing identity, which is understood via the category of women. In thinking about this observation, she maintains that representation and politics are controversial terms. For the purpose of my investigation, I will be more focused on the controversial nature of representation. I do not intend, in any way, to suggest that politics as a concept is not important for the subject investigated by this paper or that representation shall be explored separately from politics. Representation of gender on screen will prove difficult to investigate outside the domain of political discussion. On the definition of representation, Butler (1990:01) argues that it serves as the "operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects". On the other hand, so argues Butler (1990:01), "representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women". The focus of this project is on how gender is represented by different film genres.

Literature review

Genre

Before we begin to read how the femme fatale is constructed by different genres, there is a need to understand genre itself. I want to begin by acknowledging that gender has/is treated and produced in different ways in different genres in cinema. To move towards an understanding of genre itself, I wish to employ Altman (1999) for his ideas on genre. Altman (1999:14) maintains that genre is viewed as an instrument that is able to serve multiple functions at the same time. Altman (1999) understands that genres present frameworks that drive production and they position themselves as those frameworks that define individual texts. Altman (1999) crucially observes that the interpretation of genre films, the understanding of genre itself, is dependent on the spectators' expectation of that genre. In other words, the audiences' expectation of any given genre may be consulted in the attempt to understand it or even formulate a product within that same genre.

Altman (1999) observes that genre could be viewed as three different aspects; as a blueprint, a structure, and a label. Altman (1999) argues that genres are produced, in a definitive sense, by film industries and recognized by the spectators. Within this framework, Altman (1999) argues that industries and spectators are in a mutual relationship, and are the only parties in the relationship. Altman (1999) argues that any genre that does not follow this formulation cannot be considered or recognized as a genre.

The most significant idea for this paper in Altman's (1999) work is his formulation that genre has a ritual or ideological function. With this idea, Altman (1999) identifies the ritual and ideological approach. The Ritual approach maintains that the spectators are the significant producers of genre (Altman 1999:27). For the Ritual approach, the narrative forms of generic texts are brought to life from practices that already exist in society (Altman 1999:27). The ideological approach views narrative texts as instruments and as ways for the state to be in contact with its subjects (Altman 1999:27). In this case, we have an approach that is reflective (Ritual) and another that is an instrument used to communicate or advance ideas (Ideological). This is how I want to approach the analysis of genre films in relation to the femme fatale construction. Langford (2005), in a chapter '*Before genre: Melodrama'*, concedes that genre is always evolving. To articulate this claim further, Langford (2005), in Derrida's terms argue that texts do not belong wholly to one genre. With this conception, one

begins to understand that genre is always becoming and that different genres may borrow some aspects from other genres.

There are various distinct genres, but the genre of interest for this paper is film noir. In this paper, I do not intend to wholly focus the attention on the discussion of film noir as a genre. My wish is to focus on the fatal woman. I only draw from film noir because the femme fatale is and has historically been closely associated with it. It is important that I begin with an approach that will bring us closer to an understanding of film noir's fatal woman.

Film noir

Geoff Mayer, in *Readings on Film noir*, observes that film noir is both a discursive construction created by critics and scholars, and also a cultural event that questioned the governing values and frameworks of cinema in pre-1940 (Mayer 2007:03). Mayer (2007), in a definitive approach to film noir, identifies theories such as existentialism and Freudian psychology, and the school of detective fiction. Drawing on Silver and Ursini, Mayer (2007:04) observes that "these theories help promote a worldview that stressed the absurdity of existence along with the importance of an individual's past in determining his or her actions". Mayer (2007:04) explains that "the two of the most important themes of the noir movement, 'the haunted past and fatalistic nightmare, draw directly from the two sources".

Silver and Ursini argue, explains Mayer (2007), that the noir movement emerged with the 1941 version of *The Maltese Falcon.* Contrary to Silver and Ursini's argument, Mayer (2007) observes that for Steve Neale, as a single phenomenon, noir never existed. For Neale, "many of its so-called characteristic features, such as the use of voice over and flashback, the use of high contrast lighting and other expressionist elements, the downbeat endings, and the culture of distrust between men and women, which often manifested itself in the figure of the femme fatale, are separable features belonging to separable tendencies and trends that traversed a wide variety of genres and cycles in the 1940s and early 1950s" (Mayer 2007:05). Drawing on these scholarly interpretations, Mayer (2007:05) argues that film noir is a "discursive critical construction that has evolved over time and that despite its imprecise parameters and poorly defined sources, it is a necessary intellectual category". Mayer (2007) observes that some modern noir films came to be classified as melodrama.

Terms such as psychiatric, psychological or neurotic were attached to the 'melodrama' by reviewers to express the differences these films had compared to other different Hollywood melodramas (Mayer 2007:05). With this understanding of film noir, we can proceed to

interrogate what the femme fatale character is. For that purpose, I want to invoke different scholars who speak on this character of the femme fatale. Virginia Allen (1983), in *The femme fatale: Erotic icon*, defines the fatal woman as someone who brings men to their destruction and death by her extremely seductive beauty. Kuhn (1990) maintains that the fatal woman is understood by her enticing and fatal sexuality that leads to the destruction of the male protagonist.

Grossman (2009), in *Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir: Ready for Her Close-Up*, explains that film noir has been understood in a feminist context in two central ways. First, Grossman (2009) explains, as a group of texts that promote the rise of feminist critique and as 'a celebration of unchecked female power'. Grossman's (2009:02) project "seeks to turn attention away from spectator and gaze theory and the idea of the femme fatale, and toward the examination of narrative, social psychology, and the mise-en-scene in film noir movies, that she argues in her study, reveal that the majority of the so-called femme fatales are not demonized in the films in which they appear and are very often shown to be victims of the social roles that dictate gender roles and of practices that over-identify and overinvest in the idea of the femme fatale".

Grossman (2009:02) argues that "fantasies of women are socio-historically based and thus affected by the position of women in any given historical moment". In this way, we understand that femme fatales are constructed the way they are as a result of women's position in society. Grossman (2009) argues that most femmes fatales are sexual, but that is not their main appeal. "It is the leading female's commitment to fulfil her own desires, whatever they may be, at any cost that makes her the central, compelling point of interest for men and women" (Grossman 2009:03). Grossman (2009:03) argues that "film noir movies work to identify tough women as victims, whose strength, perverse by conventional standards, keeps them from submitting to the gendered social institutions that oppress them".

She argues that her concern is that "the gaze theory has overemphasized women as objects and mystified their role as social agents because of its reliance on unchanging and unchangeable models of spectatorship, whose schematic approach to the structure of the film fails to take the context and the content of individual films sufficiently into account" (Grossman 2009:03). Grossman (2009:04) argues that "the dangerous women in film noir are lawless agents of female desire, rebelling against the patriarchal relegation of women to the

domestic sphere where they are deemed passive and valued only in relation to their maternal and wifely vocation".

Grossman (2009) speaks of the ideological function of the homme fatale. Invoking Marsha Linehan, Grossman (2009) speaks on 'validated women'. Grossman (2009) demonstrates how female independence is viewed differently from male independence. Male independence is seen as a mark of strength and female independence as a sign of perversity (Grossman 2009:80). Grossman (2009) argues that homes fatales do not break norms but only extend an accepted code of masculinity that fortifies rather than challenge the traditionally accepted expectations. I find this claim interesting in relation to the femme fatale and I want to interrogate it further in the analysis of the four films. I want to argue here that to truly uncover if the construction of the femme fatale is misogynist or empowering, there a need to understand how gender is and has been constructed in cinema.

Jonette Lauren Lagamba (2012), in *Shaping Identity: Male and Female Interactions in Cinema*, investigates gender constructions in cinema. Lagamba (2012:29) argues that "Women's identities in film are formed by various situations, especially with their contacts with the male characters". Lagamba (2012:31) argues that "when reviewing cinema from its inception, one may notice that women are portrayed in various roles; however, one also notices that women's identities are often shaped by their relationship to men". Lagamba (2012) explains that the theme of the 'unruly women who learns how to fit into society' has been a prevalent theme in cinema. In her investigation of the theme of the unruly woman, Lagamba (2012) finds that a character in the play *Taming of the Shrew*, Katharina, makes men uncomfortable because she speaks her mind. Lagamba (2012) argues that societies provided women who challenge the silence that was imposed on them with punishment.

In her interrogation of the femme fatale, Lagamba (2012) explains that it is a figure often shaped by her relationship to men, that without men, her manipulative and dangerous character would have no one to affect. Lagamba (2012) asks a fundamental question, especially for this paper. She asks how could the femme fatale figure exist without a man? (Lagamba 2012:65). Lagamba (2012) argues that without men present in their lives, the femmes fatales would have no title as such.

Mary Ann Doane (2013) on her project titled "*Femmes fatales*" articulates a politically poetic stance on the figure. The femme fatale, she argues, "is a figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma" (Doane 1991:01). For her most striking characteristics,

argues Doane (1991), "is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be" (Doane 1991:01). Doane (1991:01) argues that "she harbors a threat that is not entirely legible, predictable or manageable". As a result, so argues Doane (1991), this transforms the threat of the woman into a secret, something which must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, and discovered. Doane (1991:01) states that "the femme fatale emerged as a central figure in the nineteen century, in the texts of writers such as Theophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire and painters such as Gustave Moreau and Dante Gabriel Rossetti". Agnieszka Piotrowska (2019), on her work *The Nasty Woman and The Neo Femme Fatale in Contemporary Cinema*, argues that it could be argued that cinema as a whole is a metaphor; a metaphor for our contemporary concerns and preoccupations. I want to take this view in consideration when reading the films discussed in this paper.

In *The contemporary Femme fatale: Gender, genre and American cinema*, Katherine Farrimond (2018) argues that the femme fatale is one of the most enduring character types in Hollywood cinema. Farrimond (2018:01) argues that "the femme fatale is broadly understood through a combination of manipulative sexual allure and danger, and that within that framework exists more complex appeals to notions of power, knowledge, femininity, glamour, death, nostalgia, monstrosity and desire". Farrimond (2018:01) maintains that the figure is an important one for a feminist understanding of contemporary popular culture because her complex relationship with patriarchal and feminist conception of female power pushes to the surface broader concerns about the representation of women. "That the femme fatale can be read both in terms of conservative anxiety and female empowerment speaks directly to the inherent contradictions in the limited range of representations of female power available in contemporary American cinema" (Farrimond 2018:01).

Farrimond (2018) "considers the femme fatale as a nostalgic means of marshalling gender politics in retro noir, as an emblem of postfeminist empowerment and crisis in cinemas of girlhood". Farrimond (2018) also rereads the neo noir femme fatale in terms of bisexuality, fidelity, fragmentation, and she considers the femme fatale as a device for unpacking the relationship between gender, power, knowledge and the body in science fiction films. On the definition of the femme fatale, Farrimond (2018) argues that the figure resists clear definition. She argues that the term is connected with sexuality, femininity, danger, violence and deceit (Farrimond 2018:02). However, in Farrimond's (2018:02) terms, "these connections are slippery as many characters popularly associated with the term do not fit a coherent pattern". In reading contemporary American cinema, so argues Farrimond (2018), it

is more productive to think about the femme fatale as a myth that has evolved from a few specific performances which has crystallised as an over determined definition of women in noir, through a series of pastiche characters and images.

Farrimond (2018:03) argues that "in the contemporary moment, what remains of classic noir femme fatale is a particular image of feminine sexuality, a set of aesthetic styles, marked with a sense of danger, duplicity, and modernity". Invoking Stacy Gillis, Farrimond (2018) observes that the femme fatale should be understood not s archetype, but as a constellation of tropes and characteristics emerging from concerns about women and power. Farrimond (2018) describes the femme fatale as an assemblage of possibilities, which shift in and out of focus from one example to another. "A sexuality that is aggressive or threatening; ambition to improve her circumstances; uncertain morality or amorality; duplicity; a danger of death or downfall by association; persuasiveness; normative and highly constructed physical beauty – all hover around the term femme fatale" (Farrimond 2018:05). Farrimond (2018:05) observes that "Foster Hirsch and Grossman disagree over whether the classical noir femme fatale is indicative of misogyny or sympathy, but both agree that the figure is a product of her time, connected to shifts in the social position of women".

The existence of the femme fatale, argues Farrimond (2018:06), "outside the parameters of classical or neo noir has been hinted at but rarely interrogated within critiques of the figure". Farrimond (2018) argues that there may be ways of reading the femme fatale which are not closely associated with film noir and limited to films which fall into that category. Farrimond (2018) makes an interesting argument about the shift and influence of genres on one another. She argues that "in contemporary American films, genres overlap and shift to greater degrees, and takes generic tropes with them in these mutations and cross-pollinations" (Farrimond 2018:07). "The range and representation of the femme fatale has expanded significantly as genres begin to bleed into one another, and increasing numbers of subgenres and offshoots appear" (Farrimond 2018:07). Despite these changes, so argues Farrimond (2018:07), "cinematic femme fatale criticism has focused primarily on a narrow range of texts which fall quite clearly into the noir and neo noir categories". In this work on the contemporary femme fatale, Farrimond (2018) interrogates the figure's appearances in other generic forms. I also intend to put films that employ the femme fatale figure under scrutiny. In this respect, Farrimond (2018:07) argues that "by moving beyond noir, it is possible to interrogate the wider feminist implications of the femme fatale's representation in contemporary cinema". In

Farrimond's (2018:07) terms, "different genres mobilise the femme fatale in specific ways and for specific ends".

With Farrimond's (2018) formulation of the femme fatale, I want to interrogate the role of female sexual aggression and performance as strategies for empowerment. Farrimond (2018:08) argues that "certain strands of both third wave feminism and postfeminist rhetoric have been characterised by the idea that power for the modern woman is rooted in her strategic deployment of her sexuality and femininity". In postfeminist rhetoric, so argues Farrimond (2018), "women are able and entitled to use their bodies however they like, but typically in normative sexual displays and performances to gain power and success". The language of choice dominates in postfeminist culture (Farrimond 2018:08). The femme fatale conforms to the normative standard of beauty and body type, and that her power derives from her ability to meet patriarchal standards, which the majority of women are unable to meet (Farrimond 2018:10). Farrimond (2018:10) argues that the observation that "the femme fatale is overwhelmingly white, thin and under 40 is indicative of both the industry's continuing discomfort in imagining women who do not fit this model as sexual objects, and as sexually desirable". Within this representational framework, so argues Farrimond (2018), only the thin white woman who is young can seduce male characters into pushing morality, legality, and personal safety aside.

Most striking and intriguing about Farrimond's (2018) formulation is the femme fatale as an empty vessel that embodies power without subjectivity. "This version of the classic noir femme fatale can, in this context, be read as a precursor to the hollow postfeminist heroine, who, while she appears to be a powerful and agentic subject, is actually a vacant shell onto which notions about female power can be projected" (Farrimond 2018:10). Farrimond (2018) argues that while the femme fatale may appear to offer a powerful image of feminine power, that power is ultimately insignificant and based on a series of limited and limiting choices about sexual performance and feminine display. With the rich arguments and readings provided on the femme fatale character, I want to interrogate whether her construction is misogynistic or empowering. However, a clear understanding of misogyny needs to be provided before such is explored.

Misogyny

Gail Ukockis compares sexism and misogyny. She argues that sexism can be defined as prejudice based on gender or sex, especially against women (Ukockis 2019:01). She makes

an example of a man speaking over a woman in a business meeting to demonstrate that sexism can be subtle (Ukockis 2019:01). Ukockis (2019) argues that misogyny is a much stronger term compared to sexism in a sense that it implies a hatred of women. She argues that misogyny "implies an overt and violent aspect" (Ukockis 2019). She identifies intimate partner violence, sexual assault, street harassment, and judging a female based on her appearance as examples of misogyny (Ukockis 2019:01). Ukockis (2019) argues that society has historically silenced women. She argues that patriarchal societies must silence women to advance their oppression (Ukockis 2019:02). Ukockis (2019) provides a clear definition of the term, but I want to also go through other views on what misogyny entails. I want to invoke Kate Manne for such views.

Manne speaks of a naive conception of misogyny. She argues that on this naïve view or understanding, misogyny is referred to as a group of misogynists, who hate women because they are women (Manne 2017:42). She argues that this naïve conception has serious limitations. For her, it raises some epistemological concerns or rather turns on them. She argues that thinking about misogyny in this way will make it epistemically inaccessible to women in that it will deny them the ability to obtain knowledge and justified beliefs about the manifestations of the misogyny they encounter, and to advance to make justified assertions on that basis (Manne 2017:42). It is in this way that she argues that this notion of misogyny would be silencing for its victims (Manne 2017:42).

Manne (2017) acknowledges that the problem with this naïve conception extends beyond these epistemological issues. She observes that some victims of misogyny tend to be women entering positions of power over men, and women disrupting gender roles or rather male-oriented services (Manne 2017:45). Manne's approach to misogyny as a concept broadens our understanding of the term and stretches the meaning further to highlight its epistemological implications for women. It is in this way that I believe this approach will be helpful in the understanding of the arguments I will make. It allows for a broader reading of films in relation to misogyny.

Feminist film theory

For the sake of the argument and the construction of this paper, it is important that we have an understanding of feminist film theory. I want to invoke Anneke Smelik's work on feminist film theory to read the films in question. I shall use the concepts put forward by Smelik (1999) as theoretical frameworks in analysing the four films in question.

Anneke Smelik (1999:491) on "*Feminist film theory*" observes that "cinema is taken by feminists to be a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity, and also about men and masculinity". Smelik (1999:491) observes that "issues of representation and spectatorship are central to feminist film theory and criticism". Early feminist film criticism advocated for a call to have more images of women that are positive in cinema, but later realised that this positivity of images were not enough to address feminist objectives in cinema (Smelik 1999:491). Smelik (1999) identifies Claire Johnston as one of the first feminist critics to present their critique from a semiotic point of view. Johnston investigated the myth of 'woman' and how the ideological image of woman is produced (Smelik (1999:491). Drawing on Johnston, Smelik (1999:491) argues that the sign 'woman' can be analysed as a structure, a code or convention, representing the ideological meaning 'woman' has for men.

Proceeding with such a reading, the important theoretical shift is, so argues Smelik (1999), from an understanding of cinema as reflecting reality, to a view of cinema constructing a particular, ideological view of reality. I am interested in this view of cinema as a tool for the construction of a particular ideological view of reality. I want to explore the ideological meaning of the femme fatale in relation to gender. As far as gender is concerned, what does the fatal woman mean? What does it represents? These are the questions I seek to ask and of course the meaning of the fatal woman shall depend on the way it is presented by the films in question.

Smelik (1999) also identifies Laura Mulvey's use of psychoanalysis in understanding the fascination of Hollywood cinema. This fascination can be explained through the desire to see, which is the fundamental drive in Freud's terms (Smelik 1999:491). Smelik (1999) argues that classic Hollywood "stimulates the desire to look by integrating structures of voyeurism and narcissism into the story and the image". Voyeuristic visual pleasure is realised when looking at someone as our object, and narcissistic visual pleasure is realised when one can self-identify with the portrayed image or what is inside that very image (Smelik 1999:491). I seek to employ these two notions (Voyeuristic and narcissistic visual pleasure) in my reading of the femme fatale in relation to representation and spectatorship. This will assist me in reading and constructing arguments about the gaze and its function in relation to gender.

Smelik (1999) observes that Mulvey analysed the 'desire to see' in classic cinema as a structure that functions on the axis of activity and passivity. Smelik (1999:491) argues that

this binary opposition is gendered in a sense that the male character is presented by the narrative structure, as active and powerful, while the female character is presented as passive and powerless. The male character is active because he is the agent round whom the dramatic action unfolds, and the female character is passive because she is the object of desire for the male character (Smelik 1999:491). I want to approach my analysis of the narrative structure of the femme fatale around/on these notions of activity and passivity. It is in light of this strategy of passivity and activity, so argues Smelik (1999), that cinema has perfected visual patterns favourable to male desire.

Smelik (1999), drawing on Mulvey, identifies three levels of the cinematic gaze: camera, character and spectator. Within the film, the male characters gaze towards female characters; the spectator watching the film is made to identify with this look; and this is because the camera films from point of view of the character who is looking; the male character (Smelik 1999:491). In Smelik's (1999) terms, these are the levels of the cinematic gaze that objectify the female character and transform her into a spectacle. However, this cannot be viewed and understood as a linear process. What then, happens when there are complications in this process? What happens when the spectator acts otherwise? What I seek to point out here is that, in reading cinematic texts, it will prove dangerous to assume that spectators are passive.

Mulvey argues in psychoanalytic terms, "that the image of 'woman' is fundamentally ambiguous in that it combines attraction and seduction with an evocation of castration anxiety" (Smelik 1999:491). Because her appearance reminds the male subject of the lack of a penis, argues Smelik (1999), the female character is a source of much deeper fears. Smelik (1999:492) argues that classic cinema solves the threat of castration in one of two ways: narrative structure and fetishism. To solve the threat of castration of the narrative level, the female character has to be found guilty, and her guilt will be sealed by either punishment or salvation. In this respect, the two traditional endings confronted and presented by the film story in relation to punishment and salvation is that the female characters either die or marry. With fetishism, "classic cinema substitutes and displaces the lacking penis in the form of a fetish; a hyper-polished object. In Mulvey's terms, this fetishizing of the woman shifts attention from female 'lack' and changes her from a dangerous character into a reassuring object of flawless beauty" (Smelik 1999:492).

Smelik (1999) speaks of a feminist counter-cinema. In this respect, a counter-cinema is the one that disrupts and deconstructs the patriarchal images and representations of women. In

terms of the gaze, the passivity and activity strategies argued for by Mulvey do not suggest a lack of agency on the side of the female spectator. Smelik (1999:494) invokes Mulvey to maintain that the female spectator may not only identify with the passive femininity designed for her, but is also likely to enjoy adopting the masculine point of view. Smelik (1999:494) argues that "Mulvey speculates that female spectators may negotiate the masculinisation of the spectatorial position in Hollywood cinema, because it signifies for them a pleasurable rediscovery of a lost aspect of their sexual identity".

In Doane's work, Smelik (1999:495) argues that "femininity is constructed as closeness, as an overwhelming presence-to-itself of the female body". Instead of consuming the image, the female spectator is consumed by the image, and this position can be avoided not only by transsexual identification, but also through the masquerade (Smelik 1999:495). Smelik (1999) argues that the masquerade is effective in that it manufactures a distance from the image through which the female spectator can create the necessary difference between herself and the represented femininity on screen. Smelik's (1999) arguments and observations are important for the argument I seek to make in this paper because they equip the paper with necessary tools in unpacking issues of gender and representation in the films in question. However, to unpack of gender is constructed or represented; there is a need to understand gender as a concept, as well as the ideas around gender.

Gender studies

I want to provide a definitive framework of gender on which the analysis of this paper will be based. Kosut (2012) defines gender as constructed ideas about self-representation, stereotypes and behavioural expectations that are commonly associated with the biological body. Also associated with gender are ideas about masculinity and femininity (Kosut 2012:03).

In a chapter titled *Fractured identities*, Donna Haraway (2000) admits that it has become more difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective. Haraway (2000:05) argues that consciousness through naming is acute. Haraway (2000:05) argues that "gender, race and class cannot provide the basis for belief in essential unity". In the simplification of this argument, she argues that "there is nothing about being female that naturally binds women and that there is not even such a state as being female" (Haraway 2000:05). She argues that 'being' female is itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses ad other social practices (Haraway 2000:05).

Judith Halberstam (1998), in her work *From Female Masculinity*, argues for a politics rooted in arguments and traditional understandings of masculinity. She argues that masculinity cannot and should not be reduced down to the male body and its effects (Halberstam 1998:01). Halberstam (1998) argues that female masculinity allows for an interrogation of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. She argues that female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity for the purpose that male masculinity may appear as the most authentic (Halberstam 1998:01). Halberstam (1998) describes tomboyism as a period of female masculinity. In an attempt at a definitive characteristic, Halberstam (1998) observes that tomboyism tends to be associated with a natural desire for the greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys, but is punished when it appears to be the sign of extreme male identification. In this sense, this action of punishment and the reason behind it, highlight power's desire to punish those who cross the boundaries of patriarchy. It also highlights power's ability to demarcate and regulate the body through gender expectations. This conception and treatment of masculinity is vital for this paper in a sense that it provides a framework for the arguments I advance about the performance of masculinity by female bodies.

Halberstam (1998) is in disagreement with the way masculinity has been defined and associated. She makes an argument that females are and have been masculine, but their masculinity is somehow punished when it crosses the boundary. This is not an attempt to reduce being masculine to mere physical traits, but also characteristics, as some form of action. However, it has to be admitted that by doing so, it will be problematic to describe females as being masculine when they perform actions closely associated to men, actions that are often performed by men. I think this is the problem with Halberstam's (1998) conception of masculinity. What does it mean to be masculine? From which definitive source is the meaning derived from? And if a female is masculine when she looks and behaves like a man, then the very concept of female masculinity is flawed or problematic. What is also problematic is the way the term 'female' is put before masculinity, because masculinity should be masculinity, whether or not it is performed by a male or female. Perhaps halberstam (1998) terms it 'female masculinity' because women are often not allowed to perform or be masculine. Surely this labelling and the definition of the term 'female masculinity can be debated throughout a plethora of scholarly work, but this paper does not seek to put Halberstam's (1998) arguments to question. Despite its debatable nature, Halberstam's (1998) conception of masculinity is crucial for the analysis of the femme fatale.

Privilege

Another issue I want to explore around gender in male privilege. Cinema is the way it is because of male privilege in society. Male privilege may be referred to as a term whose meaning was expressed by the experiences of women who were its victims (Rossi 2004:66). I want to state that to properly understand male privilege, there is a need to understand privilege as a concept. Privilege can be defined or thought of in many different ways depending on the context within which it is defined. In light of this discussion, privilege refers to the unearned status or characteristics that provide advantages and disadvantages to people within a given society (Winkle-Wagne 2010:34). Winkle-Wagne (2010) argues that privilege can be as a result of birth or unequal social structures. In this paper, I want to approach privilege as a result of gender difference. Male privilege,in light of the discussion of this paper, refers to advantages given to men on the basis of their sex (Winkle-Wagne 2010:36). These advantages could be social, political or economic (Winkle-Wagne 2010:36). In order to discuss the validity of the idea that one is privileged by virtue of being a man, there is a need to understand the reasons for male privilege and how men are privileged in a patriarchal society. I want to argue here that perhaps we would not have a femme fatale or feminist film critiques if it was not for male privilege in cinema. The privilege comes as a form of ideas, images and the spectator's gaze favorable to the male individual. This privilege is a design of patriarchy.

Patriarchy

In simple terms, patriarchy refers to the form of the family where women are dominated and power rests in the paternal head of the family (Murray 2005:06). In simple terms, patriarchy refers to the social system of organization in which men are dominant over women (Kepler 2009:48). In this social system of organization, the roles of men and women are separated. The roles of men and women are separated in a sense that they are assigned different roles (Kepler 2009:49). For instance, men are given the role of leadership and protection in the context of the family and women are given the roles of taking care of the family and submitting to the husband- who is the head of the house (Kepler 2009:53). The type of work men do is paid work while women do unpaid work (Kepler 2009:53). In the case of unpaid work, the role of women has been heavily domesticated and their work is not recognized (Murray 2005:15). Patriarchy suggests that men occupy the public sphere and women occupy the private sphere- which is the home (Kepler 2009:56).

In this case, a patriarchal society is one that has ascribed to these ideas of patriarchy. The defining elements of patriarchy include its male-dominated, male-identified and male centered character (Johnson 2005:29). Johnson (2005) defines patriarchy as a set of symbols and ideas that make up a culture represented by everything from the content of everyday conversation to literature and film. A patriarchal culture views manhood and masculinity as a way of life, while diminishing womanhood and femininity (Johnson 2005:29). Patriarchy involves the ideas that constantly attempt to define reality as well as what is considered good or bad in a given society (Johnson 2005:29). What we have here is an idea engendered to fundamentally promote a view of women as the other. In this sense, patriarchy is a system of ideas that identifies a man as someone so important that any gender that surfaces is immediately pushed to the periphery of things in society. It shadows the ability of women to do things by themselves and imply that they need men in their lives.

Media Theories

I want to employ different theories of the media to read the films in questions. There different models of media theory which I want to draw from in my analysis of this paper. Given the nature of this paper, I want to refer to two models; the Marxian model and the Pluralist model. I want to discuss the two models in a comparative manner. The Marxian model of media theory is a model that advances a view that the media has an influence on society and is a tool in maintaining the distinctions between social groups in terms of power (Burton 2002:48). As this model suggests, the media is significantly implicated in the structuring and influence of politics to a certain degree in sense that it engineers an intention to direct power to the hands of those who already have power. This entails that the powerless in a given society will be controlled or dominated by the power, simply because they own the means of production, which directly translates to their power to produce ideas in the media (Burton 2002:48). This production of ideas is possible because of the economic power these individuals have over the media. This difference in power is heavily linked or based on race, gender and class. In simple terms, in a Marxist notion, it is a constant struggle between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have not’. McAuley (2003) argues that the class with the monopoly on the means of productions will also lay claims or have monopoly on the means of mental production, which is the production of ideas.

The Marxist share a belief that the audiences read or understand the media products they are given the way the producers of those media products expect them to (Burton, 2002:49). In

this sense, the assumption is that the media has an easy influence on the audience. The basic assumption is that if a media text is produced with an intention to incite violence; it will easily achieve its goal with no disruption or constraint. This model of media theory directs its focus more on power relations between different social groups in capitalist societies. I want to approach the paper with ideas shared by this model, not to also assume lack of agency by the audience in rejecting the meanings produced, but to adopt its view of the media, in this case cinema, as promoting a particular view of reality. The pluralist model of media theory shares a different view of the media and audiences compared to the Marxist.

The pluralist model does not deny that the media has an influence on the audience, but opens a possibility for agency. It shares a belief that the media may influence the audience, but they do have choices to determine what they want to read, hear or watch (Burton,2002:49-50). "The audience gets what it wants from the institution because the essence of the production of media is to give the audience what it wants" (Burton, 2002:50). In this sense, the media producers produce media texts in light of what the audiences want or expect. Here, we see a shift in the production process whereby the audiences are no longer just the end goal of production but are involved as drivers of production.

Burton (2002) observes that the media are driven by market forces because they produce with an intention of making profit. To achieve this, so argues Burton (2002), the produces have to produce in respect to what the audiences want. Drawing from this framework, I want to pose a question. If, as this model suggests, media texts are produced according to what the audience want, does it mean that the gender stereotypes or racist representations in cinema are as a result of what the audiences want? This may or may not be the case. However, this is the point at which this model becomes problematic. Cinema has set a standard in the form of representation, which has come to inform the desires of the audiences themselves. If the audiences enjoy a misogynistic view, it is because the producers have imposed this view on them. This is of course dependent on the context, background, culture and experience of the spectator in question.

The Gaze

In this discussion about the spectator, I want to turn my attention to the gaze. In *Black looks, race and representation*, bell hooks makes an argument about what she terms the 'oppositional gaze'. hooks (1992) maintains that, for her, the gaze has always been political. hooks (1992) interrogates the gaze and concedes that there is power in looking. She refers to

slavery in her discussion and scrutiny of the politics of looking. She argues that "the politics of slavery, of racialized power relations, were such that slaves were denied their right to look" (hooks 1992:115). In her formulation about the emergence of the oppositional gaze, she argues that all attempts to repress black people's look had produced in them a rebellious desire to look, an oppositional gaze (hooks 1992:116). In hooks' (1992) terms, not only will they stare, but they want their look to change reality. She argues that the "ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency" (hooks 1992:116). hooks (1992) argues that the gaze is and has been a site of resistance for colonized black people around the world. Subordinates in relations of power learn through their experiences and encounters that there is a critical gaze, one that looks to document, one that is oppositional (hooks 1992:116). In a resistance struggle, so argues hooks (1992), one learns to look a certain way in order to resist. hooks (1992) argues that it was the oppositional black gaze that responded to looking relations, to the negation of black representation in mainstream movies and television, by developing independent black cinema.

Before racial integration, hooks (1992:117) argues that "black viewers of movies and television experienced visual pleasure in a context where looking was also about contestation and confrontation". Invoking Manthia Diawara, hooks (1992) observes that race, class, and sexual relations inform the position of the spectator; his or her agency. hooks (1992) speaks of moments of rupture. These moments occur when the spectator resists complete identification with the film's discourse (hooks 1992:117). hooks (1992) observes that critics interrogating black looks were mainly concerned with race and rarely concerned with gender. She argues that "black female spectators actively chose not to identify with the film's imaginary subject because such identification was disenabling" (hooks 1992:122).

As far as gaze politics is concerned, I want to invoke hooks for her ideas in reading *She's Gotta Have It*. When reading the film, hooks (1996:292) argues that the tendency to view "liberated women as sexually loose informed the way many people viewed the portrayal of black female sexuality in *She's Gotta Have It*. In this sense, hooks (1996) identifies that the secret of the representations in cinema lies not on screen but the experiences audiences bring from their ideological, social or political realities. It is what they bring with them. With this thinking, I want to argue that cinema continues from the work that has already been done. In fact, I want to argue that this is done in a cycle. Society, in the form of culture and religion,

promotes ideas, values and norms as a guiding truth, which in turn shapes the behaviours or expectations of its members.

These members then take these ideas to the cinema and understand the text according to these values and norms from their respective realities. However, when the cinema challenges these things they bring with them and incites what I want to call a psychic revolution, the audiences go back to their realities with their newly adopted ideas and begin to shape that same reality. It is in this way that cinema can be thought of as a tool to disrupt misogynistic constructions. However, I want to state that what cinema can do, the extent to which it can go, is highly dependent on who controls its means of production. It is the political economy of cinema that is important. By the political economy I mean the political and economic factors involved in production. hooks (1996) observes this fact when speaking on sexually liberated women in the film.

She argues that "to some extent, this perception is based on a narrowly defined notion of liberation that was acceptable in some feminist circles at one time" (hooks 1996:293). hooks (1996) argues that during the early stage of the modern women's movement, liberation, in a feminist sense, was often viewed as interchangeable with sexual liberation by both feminist activists and non-feminists. During this period, so argues hooks (1996:293), "the conceptualization of female sexual liberation was informed by a "whose pussy is this?". hooks (1996:293) states that this was a "fierce heterosexist bias that saw sexual liberation primarily in terms of women asserting the right to be sexually desiring, to initiate sexual relationships, and to participate in casual sexual encounters with varied male partners". hooks (1996) explains that women wanted to state that female sexuality should not be treated as passive, that women are also desired subjects who desired and enjoyed sex too. These assertions, argues hooks (1996:294), could have easily created an ideological framework for the construction of Nola Darling as a character in *She's Gotta Have It*.

hooks (1996) observes that Nola Darling continuously demonstrates her interest to be sexual with men and have multiple partners. As such, superficially, argues hooks (1996), she is the perfect example of a woman as a desiring subject; a representation that hooks (1996) thinks challenges existing sexist ideas of female sexual passivity. Thinking about this formulation by hooks (1996), it seems that the state of being a woman or femaleness in cinema has come to be equated with passivity, either in sexual relations or social settings. This passivity is a

result of 'othering' mechanisms in cinema, the fundamental reason for women to be pushed to the periphery of things.

Despite the recognition of Nola Darling as desiring subject, hooks (1996:294) thinks that her "sexual desire is not depicted as an autonomous gesture, as an independent longing for sexual expression, satisfaction, and fulfilment". Instead, so argues hooks (1996:294), her "assertive sexuality is most often presented as though her body, her sexually aroused being, is a reward that she presents to the deserving male". In this sense, she appears as if she is not doing it for herself but for the man. hooks (1996:294) argues that the film suggests that "Nola, though a desiring subject, performs her actions assuming that heterosexual female sexual assertion has legitimacy mainly as a symbol of reward or a means by which men can be controlled and manipulated by women". hooks (1996) argues that men do not have to objectify her sexuality because she objectifies it herself and, in the process, she becomes a tool to promote the sexist idea about a sexually assertive woman – that she is not liberated at all. hooks (1996) argues that even though we are made to believe that Nola enjoys sex, her being sexually fulfilled is never the central concern. Her sexual pleasure or fulfilment comes from the satisfaction that she is able to please (hooks 1996:295).

Throughout the film, Nola relies on male perceptions of her reality (hooks 1996:295). "Lacking self-awareness and the capacity to be self-critical, she explores her sexuality only when compelled to do so by a man" (hooks 1996:295). If she was indeed sexually liberated, argues hooks (1996:295), "there would be no need for her to justify or defend herself against male accusations". hooks (1996) argues that it is only after the men have judged or passed their ideas of her that she begins the process of introspecting and confronting the self. Until that point, so argues hooks (1996:295), "we know more about how the men in the film see her than about how she sees herself".

By interrogating Nola's position in the film, hooks (1996) concludes that to a great extent, the men are the focus of the film and not Nola; that they are central personalities and they are the centre of sexual attention. hooks (1996) argues that by expressing their views about Nola, they actually say more about themselves, their values, and their desires. As hooks observes (1996:295), "she is the object that stimulates the discourse, and they are its subjects". hooks (1996) argues that the story promotes patriarchal ideas because it is male centred and narrated by a male. As such, it is not a progressive portrayal of female sexuality (hooks 1996:295).

hooks (1996) argues that Nola appears to be one-dimensional in focus and perspective in that she is more concerned about her sexual relationships more than any other thing in her life, while the male characters are multidimensional in that they have personalities. She argues that Nola has no personality, she is empty and the only thing she can claim about herself is that she likes having sex (hooks 1996:295). hooks (1996) observes that Nola's identity is defined by her ability to perform sexually, while the male characters are defined by unique attributes and characteristics. Unlike Nola, so argues hooks (1996), they do not suffer from penis on the brain in that they are not always thinking about sex; they have opinions on a range of topics such as sports, lifestyle, gender and politics.

hooks (1996:299) identifies the rape scene in the film and observes that after the rape, "Nola stops to be sexually active, chooses to be in a monogamous relationship with Jaime, the partner who has coerced her". As hooks (1996:299) puts it, "Ideologically, such a scenario impresses on the consciousness of black males, and all males, the sexist assumption that rape is an effective means of patriarchal social control that it restores and maintains male power over women". hooks (1996:299) argues that at the same time, it advances a view to black females, and all females, that "being sexually assertive will lead to rejection and punishment". hooks (1996) argues that the film is a patriarchal tale in that a woman does not emerge victorious or fulfilled.

The Chicago school of media theory

Another interesting work to look at in relation to gaze theory is the Chicago School of Media Theory's conceptualization of the gaze. In their view, they observe that the gaze has shifted from a mere look to an intent look (Reinhardt 2008:01). In this way, so they argue, the intention behind the gaze becomes crucial in its definition (Reinhardt 2008:01). Invoking Foucault, they observe that the gaze of the spectator and that of the painting dismantles the usual binary nature of the gaze that is normally between the spectator and gaze (Reinhardt 2008:02). Employing Foucault's logic of the painting, Reinhardt (2008:02) observes that "the spectator becomes the subject of the painting, captured by the gaze of the painter insofar as he remains a spectator gazing at the painting".

What I find most interesting for this paper is this formulation of the spectator becoming the subject of that very thing he or she is gazing at. This formulation is important for this paper because it suggests that the gaze comes with a set of consequences, an influence carrying with it a possibility to change conditions of the subject and the painting itself. This is the way

I seek to approach the analysis of the films discussed in this paper. Reinhardt (2008:02) concedes that "no gaze is stable because the subject and object, spectator and model reverse their roles into infinity". If what they are telling us is true, if the spectator becomes the subject of what they are looking at and if the roles can be reversed in a diverse manner, then it means that there is a possibility of the spectator being absorbed by the thing they are gazing at, influencing a change within them. Or the spectator, through negotiation, may provide a distinct understating of the painter's gaze. Within this framework, I want to argue that the conflict of the gaze is not merely between the spectator and object, but also involves the gaze of the engineer of the text or artistic work.

Invoking Sartre, she observes that "one becomes aware of his self as subject when confronted with the gaze of the other and become aware of himself as object" (Reinhardt 2008:02). She stretches this argument further by arguing that "the gaze of the other is outside of our immediate control and the way the gaze objectifies us robs us of our freedom as a subject" (Reinhardt 2008:02). However, the question here is what is this freedom that the objectifying gaze robs women? Is it the freedom to self-definition or freedom from being objectified in the first place? Here, we are confronted by two sets of freedoms. On the one hand, we have positive freedom (freedom to) and on the other hand, we are confronted by negative freedom (freedom from). I will address the nature of this freedom robbed from subjects in my analysis of the films in question. Reinhardt (2008:02) makes a compelling argument when they argue that "images possess a commanding presence- there is pleasure in being able to look and not look away". "Just like the gaze of Medusa that turned the onlooker into stone, so too does the image hold the power to immobilize its viewer" (Reinhardt 2008:02). Here, a mistake should not be made that the argument suggests passivity of the spectator. The image only holds the power to immobilize, but the actual immobilization is highly dependent on the identity of the spectator. Employing Foucault, Reinhardt (2008:03) argues that "the gaze becomes the perfect medium for spreading domination".

In this way, the gaze argument takes on a Marxist character in that it suggests that media texts are employed as a vehicle promoting a particular ideological view of reality. This is similar to Antonio Gramsci's ideas on hegemony and ideology. Ramos (1982) explains that in his view of capitalism, Gramsci argues that it did not only perpetuate its control through economic, violence and political coercion, but through the deployment of ideology. Drawing from Gramsci, Ramos (1982) maintains that the bourgeois class engineered a hegemonic order or culture, which imposed its ideas in the form of norms and values to become the gospel truth

for all. Within this framework, it is very important that one understands his concept of hegemony. Gramsci defines hegemony as "a system of class alliance in which a hegemonic class exercised political leadership over subaltern classes by "winning them over" (Ramos 1982:02).

Ramos (1982) argues that it was in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* that we are presented with a more advanced conceptualization of hegemony. Ramos (1982), drawing from Gramsci, observes that hegemony involves two things. First, it presupposes that the hegemonic class takes into consideration the interests of the classes and groups over which it exercises its hegemony (Ramos 1982). In addition to this, Ramos (1982) maintains that a balance between "the hegemonic class and the subaltern classes is achieved whereby the hegemonic class will be forced to make some sacrifices different to its corporate interests". Secondly, Ramos (1982) observes that "it entails that the hegemonic class be a "fundamental class"–that is, a class situated at one of the two fundamental poles in the relations of production: owner or non-owner of the means of production". Ramos (1982:02) argues that it becomes clear "that hegemony entails, for a class, its execution of a leadership role on the economic, political, moral, and intellectual levels in relation to other classes in the system, coupled with the sacrificing of some of its corporate interests as a fundamental class precisely to facilitate its vanguard role".

Reinhardt (2008:04) makes an interesting argument when she maintains that "order is not established through steel bars but through the submission of everyone to an omnipresent and impenetrable; we are seen yet cannot see". I think this conception of the gaze finds place or resonance in the Gramscian conception of hegemony.

Michel Foucault Power and Subjection

The concept of hegemony and the gaze are concerned with power. It is in this spirit that I want to invoke Michel Foucault's work on power and the subject. The intention and reason for such an invoking is not to question the validity of Foucault's arguments. Instead, I seek to employ his ideas to advance my argument. Foucault (1982:780) argues for a way of analysing power relations from "the antagonism of strategies, rather than analysing power from the point of view of its internal rationality". He argues that to find out what society means by sanity, perhaps there should be an investigation of what is taking place in the field of insanity, what is meant by legality in the field of illegality (Foucault 1982:780). In this way, using the very same logic, it could be argued that the representation of women cannot be fully

understood or unpacked if male representation in film is not brought to question. I want to proceed with the analysis of the fatal woman with this understanding of power relations. Foucault (1982: 780) argues that to understand what power relations are about, perhaps there should be an investigation on the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate from these relations. It is also in this spirit that I seek to proceed with an approach that requires a reading of a male position in Film Noir in terms of spectatorship and representation, as well as the post-feminist and feminist protest and treatment of the femme fatale.

Foucault (1982) identifies a series of oppositions that have developed over the last few years. He identifies "the opposition of the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, and of administration over the ways people live" (Foucault 1982:780). He defines these not only as anti-authority struggles but as transversal struggles, in a sense that they are not confined to a particular political or economic form of government or region (Foucault 1982:780). Foucualt (1982) also maintains that they are immediate struggles because in such struggles people criticise instances of power which are the closest to them, those which exercise their actions on individuals. In his terms, they do not look for the "chief enemy", but for the immediate enemy; they are anarchistic struggles (Foucault 1982:780).

On their most original points, Foucault (1982) argues that they are struggles which question the status of the individual. On the one hand, so argues Foucault (1982:781), "they assert the right to be different and underline everything which makes individuals truly individual". On the other hand, "these struggles attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way" (Foucault 1982:781). Confronted by the nature of these struggles, it becomes fair to question whether they are for or against the individual. However, Foucault (1982) does justice and eliminates the question. He explains that these struggles are not exactly for or against the "individual" but rather they are against the "government of individualization"; that which produces individuals (Foucault 1982:781). They are an opposition, in Foucault's (1982) terms, to the effects of power which are linked with competence, knowledge, and qualification. Foucault (1982:781) explains that these struggles are also an opposition against deformation, secrecy, and mystifying representations imposed on people. In his respect, could feminist struggles for representation be classified as these struggles? This is the question I will hope to address in my analysis of the films; in the process of moving towards an understanding of the femme fatale.

Foucault (1982:781) explains that the objective of these struggles is not to attack an institution of power, group, elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power. In critique of these struggles, perhaps an attack on technique may not prove effective, for as long as the 'thing' which produces and exercises the technique is not attacked and eliminated, there is no writing off the possibility that another technique will emerge. And if power, this 'thing' that produces and exercises technique, is impossible to attack or eliminate, then this speaks to the impossibility of an attack and elimination of the technique. Perhaps it is possible to attack but never possible to eliminate. On the state of this form of power and the manner in which it operates, Foucault (1982:781) explains that "it applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him". In essence, so argues Foucault (1982), it is a form of power which makes individuals subjects.

In this sense, it is crucial for the understanding of this claim and for the sake of the argument Foucault (1982) advances that the meaning of the term "subject" is scrutinized. Foucault (1982:781) explains that there are two meanings of the word: subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied up to his own identity by conscience and self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest, in Foucault's (1982:781) terms, a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. Foucault (1982:781) identifies that "there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission)".

In the production of subjectivity, Foucault (1982) argues that the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. In his research, Foucault (1982) studies the way in which a human being turns himself into a subject. King (2004) argues that Foucault's writing on power and knowledge and the production of subjectivity has been very influential for feminist theorists who have followed his work. Exploring Foucault's critics, King (2004:30) observes that Foucault is accused of "neglecting to examine the gendered character of many disciplinary techniques and of treating the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationships to the characteristic institutions of modern life". King (2004:30) argues that

Foucault doesn't appear concerned to "explore how or why power operates to invest, train and produce bodies that are gendered and he also appears to be blind to the extent that determines the techniques and degrees of discipline exerted on the body".

King (2004), with this work, does not only interrogate Foucault and puts his claims to question. King (2004:30) also explores how "the category of 'woman' has been discursively constructed or condemned as inferior yet also threatening to man, thus in perpetual need of containment and control, and subjected to particular disciplinary techniques. Here, King (2004) suggests that women are subject to a certain demarcation that ultimately brands them as inferior to man, and failure or an attempt to disrupt this status forced upon them will result in punishment. With this formulation, we have an idea that female bodies are disciplined when the cross the boundaries of patriarchy. I find this idea interesting and I seek to approach my detection of misogyny within representations of the femme fatale with this formulation.

King (2004) makes an interesting argument when she states that the 'one' requires that there is a category of the 'other' in existence for it to be considered the 'one'. King (2004:31) argues that the idea of men and women being classified as opposites is advanced by "polarized categories such as mind/body, culture/nature, spirit/matter that have been inflected with gender ideologies".

King (2004:31) observes that "man is mind and represents culture: the rational, unified, thinking subject". Distinctly, King (2004:31) argues that "woman is body and represents nature: irrational, emotional and driven by instinct and physical need". Interrogating this patriarchal order, she also observes that the "mind/culture/man must harness and control this potentially unruly body/nature/woman through the application of knowledge and willpower". King (2004:31) argues that "women's association with body/nature is reinforced by biological essentialist and determinist paradigms which define women according to their reproductive physiology". "She is thus male feeble and passive, fundamentally an object for the desires of the male and incubator for his offspring" (King 2004:31). King (2004:31), in addition, argues that a woman has come to be viewed as "a creature driven by emotion and instinct; a slave to her reproductive organs or hormones".

King (2004) maintains that "woman as other is inferior but also unknowable, enigmatic and disquieting". She represents that which must be interrogated, put to investigation and scrutinized with an intention of dissecting her until her secrets are revealed (King 2004:31). As a result, so argues King (2004), "the female body has been subjected to the scrutinizing

gaze of the human sciences far more than the male". King (2004) argues that the uncontrolled sexuality of the female body must be "contained and its weakness of character exposed, particularly as it is primarily a reproductive body".

King (2004) explores the role of discourse in producing and constructing social identity and its function as a form of social control. In the analysis of the films discussed in this paper, I shall also investigate this role of discourse in bringing about identity and also serving as a way to regulate bodies and space itself. In terms of discourse bringing about or constructing identities, I wish to explore the role of interpellation as a form of social control and identity production. In terms of discourse regulating space, I look at how discourse gains control over private-public spaces by assigning identities to each space and setting a standard of what discourse should be permissible in each space. I want to clarify, perhaps as a disclaimer, that discourse also carries on the work that has already been done. It is the ideological system of a respective space that gives birth to discourse, and then discourse as an extension or mouth piece of ideology, carries on its work. Butler, when invoking Foucault, does observe that power is fortified by the same psyche it produces. This is the case here with the relationship between discourse and ideology.

King (2004:34) argues that the woman's crime of being the other - of embodying all that man fears and despises yet desires - finds fitting 'punishment' in clothing that draws erotic attention to the body by simultaneously constraining and 'correcting' it. Here King (2004) identifies the role of clothes in the objectification of the female. It is in this way that I also seek to analyze the films discussed in this paper. King (2004) invokes De Beauvoir to stretch this argument further into the domain of activity and passivity.

King (2004:34) observes that "De Beauvoir argued that female costumes and styles have been designed to prevent activity: Chinese women with bound feet could scarcely walk, the polished fingernails of the Hollywood star deprive her of her hands; high heels, corsets, panniers, farthingales, crinolines were intended less to accentuate the curves of the feminine body than to augment its incapacity". King (2004:34), drawing from De Beauvoir, maintains that "paralyzed by either too little or too much weight, by inconvenient attire or the 'rules of propriety', the woman's body could then present the inert and passive qualities of an object and appear to a man to be his property, his thing" .

I also want to draw from Patricia Amigot and Margot Pujal's *On Power, Freedom, and Gender: A fruitful tension between Foucault and feminism*. Amigot and Pujal (2009:648)

argue that "the female body appears as a strategic space, devoid of biopower and subject to a process of progressive objectification and control on the part of medical and psychological discourses". Similar to King's (2004) exploration, they also interrogate the role of discourse in the control of the female body. Amigot and Pujal (2009) observe that Faucoult refers to this instance as "the hystericization of the female body. With this formulation, they maintain that Foucault meant that "the pathologization of the female body is situated alongside women's responsibility to take care of children's health, the institution of the family, and the family's and society's health" (Amigot and Pujal 2009:648).

They argue that dispositions that are regulated and courses of action are established by power (Amigot and Pujal 2009:650). Amigot and Pujal (2009:650) maintain that "desires and pleasures also play a role in the webs of power where "desires are created and pleasures provoked". They observe that within Butler's ideas about gender, 'man and 'woman' as categories put into practice "a constructive operation that, once problematized, is shown to be an enactment of "natural" exclusion" (Amigot and Pujal 2009:653). Amigot and Pujal (2009:653) argue that "such historically naturalized categories constitute an abject and invisible space to which those who subvert the discursive order and practice are relegated. Also similar to King's (2004) formulation, stepping outside the boundaries of patriarchy or any ideological system of such stature results in punishment. Amigot and Pujal (2009:653) argue that for postcolonial and border feminisms, this type of space for those who subvert the discursive order has been linked with 'in/appropriated others'. Judith Butler also explores issues around a woman as a subject.

Butler (1990:01) concedes that within feminist discourse, "The subject of woman is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms". She argues that there is very little agreement on what constitute, or ought to constitute, the category of woman (Butler 1990:01). Butler (1990:01) argues that "the domains of political and linguistic "representation" set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, and the results being that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject". In Butler's (1990) terms, this means that the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended. Butler (1990) employs Foucault to articulate this point further. In Foucault's terms, so argues Butler (1990), juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent.

Butler (1990) identifies the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even protection of individuals related to political structures as negative terms. Using this logic by Foucault, Butler (1990) argues that juridical formation of language and politics that represents women as "the subject" of feminism is itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics. She argues that the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is meant to facilitate its emancipation (Butler 1990:02). If one has to be acknowledged first before representation can be extended, if one cannot identify herself as something that needs representation, then one becoming a subject and being represented is based on consensus; agreed upon traits worthy of representation. In Mouffe's (2000) terms, consensus is dangerous because it is exclusionary; there has to be contestations. Butler (1990) also recognises this exclusionary effort.

Butler (1990:02) argues that "the political construction of the subjects proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalized by a political analysis that takes juridical structures as their foundation". In this case, Butler (1990:02) argues that politics must be concerned with this dual function of power: the juridical and the productive, because juridical power inevitably produces what it claims only to represent. In this spirit, Butler (1990:02) argues that it is not enough to inquire into how women might become fully represented in language and politics.

Butler (1990:06) argues that "the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed". Hence gender is a causal result of sex or seemingly fixed as sex (Butler 1990:06). Butler (1990:06) also argues that "if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way". Even if the sexes, in Butler's terms (1990:06), "appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution, there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two". Butler (1990:06) argues that "when the constructed status of gender is theorized radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one". Within this gender discourse, Butler (1990) poses a very fundamental question. She asks if gender is constructed, "could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation" (Butler 1990:07).

In *The psychic life of power,* Judith Butler (1997) "considers the way in which psychic life is generated by the social operation of power, and how such an operation is concealed and made strong or maintained by the same psyche it produces". Drawing on Foucault, Butler (1997) observes that "subjection is the making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced". Butler (1997) identifies that the prison acts on the prisoner's body by forcing the prisoner to adopt an ideal, a norm of behaviour, a model of obedience. Butler (1997:85) argues that this is how "the prisoner's individuality is rendered coherent, totalized, made into the discursive and conceptual possession of the prison, and it is also how he becomes the principle of his own subjection". The normative ideals instilled, so argues Butler (1997), into the prisoner is a kind of psychic identity or a "soul". This normative ideal, the soul, becomes a kind of prison which provides or acts as a regulatory principle of the prisoner's body.

Butler (1997:86) argues that "if discourse produces identity by supplying and enforcing a regulatory principle which thoroughly invades, totalizes, and renders coherent the individual, it seems that every identity, insofar as it is totalizing, acts precisely as such a soul that imprisons the body". I find this formulation intriguing and useful for the argument I seek to advance in relation to the femme fatale identity and genre. Could one precede with an approach that views genre as a soul and the femme fatale as the imprisoned body, an individual rendered coherent and totalized? Is genre as an 'identity' totalizing? This formulation evokes important questions for the analysis that is to be conducted in this paper. In "Gender Trouble", Butler (1990) argues that the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is meant to facilitate its emancipation. This compliments the argument she makes about psychic life in an interesting manner. The psyche or subject is produced, and the very psyche fortifies the same power that produced it.

Drawing on Foucault, Butler (1997:87) observes that "the psyche is understood to be the imprisoning effect in the service of normalization". Butler (1997) poses an interesting question vis-à-vis Foucault's process of subjectivation. She asks of the break down, failure, of the process and its consequences. It is in this spirit that she invokes Althusser. Butler (1997) identifies the Althesserian notion of interpellation in which a subject is produced by being hailed, addressed, and named. She observes that Althusser believed that this social demand, she refers to it as a "symbolic injunction", produced the kinds of subjects it named (Butler 1997:95). Drawing on Althusser, Butler (1997:95) argues that "this performative

effort of naming can only attempt to bring its addressee into being: there is always the risk of a certain misrecognition". The production of the subject falters, so argues Butler (1997), if one fails to recognize that effort to produce the subject. In light of Althusser's interpellation, Butler (1997) argues that when a name is not a proper name but a social category, it is capable of being interpreted in different and conflicting ways. Butler (1997:96) identifies "the imaginary as the permanent possibility of misrecognition". She argues that for the Lacanian, the imaginary signifies the impossibility of the discursive constitution of identity (Butler 1997:97). Butler (1997) maintains that this discursive constitution of identity is symbolic. In this spirit, Butler (1997:97) argues that "identity can never be fully totalized by the symbolic, for what it fails to order will emerge within the imaginary as a disorder, a site where identity is contested".

On resistance, Butler (1997:98) argues that "psychic resistance thwarts the law in its effects, but is unable to redirect the law and its effects". Resistance is, as a result, located in a domain that is virtually powerless to alter or change the law that it opposes (Butler 1997:98). In this light, so argues Butler (1997), resistance appears to be doomed to continuous defeat (98). For Foucault, resistance is formulated differently. Butler (1997:98) observes that, for Foucault, "resistance is formulated as an effect of the very power it is said to oppose". Could feminist or post-feminist efforts to disrupt, and oppose, the gendered representations of women through the femme fatale be understood in this logic? This is a very fundamental question in this paper and these frameworks or notions of resistance shall be revisited in the analysis of this paper.

Butler (1997:99) argues that "what is brought into being through the performative effect of the interpellating demand is much more that the subject, for the subject created is not for that reason fixed in place, it becomes the occasion for a further making". Butler (1997:99) also adds that "a subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or rearticulation of itself as a subject, and this dependency of the subject on repetition for coherence may constitute that subject's incoherence, its incomplete character". In this way, the subject is always becoming. But what is it that makes the subject an occasion for a further remaking? Is it a result of the changing patterns of power, from which the subject was originally produced? In this spirit, could the perpetual gendered and stereotypical representation or position of women in film be understood or explained with this logic?

Because this paper is concerned with issues of representation, I want to explore ideas about the politics of recognition. In "*Rethinking Recognition*", Fraser (2000:107) argues that the struggles of sexuality, gender, ethnicity and race were not only aiming to achieve recognition for denied identities but also to bring a richer, lateral dimensions to battles over the redistribution of wealth and power as well. Fraser (2000) maintains that the nature of such struggles has changed. She argues that it is not just the character of such struggles that has changed but their scale as well (Fraser 2000:107). Fraser (2000:107) argues that "claims for the recognition of difference now drive many of the world's social conflicts, from campaigns for national sovereignty, subnational autonomy, to battles around multiculturalism and the newly energized movements for international human rights".

Frasers (2000:108) argues that "we are facing a new constellation in the grammar of political claims-making". She maintains that this constellation is "disturbing on two counts". First, Fraser (2000:108) argues, the move from "redistribution to recognition is taking place despite an acceleration of economic globalisation, at a time when an aggressively growing capitalism is radically worsening economic inequality". In this case, Fraser (2000) states that "questions of recognition are serving less to supplement, complicate and enrich redistributive struggles than to marginalize and displace them". Fraser (2000) calls this the problem of displacement. Second, Fraser (2000) argues, today's recognition struggles are taking place at "a time of hugely increasing transcultural interaction and communication, when accelerated migration and global media flows are hybridizing and pluralizing cultural forms". Fraser (2000) argues that these struggles take routes which serve "not to promote respectful interaction within increasingly multicultural contexts, but to largely simplify and reify group identities". Fraser (2000) calls this the problem of reification.

Fraser (2000:108) argues that the problems of displacement and reification are very serious. In this sense, she argues that if "the politics of recognition displaces the politics of redistribution, it may actually promote economic inequality; insofar as it reifies group identities, it also risks sanctioning violations of human rights and freezing the very oppositions it claims to mediate".

Fraser (2000) links injustice and economic inequality with culture. She argues that "culture is a legitimate, even necessary, ground of struggle, a site of injustice in its own right and deeply arranged with economic inequality" (Fraser 2000). When thought of in a proper manner, the struggles for recognition can assist in the redistribution of power and wealth, and can also

promote interaction and cooperation across major differences (Fraser 2000:109). Fraser (2000) argues that everything depends on how recognition is approached. In this case, she argues that we need a way of "rethinking the politics of recognition in a way that can help solve or at least reduce the problems of displacement and reification" (Fraser 2000:109). This will entail conceiving struggles for recognition so that they can be joint together with struggles for redistribution (Fraser 2000:109).

Fraser (2000) talks of the identity model as the usual approach to the politics of recognition. This approach begins from the Hegelian idea that identity is constructed dialogically, "through a process of mutual recognition" (Fraser 2000:109). The Hegelian idea suggests that recognition is reciprocal and the subjects involved in this reciprocal relation see each other as equal (Fraser 2000:109). Fraser (2000) makes an interesting argument about recognition in relation to subjectivity. She argues that one emerges or develops into an individual subject by being able to recognize and being recognized by another subject (Fraser 2000:109). In relation to this idea, she argues that this recognition from others is thus crucial for the development of a sense of self (Fraser 2000:109). It is in this way, so she argues, that to be misrecognized or to be denied recognition itself, entails an injury to an individual's identity and suffering a distortion of an individual's relation to their self (Fraser 2000:109). Supporters of the identity model argue that "as a result of repeated encounters with the stigmatizing gaze of a culturally dominant other, the members of disesteemed groups internalize negative self-images and are prevented from developing a healthy cultural identity of their own" (Fraser 2000). It is in this way and with this very logic that I wish to approach issues of representation in cinema. In this case, Fraser (2000:109) argues that "the politics of recognition aims to repair internal self-dislocation by contesting the dominant culture's demeaning picture of the group".

Fraser (2000) argues that recognition is a question of social status. In this sense, she states that "recognition does not require group-specific identity but the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction" (Fraser 2000:113). Thus, misrecognition does not mean "depreciation and deformation of group identity, but social subordination- in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life" (Fraser 2000:113). In this case, Fraser (2000) treats misrecognition as status subordination. Fraser (2000) proposes that a politics of recognition is still required to redress this injustice. She argues that "to view recognition as a matter of status means examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors" (Fraser 2000:113). Fraser (2000)

maintains that we can speak of reciprocal recognition and equality when and if such patterns constitute actors as peers, capable of participating equally with one another in social life. Fraser (2000) also addresses maldistribution by stating that "institutionalized patterns of cultural value are not the only obstacles to participating equally". She argues that equal participation is also prevented when some actors lack the necessary resources to interact with others equal. In this sense, maldistribution creates obstacles to equal participation in social life and therefore breeds social subordination and injustice.

Fraser (2000) argues that recognition and redistribution are not neatly separated from each other in capitalist societies in a sense that economic issues such as income distribution have recognition subtexts. For instance, "value patterns institutionalized in labour may privilege acts seen as masculine over those seen as feminine" (Fraser 2000:118). Fraser (2000) proposes that the solution is not to reject the politics of recognition. According to Fraser (2000), what is needed is "an alternative politics of recognition, a non-identitarian politics that remedy misrecognition without encouraging displacement and reification". She maintains that by understanding recognition as a question of status and by examining its relation to economic class, one can take steps to reduce the displacement of struggles for redistribution; and by avoiding the identity model, one can begin to reduce the dangerous tendency to reify collective identities (Fraser 2000:120).

In this piece of work, Fraser's (2000) argument that culture is a site of injustice and deeply arranged with economic inequality is accurate because it is evident in the modern day society. It is evident in a sense that there is a form of injustice and economic inequality on the basis of gender. As we will uncover in the analysis of the four films in this paper, the male character and spectator are privileged in the form of gaze relations and representation. In that case, culture is a site of injustice, arranged with economic inequality. Treating misrecognition as a question of status or status subordination is more or less a good way to deal with recognition. People are recognised by their different statuses and those who are deemed to have inferior statuses are forced to identify with the status of the dominant group in other to be recognised. This could be linked with the idea of the masquerade Smelik (1999) discussed in relation to feminist film critique. The masquerade, by cross-dressing, in Smelik's (1999) view, transforms herself as a site of resistance. However, it could also be viewed in this way, that she takes over the identity of another because hers is not recognized. Fraser (2000) is also accurate to argue that recognition and redistribution are not neatly separated because one cannot experience redistribution if he or she is not recognised by those who control the flow

of resources. I want to argue here that for the longest of time, women have not been given power because those who are supposed to give (men) do not recognize them as equal partners.

However, Fraser's (2000) idea that members of the disesteemed are prevented from developing a healthy cultural identity of their own as a result of repeated encounters with the stigmatizing gaze could be accurate or could be challenged. This view on its own, does not take into account that identities can be formed out of resistance. These may include some political identities such as feminism. Whether the identities formed are healthy or not, is highly dependent of the subject who assumes the identity. It is problematic because it assumes that members of a disesteemed group do not have agency. It assumes that they cannot resist the negative self- images they are given and that they cannot question the way they are represented. The way in which power operates in the recognition and production of ideas has to do with ideology.

I want to invoke Mark Stoddart for his ideas on ideology. Stoddard (2007:195), on Marx's notion of ideology, maintains that ideology refers to "the ways in which society adopts the ideas and interests of the dominant economic class". He observes that Marx's framework of ideology is based on a historical-materialistic perspective, "which asserts that material reality is the foundation of social consciousness" (Stoddard 2007:195). Stoddard (2007) argues that according to this notion by Marx, material reality is a crucial factor in determining which ideas will appear or emerge as the ones deemed more important or acceptable in a given society.

Stoddard (2007) also discusses Horkheimer and Adorno's ideas on the culture industry. He observes that Horkheimer and Adorno describe the culture industry as a set of media forms that "transmits ideological representation of the world to the mass audience" (Stoddard 2007:198). Stoddard (2007:198) argues that "contemporary culture does ideological work presenting the capitalist way of production as the only possible world that is unchangeable". Stoddard (2007) argues that despite the different class positions people occupy, this ideological system represent people as essentially the same. With this formulation, Stoddard (2007:198) argues that the culture industry operates in the same way as this ideological system because it is a "homogenizing force that renders people more alike, while promoting a false sense of individuality". Stoddard (2007:200) observes that the "Frankfurt School

theorists emphasize the cultural realm and the growth of scientific rationality as important sites of domination, where dominant classes exercise power through ideology".

Stoddard (2007) argues that Gramsci's notion of hegemony represents a crucial reinterpretation of the notion of ideology. He argues that "the notion of hegemony is rooted in Gramsci's distinction between coercion and consent as alternative mechanisms of social power" (Stoddard 2007:200). On coercion, he explains the concept as the state's monopoly on violence, which it can employ to punish those who refuse to participate in "capitalist relations of production" (Stoddard 2007:201). Stoddard (2007) argues that coercion is a different concept from the notion of hegemony. He argues that "hegemonic power works to convince individuals and social classes to subscribe to the social values and norms of an inherently exploitative system" (Stoddard 2007:201). Stoddard (2007:201) argues that hegemonic power is "a form of social power that relies on voluntarism and participation, rather than the threat of punishment for disobedience". In an ideological system, hegemony emerges as the common sense values that inform everyday understanding of the world (Stoddard 2007:201). Stoddard (2007) argues that it is a view of the world that produces moral or political passivity.

Stoddard (2007:201) explains that "whereas coercive power is the exclusive domain of the State, the institutions of "civil society," such as the Church, schools, the mass media, or the family, are largely responsible for producing and disseminating hegemonic power". Stoddard (2007:201) argues that "hegemonic networks of power are a result of contestation between ruling elites and subaltern groups". He argues that because contestation is basic to the existence of hegemony, there can never be a "totalizing ideological system of domination" (Stoddard 2007:201). Stoddard (2007:201) argues that "hegemony and counter-hegemony exist in a state of tension; each gives shape to the other". He observes that "Gramsci gives us an image of society in which the cultural realm is a central location for the exercise of social power" (Stoddard 2007:202). When comparing Gramsci and the Frankfurt School theorists, Stoddard observes that hegemonic power is something that involves contestation, that is always becoming, and that is contingent with history.

Stoddard (2007) speaks on the War of position. He argues that where a society is characterized by the exercise of hegemonic power instead of coercion, a continuous 'war of position' is more crucial, where the ruling classes' hegemony is dismantled and a new hegemony emerges (Stoddard 2007:202). He argues that a 'war of position' takes place when

the subaltern groups become aware of their own capacity to become philosophers of their own reality (Stoddard 2007:202). In this sense, they become aware of and begin to "understand the hegemonic common sense they otherwise take for granted" (Stoddard 2007:202).

Stoddard (2007) also invokes Foucault in the understanding of ideology. He observes that Foucault "explicitly demarcates discourse from ideology" (Stoddard 2007:203). He argues that "Foucault wants to re-locate the production of truth in social relation rather than in social structures" (Stoddard 2007:204). Stoddard (2007) observes that for Foucault, the production and circulations of discourses are mechanisms of social power. Foucault argues that those who seek to exercise social power must employ discourse. Drawing on Foucault, Stoddard (2007:204) argues that "the regulation of discourse deals with who is allowed to speak on a given topic, as well as which forms of knowledge are subjugated in the production of truth".

I want to conceptualize oppression as a term that will be discussed in relation to misogyny in the paper. I want to employ Iris Marion Young in her conceptualization of the term. Young (2011), on oppression as a structural concept, argues that many people would not use the term oppression to describe injustice because they do not understand the concept in the same way that new social movements do. She defines oppression as the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group (Young 2011:40). Here, we understand that in order to exercise oppression or to oppress others, one need to be in a ruling group or at least in a position of power over others. Of course Young (2011) considers context in the understanding and conceptualization of oppression, making reference to dominant political discourse in communist societies where anti-communist rhetoric arises, and Apartheid South Africa. This conception gives us direction in our attempt to understand oppression. However, it is not enough for us to have a much deeper and clearer understanding of oppression. Young (2011) observes that new social movements of the 70s shifted the meaning of the concept of oppression.

She maintains that in its new usage, oppression refers to the disadvantages and injustice some people suffer not so much because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society. (Young 2011:41). Young (2011) observes that this new usage of the term still recognizes that tyrannical rule over others is oppression. However, oppression also refers to "systematic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant" (Young 2011:41). In this sense, so argues Young (2011), oppression is more structural than a result of the policies or choices of a few

members of a society. What is also important for the ideas I seek to advance in this paper are Young's (2011) five faces of oppression. Young (2011) identifies exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, violence, and cultural imperialism as the five faces of oppression.

With exploitation, Young (2011:48) argues that central to the concept of exploitation is that "oppression occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another". She observes that "feminists have had little difficulty showing that women's oppression consists partly in a systematic and unreciprocated transfer of powers from women to men" (Young 2011:49). Young (2011) argues that the oppression of women does not only consist of the inequality of status, wealth and power resulting in their exclusion from privileged activities by men. She argues that the power, freedom and self-realization of men are particularly possible because women work for men (Young 2011:49). She argues that "gender exploitation has two aspects, transfer of the fruits of material labour to men and transfer of nurturing and sexual energies to men" (Young 2011:49). Young (2011:49) argues that "as a group, women undergo specific forms of gender exploitation in which their energies and power are expended, often unnoticed and unacknowledged, usually to benefit men by releasing them for more important and creative work, enhancing their status or the environment around them, or providing them with sexual or emotional service". This is a very important formulation of gender exploitation which I think will be helpful in the development of arguments in his paper. I want to use this formulation by Young (2011) differently in this paper. I want to look at gender exploitation in the realm of gaze politics.

On marginalization, Young (2011:53) explains that "marginal are people the system of labour cannot or will not use". Young (2011) argues that marginalization may be considered as the most dangerous form of oppression. She maintains that "a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination" (Young 2011:53). I want to extend or push this conception of marginalization further by applying it in cinema. In line with marginalization by material deprivation, I want to propose marginalization with the deprivation of agency of female characters in cinema. Young (2011:55) argues that "marginalization does not cease to be oppressive when one has all that they need". She argues that "Even if marginals were provided a comfortable material life within institutions that respected their freedom and dignity, injustices of marginality would remain in the form of uselessness, boredom, and lack of self-respect" (Young 2011:55). She argues that "most of our society's productive and

recognized activities take place in contexts of organized social cooperation, and social structures and processes that close persons out of participation in such social cooperation are unjust". As such, "while marginalization definitely entails serious issues of distributive justice, it also involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction" (Young 2011:55).

In terms of powerlessness, Young (2011) argues that in the most advanced capitalist societies, most people do not take part in making decisions that affect their lives as whole, and therefore, most people lack significant power. Young (2011:56) argues that many people have some power in relation to others, even though they lack power to make decisions about results and policies. This is because domination in modern societies is achieved through the wide dispersal of powers of certain agents shaping the decisions of others (Young 2011:56). Young (2011:56) states that "the powerless are those who lack authority or power even in this mediated sense, those over whom power is exercised without their exercising it; the powerless are situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them". Powerlessness marks a social position that allows people little opportunity to exercise or develop skills (Young 2011:56). In Young's (2011:56) formulation, "the powerless have little or no work autonomy, exercise little creativity or judgment in their work, have no technical expertise or authority, express themselves awkwardly, especially in public or bureaucratic settings, and do not command respect".

The fourth face of oppression that Young (2011) identifies is cultural imperialism. Young (2011:58) argues that "to experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the 'Other'. Young (2011) explains that cultural imperialism involves the dominant group universalizing its own experience and culture, thus establishing it as the norm. Invoking Nancy Fraser, Young (2011) explains that some groups in society have primary or exclusive access to the means of interpretation and communication. As a result, so argues Young (2011:59), the dominant cultural products that are widely disseminated in society "express the experience, goals, achievements, and goals of these groups". Without even realizing, these groups that are dominant promote their own experience as that which represents humanity (Young 2011:59). Young (2011:59) argues that "cultural products also express the dominant group's perspective on and interpretation of events and elements in the society, including other groups in society, insofar as they attain cultural status at all".

Young (2011) maintains that the dominant group's claim to universality can be challenged by an encounter with other groups. She argues that given that the dominant group's ideas, values and identity are widely disseminated as normal and common sense of all, they construct the differences which other groups have as lack and negation (Young 2011:59). It is in this way that I seek to approach the position of women and men in cinema, and also approach the analysis of the films discussed in this paper. Throughout the history of cinema, men have enjoyed this position as the dominant group and their ideas and values have been widely disseminated that it has become common sense for cinema to project images according to their views and interests. The objectifying gaze is one example that can be employed to demonstrate this point. The male gaze has been widely disseminated as universal and the female look has been contained and disallowed. In a Marxist view, this has been achieved because of the material conditions both groups find themselves. Men have been the owners of the means of production in cinema. Women have not so much enjoyed this position because the social conditions, the patriarchal system has excluded them from such ownership.

Young (2011:59) argues that those who are dominated culturally suffer paradoxical oppression in that "they are marked out by stereotypes and at the same time rendered invisible". Young (2011:59) maintains that "the stereotypes confine them to a nature which is often attached in some way to their bodies, and which thus cannot easily be denied". Most intriguing about Young's (2011) arguments is the one she makes about those living under cultural imperialism. She argues that "those living under cultural imperialism find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them" (Young 2011:59. This can also be seen in film, particularly exploitation cinema, about women. This is perhaps the same fear or anxiety experienced by some feminists about men in feminism; the fear of being defined by the outside. According to Young (2011:59), this just does not end here. She argues that these stereotypes and inferiorized images of the group "must be internalized by its members at least to the extent that are forced to react to behaviour of others influenced by those images" (Young 2011:59).

Young (2011) argues that this creates, for the culturally dominated group, an experience of double consciousness. She explains that double consciousness is the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Young 2011:60). Young (2011:60) argues that the culturally dominated group is "culturally different from the dominant group, because the

status of Otherness creates specific experiences not shared by the dominant group, and because culturally oppressed groups also are often socially segregated and occupy specific positions in the social division of labour". Young (2011) argues that double consciousness takes place because one is defined by two cultures; a subordinate and dominant culture. Young (2011:60) argues that "the injustice of cultural imperialism is that the oppressed group's own experience and interpretation of social life finds little expression that touches the dominant culture, while that same culture imposes, on the oppressed group, its experience and interpretation of social life".

The last face of oppression that Young (2011) identifies is violence. She argues that many groups suffer the oppression of systematic violence (Young 2011:61). She argues that "members of some groups live with the knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or property, which have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person" (Young 2011:61). Young (2011:61) argues that what makes violence a face of oppression is not so much the acts themselves but "the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable". What makes violence a social injustice rather than just an individual moral wrong is its systemic character; that it exists as a social practice (Young 2011:62). Young (20110 argues that violence is systemic because it is directed at members of certain groups particularly because they are members of those groups. Young (2011:62) argues that "the oppression of violence consists not only in direct victimization, but in the daily knowledge shared by all members of oppressed group that they are liable to violation, solely on account of their group identity".

Young (2011) argues that living under such threat deprives the oppressed of dignity and freedom. Young (2011) argues that violence intersects with cultural imperialism. She argues that the oppressed groups may reject the projections of the dominant group in terms of ideas and meanings, and try to assert their own subjectivity, and the dominant group may reply with irrational violence against this challenge (Young 2011:63). In this sense, what this demonstrates is that the dominant group, like any group in a position of power, refuses to give up some of its power. This is the case with women who step outside the boundaries of patriarchy; they are met with irrational violence. This could also be seen in films discussed by this paper.

I also want to draw from Chantel Mouffe, particularly for her ideas in an interview she did with Nico Carpentier and Bart Cammaerts titled *Hegemony, democracy, agonism and journalism: an interview with Chantal Mouffe*. Chantal Mouffe discussed how her idea of *Hegemony and Social Strategy* is post-Gramsci. In the interview, Mouffe maintained that there is a need to push Gramsci's approach further if we want the approach to be more consistent (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:03). She questions the idea of privileged subjects (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:03). Mouffe argues that "the whole question of hegemony is linked to the post-structuralist perspective" (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). She spoke of the discursive construction of reality and the social. In this sense, she argues that "reality is not something that is given to us; meaning is always constructed" (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). This is the very idea which I seek to approach the analysis I want to make in this paper with. By reading the four films discussed by the paper in this way, we get an understanding that cinema itself does not offer a reality that is fixed; the meaning of the text could be constructed or interpreted in various ways. Mouffe maintains that "the social is always the result of a hegemonic articulation" (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). In this case, "every type of social order is a product of a hegemony as a specific political articulation" (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). In thinking about her debates on deliberative democracy, Mouffe argues that if every order is a hegemonic order, it means that there is always an outside (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). In this sense, she maintains that there is always something that has been excluded, so there is no consensus without exclusion (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04).

Mouffe argues that there is no possibility of complete inclusion, because "in order to create a hegemonic order, there is always something that needs to be oppressed" (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). She maintains that hegemony is positive because without it there would be no form of meaning or any form of order (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). Here, the idea is not to get rid of power, because "power is constitutive for the social" (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). In this sense, "there is no social without power relations" (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). Mouffe argues that any form of order is a hegemonic order (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:04). In Gramsci's terms, she makes the distinction between Expansive hegemony and hegemony by neutralization. Expansive hegemony, Mouffe maintains, is a form of hegemony which can be brought about by the working class, and hegemony by neutralization exists to impede the multiplicity of demands (Carpentier and

Cammaerts 2006:04). However, Mouffe acknowledges that there are other forms of hegemony.

In terms of the media and reproduction of hegemony, Mouffe argues that the media do play an important role in the reproduction, but the whole field of culture is where hegemony is created and reproduced (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:05). This culture, in Mouffe's terms, includes cinema and literature (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:05). The media play an important role in the maintenance and production of hegemony, but it can be challenged because every hegemony can be challenged (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:05). Mouffe argues that the use of new media is not good for democracy. She sees the use of new media as a form of autism, where people are only listening to and speaking with people that agree with them (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:07). Mouffe speaks of an agonistic public space. She maintains that she does not see that the new media would automatically be supportive to the creation of an agonistic public space (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:07).

Today, Mouffe argues, the main task is no longer to radicalize democracy, but to protect democratic institutions (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:07). She speaks of the chain of equivalence where the demands of one group are not met at the expense of another (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:07). For instance, the demands of men should not be met at the expense of women. In this sense, different struggle movement should work together. Mouffe ties politics with conflict. She argues that if there is politics in society it is because there is conflict (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006:09). Here, I do not seek to discuss the diea of democration in relation to the films. However, I want to employ these ideas Mouffe makes about the agonistic public space, the chain of equivalence and reproduction of hegemony. I want to use these ideas to read the films discussed in this paper in relation to gender production and hegemonic articulation vis-à-vis gendered representations.

Methodology

As a first step of critical enquiry, I want to analyse each film independently in relation to questions posed by this paper. I specifically interrogate the fatal woman in each film and the implication of their representation with the help of feminist, post-feminist, and political philosophic discourse. I will interrogate what the genres involved mean and the ideological work they do. I shall select scenes from each film in my analysis to interrogate independently. In conjunction with the application of film grammar, I shall perform a visual and discourse analysis on the selected scenes of each film. Visual analysis shall include a blend of semiotics and it shall provide a good understanding of the use of images and camera movements in relation to what is to be investigated by this paper. The disadvantage of this method is that one will miss out on the importance of dialogue or spoken language in uncovering the implications and meanings of the femme fatale. This is the reason I have chosen discourse analysis as my second method.

Discourse analysis shall provide a much deeper understanding of how dialogue or spoken language is used to address, label and represent the femme fatale. Together with discourse analysis, I shall employ interpellation as a concept to interrogate the way the femme fatale is treated through language by the films in question. The disadvantage of this method is contrary to the one faced by visual analysis. This method provides far less understanding of the visuals involved in making the fatal woman. Together, visual analysis and discourse analysis cover both crucial areas of a film and that explains the reason this paper shall employ the two methods. After analysing the four films independently, I shall put all four films in conversation to explore the changes the femme fatale has faced in meaning, treatment, and production. In this way, it shall be possible to gather enough information to decide the fate of this enquiry and analysis.

It is important that these methods are explored definitively, for they are important in the life of this paper. In defining Discourse Analysis as a method, it is important to define the term discourse as a concept. Drid (2010) explains that the term discourse conveys a number of significations for different purposes, but that in all cases the terms relates to language. The term refers to the topics or types of language used in definite texts (Drid 2010:21). Drid (2010) explains that the term ‘discourse’ is often employed to signify what is spoken and the word ‘text’ for what it is written. Proceeding with this understanding of discourse, an approach can be made towards the understanding of discourse analysis. According to Drid (2010), Discourse Analysis is seen as an exploration of language use by focusing on pieces

larger than sentences. But what are these pieces larger than sentences and at what point does a piece become larger than a sentence? Drid (2010) does not address this question, which I want to address myself. I do not wish to offer a critique to Drid's (2010) formulation, but rather to unpack aspects of this formulation to understand the method further.

Drid (2010) maintains further that "the analysis of discourse is the analysis of language in use and that as a result, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs"(21). Drid (2010) makes an interesting argument. Drid (2010) argues that the focus of this conception is on the regularities which utterances show when situated in contexts. Thus, so argues Drid (2010), the aspects of the world in which an utterance is employed can also contribute to the meaningfulness of discourse. In this case, Drid (2010) considers context in the understanding of discourse. Using this formulation of discourse and context by Drid (2010), I want to argue that context is important when analysing discourse. I shall perform a discourse analysis on the films in scrutiny to uncover the meaning and possible implications of the language used to gender relations.

Visual analysis shall involve the analysis of images and the way the camera is used. I want to approach visual analysis by employing semiotic analysis. In this case, semiotic analysis refers to the uncovering of rules, relations and mentality behind written texts and also to social life and its symbols (Fook 2016:119). It is important to note that the meanings produced through semiotics are not fixed; cultural and political background matters in the creation and understanding of meaning. In this case, I shall merge this formulation with the Uses and Gratifications theory.

Men in feminism

I want to begin this analysis by acknowledging that my gender will have an impact on the way I read these films in relation to gender construction. I want to go through the debates on whether or not men can write about feminism. I want to particularly invoke Paul Smith and Stephen Heath on this subject. Paul Smith (1985) in his writing on *Men in Feminism: men and feminist theory*, argues that men, some men, now and by repeating an old age habit, are entering feminism, actively penetrating it for a variety of reasons and motives in a number of different ways. This penetration, so argues Smith (1985), is often looked upon with suspicion that it can be taken to be yet another interruption, an illegal act of breaking and entering. Smith (1985:01) argues that a question these men need to ask themselves is "to what extent is that interruption justified; is it of any political use to feminism? To what extent is it wanted"? In his terms, "theory, as feminist theory has taught us to know, is itself implicated fully in the phallocracy: it helps invent, legitimate and reproduce the male order" (Smith 1985:02). Smith (1985) asks a brace of questions.

He asks if men can understand the feminist theoretical and academic position in feminist theory? Can they be of any political use to it? (Smith 1985:03). Smith (1985) answers the question by stating that men can, in one sense, understand it. He argues that "as the everyday practitioners of fetishism, they shouldn't be much put out of joint by this paradoxical view of women as being both there and not there, both for the upholding of the structures and also disavowed by them" (Smith 1985:03). He argues that the position of men as admirers of feminism seems to be almost an endorsement of fetishism (Smith 1985:03). He argues that "the intellectual task of understanding feminist theory is not a huge problem because it is situated within the array of post-structuralist discourses with which everyone is familiar" (Smith 1985:03). For this very reason, Smith (1985:03) argues that feminist theory is thus understandable; it's understandable that it exists.

He argues that "the question-in any context- of who is allowed to say or do what, to whom and about whom is patently a legal question: it can come up only when any given discourse is forming or has formed a mode of pragmatic legislation, where it is legalizing itself, and defining its outside, naming potential transgressors" (Smith 1985:04). "Any discourse desires to be its own space, in a way; it needs to think itself as sui generis: it must exclude" (Smith 1985:04). Smith (1985:04) argues that he understands that such a discourse "has every reason not to take him seriously, not to take him in: but as yet it has not actually passed the proper legislation". Men still constitute a shadowy, unlegislatable area for feminist theory" (Smith

1985:06-07). So long as this is still the case, so argues Smith (1985:07), "so long as the edict has not been passed, it seems to him that it could be considered useful to have men in feminism, men who are still, or as yet, neither outlaws nor in-laws" (Smith 1985:07).

Within the context of feminist theory, argues Smith (1985), men might do "something like the same thing as women did within theory itself: they can be there to help: to subvert, unsettle and undermine the laws of that discourse". They might do this purely by virtue of existing in it as a difference (Smith 1985:07). "They might act as a reminder to feminist theory, of the material fact of difference, the real consequences of which is feminism's material" (Smith 1985:07).

Smith (1985) agrees that men can participate in feminism. He argues that they may be able to take an interrogative but sympathetic role (Smith 1985:07). Stephen Heath's (1985) *Men in feminism: Men and feminism* is written in response to Smith. Heath (1985:11)) argues that all representation is transferential. "Representation is at once an image given, an argument made and a deputation established a construction of object, me and other" (Heath 1985:11). Heath (1985) argues that the problem for men, in feminism, has little to do with feminist theory, but much to do with the representation of feminism for men (Heath 1985:11).

He argues that the question for men is "how do I change, who am I if I listen and respond to feminism, if I understand with its understanding?" (Heath 1985:12). This is not a theoretical question, so argues Heath (1985), it is a practical-theoretical-political-ethical one (Heath 1985:12). It is easy for one to say that they know, but the point is to live it, including in theory, and in writing (Heath 1985:12).

I do not want to create an impression that I am just another man trying to colonize feminism for my own benefit. I want to clarify that by writing or even citing feminist scholarly work, I do not proclaim myself a feminist; I am not a feminist. I am only a witness and beneficiary of the same system that oppresses and has historically oppressed women, and I seek to write as such, interrogate as nothing but a witness. I want to admit that my interrogation of issues of representation might be affected by my own identity as a man. To employ Chantel Mouffe's language, I shall try to not be passionately attached to my identity in my analysis of films in this paper.

My Cousin Rachel (2017)

My Cousin Rachel (2017) is a mystery film directed by Roger Michell. The film is about a young Englishman (Phillip) who receives communication that his cousin (Ambrose) has died. He then embarks on a quest to avenge his cousin's death, for he suspects that his wife (Rachel) is the murderer. Instead of confronting Rachel and pursuing revenge for his cousin's death, Phillip falls in love with her and divorces his intentions completely.

Before proceeding with its reading, it is important that I begin with an understanding of the genre. I want to invoke William G. Tapply (2009) on his conception of the genre. Tapply (2009) argues that regardless of their genres and subgenres, contemporary mysteries contain the same elements. Tapply (2009) identifies the Puzzle as one of the elements. The most important question, argues Tapply (2009), that drives the plot of every mystery is who did it? Who committed the crime? The crime is generally a murder (Tapply 2009:08). This can be seen in *My Cousin Rachel* (2017). The film is driven by this fundamental question of who is the culprit. There is a murder, but there is only one suspect; Rachel. This is problematic in a sense that by doing this, the film encourages the audience to look at Rachel in a particular way, with a particular idea in mind; that Rachel is a murderer and cannot be trusted.

At the beginning of the story, argues Tapply (2009), neither the protagonist nor the audience knows the answer to that question. Another element Tapply (2009) identifies is Detection. With this, Tapply (2009) argues that the investigation of the crime constitutes the story's central point, that when the puzzle or crime is solved, the story ends. The film fits into Tapply's (2009) formulation, but the story ends without the puzzle being solved.

Tapply (2009) also identifies the Sleuth, as a hero, as a third element. In this respect, the protagonist is the one who solves the puzzle, usually through his intelligence, strength, perseverance, moral conviction, or a combination of all these qualities (Tapply 2009:09). The fourth element is the Worthy Villain. The antagonist, usually the murderer, so argues Tapply (2009), tests the limits of the sleuth's abilities. In Tappy's (2009:09) words, "the villain is clever, resourceful, and single-mindedly intent of getting away with his crimes". He makes solving the crime a challenge for both the sleuth and the audience (Tapply 2009:09). There is fair play as an element. In this sense, so argues Tapply (2009), all of the information uncovered by the protagonist, in the form of clues, is equally available to the audience. Tapply (2009) argues that the climactic revelation presents no evidence that has not been revealed throughout the course of the story. The story follows a sense of realism and logic, in

that everything fits and makes sense (Tapply 2009:09). From this conception of the mystery genre, it can be concluded that the mystery tropes can be identified as the absence of evidence, anonymous killer and anti-climactic unmasking.

Rachel is young, beautiful and appears to be innocent; at least a sense of innocence is attached to her by the way she is dressed. The most important characteristic here is that Rachel appears as if she is not what she appears to be. Every scene where Rachel is, the lighting is dim, there is less light. In this case, I want to compare Rachel and Louise in the film. I compare them within the binary, duality of light and darkness. Rachel appears in most of the scenes that are dim or with less light. The black dress she is wearing, not only does it signify that she is a widow, but can also, in a semiotic sense, be taken to signify evil. On the contrary, Louise appears in scenes with more light than Rachel and she always wears dresses that are colourful (mostly white) to compliment the light. In this sense, I want to argue that Rachel is presented to the audience as a negative and Louise as a positive; good and evil. Louise is the one always trying to make Phillip aware of Rachel's evil. The film makes it appear as if Louise is what purifies Phillip's reason or judgement and Rachel is that which clouds it. This is reinforced by the marriage between Phillip and Louise at the end of the film.

In the film, there is a gendered binary opposition of activity that Smelik (1999) speaks of. Rachel is the only female character that appears to be active, for the dramatic action unfolds fairly around her. Rachel is, however, Phillip's object of desire. Before he met Rachel, he wanted nothing more than revenge for his cousin. Upon meeting Rachel, Phillip is enticed by Rachel's good looks. Phillip is the bearer of the gaze and Rachel the object of the gaze. In terms of this idea of activity, I want to look at the gender roles in the film. Men have domestic professions. We see that Phillip has a man as a servant. Despite this, both Rachel and Louise do not seem to have a profession at all. In this way, the female characters are confined to the private space and excluded from the public. In this sense, the film promotes a view that women are, by design, meant for the private space. They have a choice to disrupt and pull themselves from this problematic space, but with a risk that the public space will not let them in; it will reject them. Fundamentally, the film demonstrates that when women escape the private for the public, they become something that is there but not there in the public. Both Rachel and Louise do not have an identity in a sense that we only know them because of their relationships with the male characters. The focus of the film is more on Phillip than Rachel. That is the reason why Rachel does not have an identity and Phillip does have an identity. She is not vacant; she is just not allowed to be who she really is.

As I have demonstrated, in mystery films, the protagonist is usually smart and ends up overpowering the villain. However, this film does not provide us with such a construction. Phillip is weak and has absolutely no idea what is happening. In fact, the formulation of who is the villain and the protagonist is not clear, it is constructed by the spectators themselves. Rachel is critical of the gender relations and the film depicts her as dangerous and manipulative. The film suggests that she is how she is because of this critical nature, thus side-lining and concealing her feminist stance. I refer to Rachel's effort as feminist not because she declares herself feminist, but because she represents and brings to light feminist issues and goals.

In the film, there is a realisation of both Voyeuristic and Narcissistic visual pleasure. There is an experience of Voyeuristic visual pleasure in a sense that Rachel is seen as an object of desire by the male character. Before the male character (Phillip) met Rachel, he wanted nothing but revenge for his cousin. In other words, he had created in himself a hatred for Rachel. However, when he meets her, he begins to see her as his object of desire and divorces his intentions of vengeance completely. To explain this voyeuristic experience, I want to refer to the scene where Phillip is in Rachel's bedroom to offer her a necklace.

There is no light in the room. The camera, with an over the shoulder shot, films from Phillip's point of view. While Rachel is wearing the necklace offered to her, Phillip is carrying a candle, which is the only source of light in the room, and that light is focused solely on Rachel, as if to signify that she is the one being looked at. The camera then cuts back to Phillip with a close-up shot of his face, with the light of the candle much closer to his face, showing his eyes sparkling with desire. It is in this way that Rachel is perceived as an object of desire and the male spectator, or those with the same identity as Phillip, may adopt this gaze. Narcissistic visual pleasure may also be experienced within this frame. The spectators, through negotiation of the gaze, may identify with both Phillip and Rachel. This will purely be dependent on the background, experience or identity of the spectators in question.

This has a relationship with Smelik's (1999) three levels of cinematic gaze. In almost all of the scenes, Phillip is the one gazing at Rachel and it is never the other way around. The camera shots are in the point of view of the male character and in Smelik's (1999) terms, the spectator is more likely to identify with the male look. In this way, Rachel is objectified and transformed into a spectacle. In this sense, the three levels of the cinematic gaze are experienced in the film.

Because of the letters Phillip was receiving from Ambrose, he had engineered a certain construction about Rachel that he has a particular expectation of what Rachel will be like. In the film, Rachel is perceived as a fatal woman under uncertain circumstances. When the spectators are being made aware of the content of the letters, their gaze is immediately directed at Rachel. The film refuses to tell the audience who is right or wrong. Instead, it encourages the audience to be active and look for answers themselves. One thing that clears everything is the letter Phillip received from Ambrose, which states that Rachel had been poisoning him with her herbs and tea. At this point, we get an idea that Rachel is the one who murdered Ambrose. Coming into contact with this revelation, Rachel is immediately constructed as the femme fatale. This is the beginning of Rachel's subjection. Obtaining knowledge that Rachel is the one who poisoned Ambrose, how she is viewed changes and a certain identity thus given to her.

My Cousin Rachel (2017) uses the aspects of its genre to not construct Rachel as a femme fatale itself, but to force the audience to do this construction. Rachel is constructed as a black widow. The black widow as a trope is a woman who lures men, marries them or seduces them with the sole intention of killing them for their money. In the film, we are faced with two truths; Phillip's and Rachel's. Phillip sees her as the murderer and Rachel sees herself as a victim of perception; that she is only seen in a dubious manner because she is a woman who is trying to be independent. This demonstrated by the scene where she asks Phillip if he can't let her be a person in her own right, "a woman who is making her own way in the world as she wishes". There is no concrete evidence that she did kill Ambrose and poison Phillip.

The film, through Rachel, is in conversation about gender relations. We are introduced to this in the scene of the first meeting between Rachel and Phillip. Phillip meets Rachel at his house. When he enters the room, he is confronted by the dim lit room and Rachel standing by the window, wearing a black dress. The composition of the scene is very important. The dimness of the room itself suggests something of darkness; death. Rachel is wearing a black dress because she is a widow. Rachel is holding her cup of tea and the camera provides a close-up of that cup of tea, almost to emphasize it. Both Rachel and Phillip have a debate about smoking. Phillip wants to smoke, but maintains that he does not want to open the window because the rain outside will damage Rachel's carpet. Generalising, he says "*I thought you lot worried about things like that*". When Rachel asks him about what he means by "*You lot*", he states that he is referring to women. Rachel replies by saying that they do that only when they have nothing else to worry about. She replies with a sense that suggests

that she is offended by Phillip's generalisation. Phillip, with this labelling and interpellation, reflects the already existing gender expectations.

This scene, introduces us to the private-public divide about gender roles. The basic idea of this conception of the private-public dichotomy is that women are excluded from the public (male dominated) space and forced into the private, being the home (Boyd 1997:91). This divide has been identified by feminists, as the core of women's oppression (Boyd 1997:91). Heldke and O'Connor (2004), in the article *Five faces of oppression*, provide a useful formulation of oppression. They argue that in a traditional sense, oppression refers to the exercise of tyranny by a dominant group (Heldke and O'Connor 2004:01). They admit that this traditional conception of oppression may not be present in many modern societies. They argue that even a "well-intentioned liberal society can place system-wide constraints on groups and limit their freedom" (Heldke and O'Connor 2004:01). They propose a universal definition of oppression as when people reduce the potential of others to be what they are (Heldke and O'Connor 2004:01).

It seems instilled in Phillip that women worry about domestic affairs, private issues, rather than public. I want to Invoke England (2018) concerning this private-public conception. When reading *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, England (2018) argues that Buffy seemed to be disrupting the societal boundaries in regard to women's roles in public spaces, but assuming traditional roles in private. By 'traditional, England (2018) concedes that she is referring to roles that are patriarchally coded. England (2018) argues that the film shows the private space in ways that both challenge and maintain patriarchal gender roles. The home is shown as both a site of danger and sanctuary, advocating for the idea that women should stay in the home. Rachel's position in the film is similar to this one outlined by England (2018). In the public, Rachel holds no professional responsibility, but her behaviour is a disruption because it challenges the socially expected attitudes of women being silent and modest. However, she still maintains the patriarchal gender roles in the home. Her passion of making tea is also a patriarchal expectation of women in the private.

The third scene I want to refer to is the one where both Phillip and Rachel are riding to church. When both Rachel and Phillip are riding to church, Phillip tells Rachel that the people at church will be looking at her and Rachel replies by saying that she will look back. This scene highlights a tension of the gaze, a conflict between one gaze and another. It is their gaze against Rachel's gaze; the oppositional gaze. Rachel, with her reply, suggests that

her intention is for her gaze to change reality. Also while at the beach, Rachel asks Phillip, "*Why should women suffer in child birth*? Is it their destiny to do so? Phillip replies by saying that he has never thought of it and Rachel, as a result of his response, maintains that he knows nothing about women.

I want to read how the film solves the castration anxiety created by Rachel. Smelik (1999) argues that classic cinema solves the threat of castration in one of two ways: narrative structure and fetishism. To solve the threat of castration of the narrative level, the female character has to be found guilty, and her guilt will be sealed by either punishment or salvation. In this respect, the two traditional endings confronted and presented by the film story in relation to punishment and salvation is that the female characters either die or marry (Smelik 1999:492). Rachel was found guilty and she refused for her supposed guilt to be sealed by salvation; she refused to marry. Her refusal of this salvation led to her punishment, in a sense that she had to die. However, as far as the narrative structure is concerned, she dies with power because she dies with the truth, which is only known to her.

With fetishism, classic cinema substitutes and displaces the lacking penis in the form of a fetish; a hyper-polished object (Smelik 199:492). In Mulvey's terms, this fetishizing of the woman shifts attention from female 'lack' and changes from a dangerous character into a reassuring object of flawless beauty (Smelik 1999:492). It could be argued that this is also evident in the film to a certain extent, in a sense that Phillip forgets about his cousin's accusations about Rachel and falls in love with her. Phillip himself fetishizes Rachel to a point of taking rash decisions to gain her affection. I want to argue that Rachel is an agent of anti-authority struggles in a sense that she challenges the patriarchal norms and gender expectations in the film. Foucault (1982:781) explains that the objective of these struggles is not to attack an institution of power, group, elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power. She questions the status of her individuality. She is not exactly against individuals, but the system that makes these individuals individual. In the film, we notice Phillip's attempted interpellation on Rachel.

The Althesserian notion of interpellation in which a subject is produced by being hailed, addressed, and named. Drawing on Althusser, Butler (1997) argues that "this performative effort of naming can only attempt to bring its addressee into being: there is always the risk of certain misrecognition. The production of the subject falters, so argues Butler (1997), if one fails to recognize that effort to produce the subject. In light of Althusser's interpellation,

Butler (1997) argues that when a name is not a proper name but a social category, it is capable of being interpreted in different and conflicting ways. Here, I also seek to refer back to the scene of Rachel and Phillip's first meeting. Rachel refuses to recognise Phillip naming her as 'a woman always worried about her carpets'. He uses a social category of women; *You lot*, to describe Rachel. The production, the hailing and attempted interpellation of Rachel as a subject faltered because the name that was used for her production was not a proper name, but a social category. Butler (1997), in *The psychic life of power*, observes this fact. Butler (1997) argues that when a name is not a proper name but a social category, it is capable of being interpreted in different and conflicting ways. She also states that the production of the subject fails if one fails to recognize that object to produce a subject (Butler 1997:96). Rachel rejects this attempt, but she is passionately attached to her identity as a widow; she uses the term 'independent woman' as her master signifier.

Rachel has power, in the form of agency, in the film because she is constantly resisting and in a maintained state of self-determination. Ideologically, the femme fatale in this film represents self-determination and a protest against being named and being the object of the gaze. Phillip's ideas about Rachel being the murderer are a paranoid construction, with a surplus and excess attached to her to the point of a fantasy. McGowan (2012:23) argues that for psychoanalysis, the fantasy serves as a way for the individual subject to imagine a path of the dissatisfaction created by the demands of social existence. By distorting social reality through the imaginative act, so argues McGowan (2012:23), "fantasy creates an opening to the impossible object and allows the subject to glimpse an otherwise inaccessible enjoyment". McGowan (2012:23) argues that if we proceed with this understanding of fantasy, then "every film is a fantasy insofar as it distorts the social reality from which it emerges and translates a private imagining into a public spectacle".

McGowan (2012:24) argues that "fantasy compromises the subject's desire, providing a justification or realization for the impossibility that it presents". There is a surplus and excess attached to Rachel because her villain status is based on uncertainty with no concrete evidence. With this conception, I want to argue that the representation of the femme fatale in this film is misogynistic. It is misogynistic because her resistance is not allowed to be a success. She is presented as a fatal woman that her intentions of self-determination are passed as selfish motives to steal wealth. The film does not allow her an opportunity to prove her innocence. Throughout the film, she is the object of the gaze and she is not allowed freedom

with her gaze. The male gaze is not challenged in the film. However, Audition (1999) challenges the male gaze intensely.

Audition (1999)

Audition (1999) is a Japanese horror film by Takashi Miike. The film is about a widower (Aoyama) who, with the help of his friend, conducts an audition to find a wife. They invite women to the audition, letting them believe that they are auditioning for a role in an upcoming movie. Aoyama chooses a woman at the auditions and this woman ends up torturing and physically abusing him. This woman is then killed by Aoyama's son.

It is best to analyse this film in terms of the visual, ideological and narrative tropes. I want to begin by first scrutinizing the horror genre in terms of these tropes. Blake and Bailey (2013) on the work titled *Writing the Horror Movie*, explain that a horror divides into clear subgenres. They explain that the horror genre can be divided into the following: The undead (including vampires and zombies), monsters, psychological horror, possession, the supernatural, witchcraft and curses, werewolves and body horror, bad science, and slasher (Blake and Bailey 2013:21). The most important thing to look at for this paper is the visual, narrative and ideological tropes of the horror genre.

Popular location choices for horror films have been graveyards, forests, dark and isolated place, and places in the middle of nowhere (Curtis 2008:10). *Audition* (1999) does fit into the classic horror location categories to a certain extent. It is set in the city, but there is a sense of isolation and loneliness to the location/s where the main action takes place. There are some locations where the place is dark and isolated. For instance, the place where Aoyama went to go look for Asima, where he found a man in a brown sack, is dark and isolated. Other visual tropes include the evil phone, cemeteries, close-ups, and evil dolls. In horror films, camera shots are often done with low-angle; this is to show the strength of the villain and vulnerability of the victim. Close-up shots are also popular as they show the emotion and fear on the face of the characters. Settings of the film include dark and isolated places where no one is around to help. Elements such as evil dolls have become popular in contemporary horror films. E.g. *Saw*, and *The Conjuring.*

The emptiness of the scenes in *Audition* (1999), coupled with Aoyama's circumstances of losing his wife, draws the audience to sympathize with his loneliness. The wide shots and the dim composition of the scenes in the beginning of the film stress and emphasize a kind of loneliness felt by Aoyama. There is a black phone in Aoyama's house, another visual trope of the horror genre in *Audition* (1999).

In terms of the narrative tropes of the horror genre, there is an extensive use of narrative enigmas. There is the use of unexplained events and occurrences that keep the audience confused and seeking for answers. The genre, in essence, encourages the audience to be active; it triggers a physical reaction of the audience. Across most horror films, there is always a clear binary opposition, the battle between good and evil. The genre encourages the audience to be active; it triggers a physical reaction of the audience. The horror film most follows the Three Act Narrative structure; The setup, confrontation, and resolution (Alleyne 2014:57). With the first act, the setup, the genre encourages the audience to be active; it triggers a physical reaction of the audience. The confrontation stage is where the main drama happens and the obstacles to the main characters are introduced into the story. The resolution is where the story wraps up, evil is fought and the balance is restored.

The most common ideological trope of the horror film is that women are depicted as weak. They appear as victims of violence and men usually being the cause of that violence. For instance, when closely reading possession films, one can identify that, in some cases, only the female body is the possessed body. This can be seen in the exorcist films such as The *Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) and *The Last Exorcism* (2010). Men are also, sometimes depicted as powerful in horror films compared to women. I want to make reference to possession films again to make this point clear. In some possession films, when a female is possessed, a male in a form of a priest comes to do the exorcism. This can be seen in films such as *The Conjuring* (2013) and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005).

When looking at the ideological tropes of *Audition* (1999), men are depicted as ignorant. It is debatable whether or not Asami, as a woman, is depicted as powerful. As the femme fatale of the film, she has physical violence as her number one commodity; she tortures men. In fact, the most important tool in her arsenal is her beauty and innocent appearance. She is just what men, in the film, expect a 'good' woman to look like and behave. She exploits and feeds on the expectations of Aoyama, and also on his desperation to find a 'good' wife. Asami is a dangerous woman, powerful as far as violence is concerned, but she is also a split subject. She is caught between her desire to have an honest companion/loyal man and punishing men for their patriarchal tendencies. There is a Freudian sense to her character in a sense that the film, through its narrative and visuals, suggests that she is the way she is because of her childhood past of abuse. In this case, there is conflict within her, between attacking the Japanese patriarchal systems and participating in that same system. The source of the conflict is her different subjectivities, her divided self. Asami's past becomes some kind of prison

that eventually produces and grants her a kind of psychic identity; a torturer. It seems that a woman is not allowed to have rage; there has to be something wrong about her. In this case, she is experiencing what Young (2011) describes as double consciousness.

In terms of the visual, there is a black telephone owned by Asami, an element of a horror visual trope. When Aoyama calls her, the scene is dark and the camera is close up with her face slowing changing from tired to happy as she begins to smile. However, there is something about her smile that insinuates danger. The way her hair is arranged and her all white clothes resemble that of a possessed woman in exorcism films. In this sense, elements of horror start to emerge. In this scene, doubts are placed on Asami's character; it seems that she is not what she appears to be.

There is a scene where the content of the sack/bag that's been lying next to the phone is revealed. Aoyama tries to run away from Asami and trips over the bag. He tries to open it, but it opens by itself and there is a man with no fingers, no tongue and his feet chopped off. Asami vomits into a pet food bowl and serves the man her vomit. He eats like a dog and Asami brushes his back with her hand as would the owner on her dog or pet. In this way, Asami perceives men as animals; dogs. She has forced this identity on this man and powerless, he has accepted it. As a result, he has recognized in himself this identity and by eating what he is served, reproduces and maintains Asami's power over him.

Audition (1999) is an attack on the gaze. In this sense, I refer to the gaze not as the act of looking at, but of being looked at. However, most importantly, *Audition* (1999) is the attack on genre itself and its gender constructions. It achieves this by using a tactic of exploitation cinema, that of allowing the audience to wish for something bad to happen, even if they know it's bad, to fulfil narrative expectations. By exploring the visual, narrative and ideological tropes of the horror genre, I have demonstrated that the genre itself has treated and/or constructed gender in a certain way.

Audition (1999) seeks to disrupt this construction with an approach that involves an unmasking of the ideology of genre and audience expectations. As far as the audience expectations to fulfil narrative expectations are concerned, the film, in Žižekian terms, asks a question that causes hysteria: Che Vuoi. The term means 'what do you want?' Beyond this conception, it means 'what are you really aiming at?' (Daniels 2012:12). You are looking at me, but what do you want to achieve with that gaze, what do you expect to see? Glenda Daniels (2012), invoking Žižek, explains that it is experienced by the subject as an

unbearable anxiety. It is a question the film asks concerning the gaze. The spectator, particularly male, is this subject that is faced with this unbearable anxiety. I want to argue that Asami holds no power in this film. She is the production of the very system she is trying to attack. Here, I use the term 'system' to refer to the structures of subject production, the government of individualization. She attacks it not on her terms, but on the effects of the system. In other words, her actions are a mere reaction to the actions of men.

Asami's actions, in Foucault's (1982) terms, are against the government of individualization. As far as the film and genre construction is concerned, they are an opposition against deformation, secrecy, and mystifying representations imposed on people. Asima is resisting the control of the system, but she is still a subject. She is not subject to someone else by control and dependence, but she is tied up to her own identity by conscience and self-knowledge. This is because she is defined by, and subject to her past, which forms part of her identity. As Foucault (1982) has suggested, it is indeed important that power relations are analysed from the antagonism of strategies, rather than analysing power from the point of view of its internal rationality. With this conception, there is a need to analyse gender relations in the film from the antagonisms of strategies, that to understand whether or not the femme fatale is a symbol of power, we need to interrogate male power in this film. If one argues or states that the femme fatale has power, a temptation often arises that it will be relative to something or someone else. That we can only discuss power in a comparative language because what is defined as powerful is something seen, but most importantly, what is felt. If one can do more than the other, he or she may be perceived as more powerful than the other.

However, for the moment, I want to resist this temptation and explore how power is defined in/by the film in question. Do the male characters in *Audition* (1999) have power? If so, in what sense do they have it? The main male characters, first of all, occupy high positions in their respective workplaces, thus enabling them to do as they please; to deceive women about having an 'audition'. The film itself does not explicitly reveal what professions they occupy, but we can see power relations clearly in the workplace. The female characters in the film have domestic and supporting professions. For instance, Aoyama has a female as a secretary and also as a maid. The behaviour of all the characters seems to be controlled by a certain code of behaviour. While at the restaurant, Aoyama and Yoshikawa look down on the group of women making noise, thus defining and labelling them as bad women. When a group of girls laugh out loud at a restaurant, Yoshikawa calls them awful/bad girls. Through his

speech, it seems that girls should be in silence and not stand out. This is fundamentally an effort to silence the girls, because when they stand out, when they make noise, they cross the boundary and as a result become bad girls that should not be married.

It seems that it is socially expected, as the film suggests, that women should stay modest and in silence. However, a mistake should not be made that the male characters are all powerful and immune to the effects of the power they have in this instance. The film looks at the women with their gaze, but, in the film, it is also instilled in them, attached to their identity that they should recognize these qualities in women for them to then qualify them as good or bad. Failure to recognize these qualities in women results in a demarcation of some sort, a casting out, and a discursive construction of women in binary oppositional categories; good and bad. Men have power in a sense that they are able to gaze and judge. What we can gather from the film is that power, shown through action, in its definitive character, is freedom. I want to invoke Lawrence Hamilton for his conception of freedom to create a framework of this power. Hamilton (2014), in his book *Freedom is power: Liberty through political representation* argues that Freedom always involves a relation between three things: an agent, certain prevailing conditions, and certain doings or becomings of the agent.

He argues that freedom depends on one's power within four related domains: power to overcome existing obstacles; power to determine who governs my political association and community, power to resist the disciplinary power of one's community and state; and power to determine one's social and economic environment through meaningful control over one's representatives (Hamilton 2014:95). Hamilton (2014) argues that freedom is power across these four domains in a sense that individual freedom depends on some agent's power or ability to bring something about. However, just because one has power, does not mean he or she is free from its effects. With her appearance and behaviour, Asami is deemed qualified for the 'good' girl status. The torture and violent revelation of who she really is, is a protest and refusal to accept the definitive attempt.

In this case, the femme fatale in *Audition* (1999), ideologically, represents that which refuses to be defined, to be named. She represents a violent attack on patriarchy, on a system of individualization. The fatal woman refuses attempts at subjectivisation and interpellation by acting contrary to what she is expected to act. The femme fatale, in this case, represents male anxiety about women who refuse to perform the identity presented to them; that these women will lead to their downfall and social torture. This anxiety is a result of the question of what

would happen if one was held accountable for the ways he thinks about, views and treats women? It poses a question that causes hysteria. Employing Daniels' (2012) language, this anxiety has forced Aoyama and Yoshikawa to create the woman who does not conform to their standards as a paranoid construction, with a surplus and excess attached to her, labelled negatively to the point of a social fantasy: a bad woman, and not the marrying type. Daniels (2012:13), drawing on Žižek, defines surplus and excess as what is attached to the object, more than the object itself, something that the object stands for.

It has been demonstrated that genre reproduces gender. *Audition* (1999) has made an attempt at constructing gender, but used the femme fatale to reject this construction. In fact, it has constructed gender, only to destroy and critique the construction later. The film defies its genre by using its visual, narrative, ideological tropes and betraying it by turning against these tropes. However, it has constructed gender as well. It has constructed a powerful woman and a weaker man; it has exposed the power in a woman and the vulnerability of a man, something modern cinema has failed to do in many occasions. *Audition* (1999) does employ horror tropes such as close-up shots, dim lit scenes, narrative enigmas (a thing or person that is mysterious to understand). Most horror films, as I have demonstrated, have depicted women as victims of violence and men as the causes of violence. However, *Audition* (1999) does not follow this depiction. On the contrary, men are victims of violence and women are the causes of that violence.

The female characters are presented as less powerful than males in terms of the professional space they occupy. Before the torture, in hooks' (1992) conception, men are the bearers of the gaze, and women the objects of the gaze, at least that is the intention of the audition. However, the gaze is resisted and punished by the femme fatale through the torture of Aoyama and other male victims. I want to refer to this scene of the torture. In the scene, she has paralyzed his body by poisoning his whiskey. When she tortures him, she starts with the tongue. She injects it with some chemical. She tells him that men like him call many girls to auditions, make them fail and contact them later just to have sex with them. She sticks needles on his stomach and chest, sarcastically saying *deeper, deeper*, perhaps a sexual reference to Aoyama's intentions about the audition. *Words create lies, pain can be trusted*, says Asami. She sticks needles again in his eyes. In this way, she is destroying the very thing that enables him to gaze. *You only realise what kind of man you are when you feel pain, you understand when you have a very agonizing experience*, says Asami. *Your son has to suffer pain and then you'll understand*. Here, Asami appeals to Aoyama that he can only understand

her when placed in her position. She uses the term 'pain' to signify her existence. It is a painful existence because she is limited, contained and controlled.

This is a call for Aoyama to interrogate his normalised habits, perhaps a call for the audience to interrogate themselves, to question their behaviour and gendered expectations to fulfil narrative expectations. She cuts off his leg with a wire. As she cuts the leg, the scene cuts off to a shot of a man in a wheelchair. The man has his hand on his penis, almost like he is masturbating. In this way, the chopping off of the leg could be read as a castration metaphor. This shares a connection with Smelik's (1999) castration anxiety. Some horror films have presented female characters as passive and helpless. *Audition* (1999), through the femme fatale, transforms a woman into an active agent, giving her agency to the point of resistance.

I want to address the question of whether or not the construction of the femme fatale in this film is misogynistic or not. It could be argued that the construction of the character in this film is not misogynistic. She is constructed as a site of resistance, a danger zone that should be approached with caution by sexist men. She is provided with agency and the monopoly on violence. However, her character is a source of fear to men. What happens if this misogyny is performed by individuals of the same gender? It cannot also be assumed that men are the only characters that might look at women as objects in cinema. What then happens when women are looking at women? Does the gaze also become problematic? Halberstam (1998) does argue that females are and have been masculine. Smelik (1999:494) invokes Mulvey to maintain that the female spectator may not only identify with the passive femininity designed for her, but is also likely to enjoy adopting the masculine point of view. Smelik (1999:494) argues that "Mulvey speculates that female spectators may negotiate the masculinisation of the spectatorial position in Hollywood cinema, because it signifies for them a pleasurable rediscovery of a lost aspect of their sexual identity".

It could be argued that this construction is misogynistic because the character herself dies for resisting. She is unable to resist the system's way of solving the castration anxiety she has created, she is punished with death. It is misogynistic because the fatal woman is made to appear as a symbol of fear than a symbol of liberation. *Audition* (1999) utilizes and disrupts some of the tropes of its genre and the result of this is a construction; a construction of a woman as a powerful figure, with a monopoly on violence, equipped with sexual/social ammunition to the point of resistance. The film constructs certain ideas about gender. It depicts men as the social ill of society, its weakness and women as the repairers.

There is an experience of both Voyeuristic and Narcissistic visual pleasure in the film. The experience, of course, depends on the identity of the audience. A male spectator experiences voyeuristic visual pleasure on the scene of the audition itself. At the audition, the camera films from the point of view of the male characters, gazing at women as their objects and ultimately, in hook's (1992) terms, transforming them into a spectacle. The scene of the torture itself brings out this experience. When Aoyama is been tortured, the camera films from his point of view for a certain amount of time. When he is being tortured, he gazes at Asami (his torturer) as an object. He gazes at her not as his sexual object, but as an object of his fear. Asami also gazes at Aoyama as an object, an object representing a source of her social oppression. The camera also films from her point of view in this scene. She sees Aoyama as exactly what is wrong with men in Japanese society and the only salvation for that is castration, hence she cuts off his tongue and leg.

For female spectators, this scene might bring an experience of narcissistic visual pleasure, in a sense that they might identify with the image; with Asami's frustration and protest. However, I want to state that this framework or pattern of the gazing experience is not all straight forward; there is room for misrecognition and rejection. In other words, women may enjoy the experience of looking through the male gaze and men may enjoy looking through the female gaze, if there is such a thing. The audience may reject the film's discourse all together. hooks (1992) calls this instance, moments of rupture. These moments occur when the spectator resists complete identification with the film' discourse (hooks 1992:117). The uses and gratifications theory of media states that audiences use the various media texts for their variously distinct reasons (Heggde and Shainesh 2018:97).

Concerning the characters in *Audition* (1999), I want to interrogate the notion of activity and passivity, as in, who is active and passive. First of all, the film presents gender as a binary opposition; there are only men and women in the film and no other gender representation. For this reason, I want to interrogate this notion of activity and passivity between men and women in the film. In hooks' (1992) terms, I seek to trace the bearers of the gaze and the objects of the gaze. The bearer of the gaze is active, in control and is receiving pleasure (Block 2009:59). The object of the gaze is passive, receptive, attractive and giving pleasure (Block 2009:59). In *Audition* (1999), the male characters are the bearers of the gaze. This is seen from the beginning of the film up to the audition itself. They are the ones looking most of the time.

The narrative action develops around them. For this reason, they are active. The female characters are the objects of the gaze. They are being looked at, expected to be attractive, judged and labelled by men. By being gazed at the audition, they are giving pleasure to the male characters. For this reason, it could be argued that they are passive. However, all of this is challenged and disrupted by the film. Through the femme fatale, the film deconstructs the man and fundamentally strips him off of his power to look, by attacking all that is enabling him to do so; hence Aoyama's eyes are pierced with needles. At this moment in the film, the roles were shifted from women being passive to active. The female character becomes an active agent because she has taken control of the story itself; that any dramatic action, what happens next, is almost entirely up to her. She is the bearer of the gaze and the male character's suffering was the source of her pleasure. This transformation rendered Asami a castration anxiety and she was punished by death. I want to move this conception of the gaze to *Species* (1995).

Species (1995)

Species (1995) is a science fiction/horror film directed by Roger Donaldson. The film is about a government scientist (Xavier) who receives communication from space about a genetic sequence of an alien species, which he combines with human DNA to produce a hybrid called Sil. Sil is contained in a laboratory and is subject of countless experiments. She escapes from the lab and start killing people in her quest to mate. Xavier then assembles a team of experts to try and stop Sil.

I want to interrogate the film with respect to its genre and construction of gender. *Species* (1995) is a science fiction horror film. In this paper, I have tried to demonstrate that the horror genre has treated and constructed gender relations in a negative way as far as the category of 'women' is concerned. I have shown that the horror genre has constructed women as the victims of violence and also as the causes of that violence. It has portrayed women as weak, possessed, a problem and dangerous to society. On the contrary, it has portrayed men as strong, the problem solvers, saviours and good for society. Science fiction films, on the contrary, "are a group of cinematic texts that are usually scientific, futuristic and imaginative" (Mathijs and Sexton 2011:210). "They are usually visualized through imaginative settings and have a particularly strong emphasis on technology advancement, scientific developments and employs fantastic special effects" (Mathijs and Sexton 2011:210). The films may include themes around heroes, distant planets, impossible quests, fantastic places, futuristic technology and the figure of the 'other'; something unknown (Johnston 2011:07).

Science fiction films are usually based on space exploration, advanced technology and genetic engineering (Johnston 2011:07). Within the storylines of science fiction films, strange and genetically engineered species or aliens often terrorize humanity, and they are either created by misguided mad scientists or out of a quest for knowledge (Redmond 2005:43). "Science fiction films can be seen to express society's anxiety about technology and how to control the impact of technological and environmental change on contemporary society" (Hilliard 2009:206). "Science fiction often presents the potential of technology to destroy humankind" (Hilliard 2009:207).

It is clear that *Species* (1995) employs the gender constructions of its genre and does not disrupt them in any way. In the film, we are able to see that Sil is perceived and treated as a threat by the characters in the film. Her sexuality is too strong and dangerous, that she must

be destroyed. Sil is constructed as a threat and a cause of violence. The male characters are presented as the heroes who should get rid of the threat and restore order. They are strong, intellectually equipped, and they are the problem solvers. When looking at the character of Dr Laura Baker in the film, one is almost tempted to think that the film disrupts traditional gender constructions; that she is the problem solver in a sense that she is in a team that seeks to destroy Sil. There is no doubt that, in the film, Dr Baker is intellectually equipped and a problem solver. However, she is presented in a way that side-lines her efforts. The film focuses on her romantic attempts towards Preston that her role in getting rid of the threat is made blurry. Of the entire protagonists, we are given more access to her private life. It seems that Dr Baker is smart, but she has to be loved by a man.

Species (1995) reproduces the traditional gender constructions of its genre discussed in this paper. When we see women in the film, they are either naked or on a mission to please a man. For instance, we see Sil naked most of the time and when she enters the club, we see a woman stripping. The girl in the bathroom, at the club, while adjusting her breasts, says to Sil *Whatever it takes right*? This female character is then killed by Sil in the bathroom. The film claims, in the following scene, that she killed her because she was a sexual competition. The film exploits Sil's desire to mate to produce misogynistic representations about women.

When Xavier had assembled a team, he tells them that they decided to make Sil a woman so that *it may be more docile and controllable*. He insinuates that there is a certain gender that is controllable, that being female is to be in a state of submission, to be controlled easily. Preston responds to this remark by saying *More docile and controllable huh*? *Well I guess you guys don't get out much*. He points out Xavier's ignorance and sexism.

There is a need to read *Species* (1995) by looking at the gender power relations. The femme fatale of the film, Sil, is active because she is the one who drives the dramatic action. The dramatic action develops around her. She is the threat that the protagonists are trying to solve and without her, the chase comes to an end. However, Sil is filmed naked most of the scenes in the film and the camera captures a full shot concentrating on her nakedness. In this instance, it could be argued that she is the object of the gaze. This could also be seen in the scene where she enters the nightclub. By the nightclub's entrance, we can see a lot of people waiting in the queue to get in, with two security guards facilitating this queue. Sil goes past the queue and without even saying a word; the guards let her know that she can get in without waiting in the queue. They say this because of her looks.

We can see the camera capturing a close-up shot of the guards' faces when they gaze at Sil in a sexual way after she had just walked passed them. In this way, Sil has become their object of desire. However, Sil is also allowed to gaze in this way in the film. When she is in the club, she sees a man by the bar and she immediately flirts with him. Before she does, she takes her shirt off and she is left with her bra. She leaves the club with the man to his house. While at the house, we see Sil looking at the man naked by the shower. The camera first captures a close-up shot of Sil's face and desire-filled eyes, and then a medium shot of the man's body, with the camera moving from up his face to his lower body. Because of this, I want to argue that there is an experience of both Voyeuristic and narcissistic visual pleasure. There is an experience of Voyeuristic visual pleasure because both male and female spectators, because of this camera work, may identify with the male look and see Sil as their object, and also identify with Sil's look and see men as objects. With this observation, we can see that the activity and passivity is shared between the two genders present in the film.

Female spectators may also identify with this look because there are different sexual identities. hooks (1992) also concedes that female spectators may negotiate with the masculine look; they could enjoy adopting the masculine view. McGowan (2012), drawing on Lacan, argues that the very form of the image changes on the basis of the spectator's position. He argues that spectators never look on from a safe distance; they are in the picture, implicated in the text itself (McGowan 2012:07). Halberstam (1998) also tells us that females are and have been masculine. If what Halberstam (1998) is telling us is true, then it means that there is a possibility of females looking at each other in an objectifying way. The fundamental question is what happens when females are looking at each other and enjoy the masculine view? Do we still call the gaze oppression? With the conception of both hooks (1992) and Halberstam (1998), I'm interested in this negotiation of the look. As far as spectatorship is concerned, I want to argue that audiences interpret and use different film texts they consume differently. This is the conception of the Uses and Gratifications theory on media texts. It is a brand of effects studies and its basic assumption is that audience members are actively involved in selecting messages or media texts to gratify individual needs (Fourie 2001:244). These needs may be to relax, escape from daily reality, to be informed or entertained (Fourie 2001:244).

The active spectator assumption, so argues Fourie (2001), therefore invalidates the assumption that the film has great influence on helpless, mindless audiences. hooks (1992), with this concept of negotiating the look, proceeds with an idea that the audience are active,

that there is a possibility of both rejecting and accepting the look. I want to argue here and agree with the conception that film has great influence on the helpless, mindless audiences. Daniels (2012) makes an interesting point when she speaks of the secret of ideology. Daniels (2012), invoking Zizek, argues that the secret of ideology is that it works best on a 'stupid' subject. However, to add to Daniels' claim, there has to be a question on whether there is such a thing as a helpless, mindless or stupid subject? I want to point out here, in an attempt to answer this question, that there is no vacant subject. The spectators approach the films with different identities, subjectivities, cultural backgrounds, interests and desires. Their understanding of the film texts is highly dependent on these qualities they bring with them. Daniels (2012) recognizes that as postmodern subjects, we have multiple subjectivities- that of being a woman, man, journalist, black and middle class- and therefore our loyalties are split between many distinct things.

With this conception, we see that there is no such a thing as a mindless or vacant subject, for the subject to be completely formed and totalised and tied to their identity in a constraining way, they have to have various things attached to their identity to seal their subjection. So because there is no mindless or vacant subject, what then, makes it stupid and helpless? It seems that the spectator becomes stupid and helpless when its gaze is clouded by desire to the point of objectification; looking at another as an object. It becomes stupid when it fails to negotiate the gaze presented to it by the film. It is in this way that I want to argue that *Species*' (1995) construction of the femme fatale is misogynistic, because it is constructed as a thing to be looked at, investigated and destroyed; an enemy.

It seems that Sil's victims are mostly men and women who subscribe to the conventional ways of thinking. In Smelik's (1999) terms, Sil represents a castration anxiety and general threat for men. It is important that I interrogate how this castration anxiety is resolved by the film. Smelik (1999) has observed that classic cinema solves the threat of castration with the narrative structure and fetishism. In *Species* (1995), we see that Sil has been found guilty, but her own threat is too enormous, she is only faced with punishment. Her guilt is sealed by death. Sil is killed by being shot in the head and falling into a pool of fire. It is almost like she is condemned to hell.

Species 2 (1998)

Species 2 (1998) is a science fiction horror film. The film starts with three astronauts on their first mission in Mars. After successfully landing on Mars, they get infected by alien DNA. This alien DNA turns Patrick Ross into a monster; he has intercourse with women to produce offspring, resulting in the death of these women. Laura Baker, a scientist, teams up with Press Lennox and Dennis Gamble to take Commander Ross down.

Upon their return to earth, the astronauts get placed on a quarantine in which they are forbidden to partake in sexual activity for 10 days. This is similar to the Adam and Eve story with the forbidden fruit. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the re-engineered Sil is called Eve. However, despite this strict instruction, like Adam and Eve, the astronauts ignore it and participate in sexual activities. The result of this is the reproduction of alien species and the death of women involved in those sexual activities. It is the sense of disobedience and a refusal for their sexual desires to be control that causes trouble. I want to intensely scrutinize the modus operandi of dangerous sexuality and gendered death in this film. I want to refer to Commander Ross' first sexual encounter on his return from Mars.

At the hotel, where the celebration of their successful mission was being held, Ross goes to a hotel room where he finds two women (Marcy and her sister) who wish to be intimate with him. Ross ignores the quarantine he is under and becomes intimate with these two women. After being intimate with them, their stomachs swell, experiencing an accelerated pregnancy that causes their stomachs to explode and alien offspring to come out. This is also a biblical reference to the sin of Adam and Eve that resulted to the pain experienced in child birth. This film uses the element of the uncanny in its depiction of Ross.

Freud (1912:01) argues that "the subject of the uncanny undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible- to all that arouses dread and creeping horror". We are tempted, so argues Freud (1912:02), "to conclude that what is uncanny is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar". He argues that "the better orientated in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it" (Freud 1912:02).

Quoting Jentsch, Freud (1912:05) observes that "in telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty, whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton; and to do it in such a way that his attention is not directly focused upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be urged to go

into the matter and clear it up immediately, since that, as we have said, would quickly dissipate the peculiar emotional effect of the thing".

Instead of employing the femme fatale, the film uses the homme fatale in its place. The homme fatale refers to a man who is seductive and dangerous, a womanizer (Gerekiz 2016:10). The primary feature that distinguishes a femme fatale from a homme fatale is sexual difference (Gerekiz 2016:04). Most hommes fatale rely on their social status and economic success to attract their victims (Gerekiz 2016:10). This could be seen in *Species 2* (1998). We see that Commander Ross is well known and loved by the American public. He uses his social status to attract his victims. In the scene where he is at the supermarket, he meets a woman who is attracted to him because of his popularity.

He flirts with the woman before forcefully dragging her out to rape her. In the first *Species* (1995), Sil as the femme fatale uses her good looks instead of her social status or economic success to attract her victims. In fact, she does not have these two qualities at all and her power is reduced to mere sexual and physical attributes. In this case, I want to agree with Gerekiz (2016) that this is a way to reinforce the patriarchal view that the masculine gender is superior to the feminine other. Gerekiz (2016) argues that fatality is addressed, described and treated differently if the carrier of that title is female rather than male. Gerekiz (2016:05) argues that the general tendency in films and literature has been to kill or punish femmes fatales and to justify or forgive their male counter parts.

It is almost as if this film is a response to my analysis of the first *Species* (1995). In my analysis of the first film, I have argued that the film reproduces the same gender constructions of its genre and that the construction of the femme fatale is misogynistic. However, *Species* 2 (1998) provides a shift in the construction of gender and power relations. We notice that a woman is no longer the chief enemy, a man is. In place of a fatal woman, we have a fatal man; a homme fatale. Commander Ross is a fatal man in *Species 2* (1998). It is almost as if he is placed in Sil's shoes. Just like Sil, his sexuality is dangerous and it is the one that causes death. He is also hunted down with the intention of destroying him. The shift is evident in the way female characters occupy good professions as their male counterpart. For instance, we see a female character as a doctor and astronaut in Laura Baker and Anne Sampas.

However, despite the film's efforts to shift from the traditional gender construction, it also, at the same degree, reinforces these gender constructions in question. Here, I speak of traditional gender constructions as those constructions that have presented women as objects

of the gaze and less powerful relative to their male counterpart. I admit that the usage of the term 'traditional' in this sense is problematic and seeks investigation. However, for the purpose of this paper, I shall proceed with this formulation of the term 'traditional'. I speak of these traditional gender constructions in a cinematic sense. The gazing power is not equally shared between characters in a sense that women are the objects of the gaze.

Given that the homme fatale's mission is purely in sexual terms, the film exploits the idea of Ross being sexually possessed as a way to make a man the bearer of the gaze. Commander Ross is not a protagonist in the film, but the camera films from his point of view. He gazes at women in a sexual way because he wants to be intimate with them. In this way, there is a huge possibility that male spectators may identify with this gaze. I use the term 'possibility' because I have discussed that the gaze can be negotiated; adopted by females and rejected by males. In this sense, there is an experience of Voyeuristic visual pleasure. Because the camera films from the point of view of the male character, male spectators may adopt this view. However, as I have discussed in the analysis of other films, this gaze can be negotiated.

There is death of both male and female characters in the film. However, the most crucial aspect to look at is the political manner in which bodies are treated in the film. Two male characters die in the film, Commander Ross' father and Anne Sampas' husband, as well as Ross himself. The rest are female victims. The female bodies are fully naked compared to male bodies. Of all the victims killed by these sexual encounters, the female characters are the only bodies that are fully naked and examined. We see the examination of Sampas' body and the woman found at the brothel. Sampas is also infected by alien DNA, but it also kills her after sexual intercourse.

For some scientific reason, she does not possess alien abilities like Commander Ross. Perhaps it is an ideological language implying that in the modern society, women can be given a certain amount of power, but they are not immune to the male dominated world. Her offspring is the only one to be killed immediately after birth. The film is in conversation about politics of the body. I want to discuss this politics further. It is clear that the female and male bodies are no treated the same. It seems that the feminine body can be easily interrogated and intruded. Unlike the feminine body, the masculine body is accorded respect and dignity. In this sense, the feminine body is treated as a biological object. Lehtinen (2014) argues that the feminine body should not be confused with any material or biological object or a body, which can be manipulated. Lehtinen (2014) argues that the body is not an object of

bio-sciences and should not be reduced to material resource for production or a mere correlate for the desiring or needy masculine body. However, in *Species 2* (1998), we see that the feminine body is reduced to such material resource and object of bio-science. We see this through the nakedness of the feminine body in the film and that same body being subject to laboratory scrutiny. The feminine body is treated as an object of bio-sciences in the film because it was the alien species that were created into a feminine body.

I want to refer to the scene of the rape. As Ross was attempting to rape a woman, Dr Laura Baker and Eve instruct Dennis Gamble and Press Lennox where to go to stop Ross from raping the woman. However, they fail to stop him. They went past the correct van to the incorrect one to find a couple having sex. Both vans were identical (black in colour). Perhaps this speaks to modern day struggles where men fail to stop the sexual abuse of women. They are aware of it but fail to make real effort to stop it. In this instance, the film is critical of misogyny itself. However, it also asks a question that causes hysteria and a fundamental political question; can men ignore their identity and carry the responsibility of fighting for the struggles of women? This question may be a cause of discomfort for men in feminism or at least those who describe themselves as feminists. In the beginning of this paper, I discussed the conflict of identity and lived experience as aspects that disqualify men from such a quest. I want to refer to the #MeToo movement to read this scene in terms of sexual assault.

Harris and Morris (2018:36) explain that the #MeToo movement "questions the power dynamics and cultural norms that allow harassment and abuse to take place". Harris and Morris (2018) explain that many of the efforts in the 1970s-1990s, before the #MeToo movement, focused on sexual harassment and assault at work. In 2017, the #MeToo circulated in social media after the news story of Harvey Weinstein's sexually harassing and assaulting women surfaced (Harris and Morris 2018:36). Harris and Morris (2018) explain that the #MeToo movement has been against sexual harassment and assault in the work place and as a result, has come to be classified, by some, as a workers' rights movement. According to Harris and Morris (2018), stories from the #MeToo movement have revealed that people are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse when they are in positions of economic dependence or in positions with little or no authority. I want to argue here that the femme fatale, in all of the films discussed in this paper, highlight much deeper concerns about gender power relations in society. The figure, because of its defying character, could be taken to represent the interests of this movement. In this paper, I have demonstrated how the figure challenges patriarchal regulation and silencing of the female. The #MeToo movement

is built around dismantling a culture of silence and systems that view women as sexual objects. It is for these reasons I argue that the movement and the femme fatale figure share the same desire.

Even though the female characters have high professions as the male characters, the male character, Ross, is celebrated more than the other astronauts. Gamble and Sampas were all part of the successful mission to Mars with Ross, but Ross is celebrated more than them. The film presents an issue of intersectionality which I think connects with American nationalism. It is important that I provide an understanding of intersectionality as a concept. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016) provide a more useful conception. Collins and Bilge (2016) explains that intersectionality refers to a way of "understanding and analysing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences". Collins and Bilge (2016) explain that "the events and conditions of social life, and the self are shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influential ways". When it comes to social inequality, so argue Collins and Bilge (2016), "people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other".

Gamble is a black man, but it seems that his blackness disqualifies him from being perceived as an American hero, like Ross. It also seems that Sampas' being female is what disqualifies her. With this observation, I want to argue that American nationalism, at this moment in the film, is highly based on gender and race.

Conclusion

I have attempted to unmask the manner in which gender has been constructed in cinema. From the constructions provided by the four films, it is quite evident that the femme fatale has been deployed to signify deeper fears about women with power. After closely reading the four films, I have come to the realization that the films try to shift away from the traditional gender constructions, but still reinforce the accepted patriarchal ideas about gender in cinema. It is important to notice how the femmes fatales in all four films are introduced, revealed and ended. Rachel is introduced as a widow and a murder suspect, but she is revealed as only a widow and not the murderer. There is a sense of uncertainty around her femme fatale status. She is a paranoid construction with a surplus and excess attached to her. In fact, her femme fatale status is highly dependent on the conclusions the audiences make. Because of this reliance on the audience, the film runs the risk of perpetuating misogyny on screen.

Throughout the film, the film encourages the spectators to gaze at Rachel with suspicion and with a male gaze. In the film, Louise also looks at Rachel with this suspicion, but the film creates an impression that she does so because she is jealous and wants Phillip's attention to herself. This is reinforced by its ending scene, where we see Louise and Phillip married with a child. In this sense, the film suggests that the female gaze, within the story, cannot be trusted. In terms of this idea of activity, I have insisted on interrogating the gender roles in the film. I have observed that men have domestic professions. We saw that Phillip has a man as a servant. However, despite this switching of men to the domestic, both Rachel and Louise do not appear to have a profession or a role at all. In this way, the female characters are fundamentally pushed to the private space and excluded from the public. I want to argue here that, by doing so, the film promotes a view that women are, by design, meant for the private space. What the film is actually conveying to the audience is that women have a choice to disrupt and pull themselves from this problematic space, but with a risk that the public space will not let them in; it rejects them. Fundamentally, the film demonstrates that when women escape the private for the public, they become something that is there but not there in the public.

Both Rachel and Louise do not have an identity in a sense that we only know them because of their relationships with the male characters. The focus of the film is more on Phillip than Rachel. hooks also observed this fact about Nola Darling, when reading *She's Gotta Have It*. She argued that the film was more about the male characters than Nola Darling herself. This

is the reason why Rachel does not seem to have an identity and Phillip has an identity. Despite the lack of identity, Rachel is not vacuous as hooks maintained that Nola Darling was; she is just not allowed to be who she really is. Rachel is ended through death. We also see this ending of a fatal woman in *Audition*. The construction of the femme fatale in *My Cousin Rachel* is misogynistic for this reason. It is misogynistic because it promotes a view that male reasoning is superior to female reasoning. On an ideological level, the femme fatale in the film may be taken to represent a protest against naming and the patriarchal construction of social behavior. Women are constructed in a way that reinforces the traditional gender constructions. They are presented as inactive, without agency and heavily concerned about the private life. Rachel tried to challenge this construction, but it led to her death.

In *Audition* , we see a shift in the way gender is constructed. Asami, as the femme fatale of the film, is introduced as an innocent and traditional woman fitting in the patriarchal Japanese society; a 'good' woman. She is revealed as a castration anxiety; a dangerous woman whose fatal status is confirmed by the torture of the male character. She is then ended through death. *Audition* employs the femme fatale to serve as a violent attack on patriarchy. The fatality of Asami is unquestionable. She attacks the gaze, challenging it by asking questions about the accepted gender constructions. The femme fatale in *Audition*, ideologically, represents that which refuses to be defined, to be named. She represents a violent attack on patriarchy, on a system of individualization. The fatal woman refuses attempts at subjectivisation and interpellation by acting contrary to what she is expected to act. Asami, in this case, represents male anxiety about women who refuse to perform the identity presented to them; that these women will lead to their downfall and social torture. It poses a question that causes hysteria. Employing Daniels' language, this anxiety has forced Aoyama and Yoshikawa to create the woman who does not conform to their standards as a paranoid construction, with a surplus and excess attached to her, labelled negatively to the point of a social fantasy: a bad woman, and not the marrying type.

Despite this resistance by the fatal woman, the film refuses to purify her intentions. Instead, it suggests that the femme fatale is the way she is because of her divided self; because of her childhood past and hatred for men. It seems that something has to be wrong about her to resist. She is presented as an obsessed torturer with a sense of madness attached to her. It is this madness; this other dark side of her that invalidates her resistance. In this way, the representation of the femme fatale is misogynistic. The film provides the fatale woman with agency and a monopoly on violence, but it does not allow her resistance to become a success.

The film has constructed gender in a sense that it has constructed a woman as powerful and men as weak, unmasking their vulnerability. Unlike *My Cousin Rachel*, *Audition* allows the fatal woman to have agency and allows her freedom with the gaze.

Species 2 provides a different construction of gender compared to the other films discussed in this paper. Instead of deploying the femme fatale, it deploys a homme fatale. We see that a man is placed in the shoes of the fatal woman. We see women starting to occupy professional roles outside the home. The homme fatale is introduced as the hero, revealed as the enemy and ended through death. Unlike all the films in scrutiny, this film uses gender to imagine the American nationalism. However, the male character is still the bearer of the gaze and he views women as his objects of desire. There is an element of exploitation cinema in this sense because the film exploits the idea of the male character being sexually possessed to make him the bearer of the gaze. Even though the gaze is not shared in the film, its gender constructions are not misogynistic. In fact, it attempts to shift from patriarchal gender constructions by placing women in positions of power and highlighting issues around body politics in terms of sexual assault and abuse.

Species reinforces the traditional gender constructions in a sense that it depicts women as the objects of the gaze and men as the bearers of the gaze. However, the gazing power is shared in a sense that the femme fatale is also allowed to gaze. The femme fatale is constructed as the enemy and her sexuality is dangerous that there is no cure for her; she has to die. She is treated as something to be looked at, interrogated and contained. In this way, the construction of the femme fatale is misogynistic. By intensely scrutinizing the four films, we have noticed that characters with fatality attached to their status have been killed; they have suffered the same fate. All films have constructed gender differently, but do have contain elements of misogyny in their constructions. I want to conclude that the femmes fatales presented by the films in question are paranoid constructions with a surplus and excess attached to them. The fatal status of the femmes fatales is attached to them not only because they cause harm to men, but because they are fundamentally fatal to the very order that empower men and oppress women. I want to suggest ways to challenge these misogynistic representations.

Young , when dealing with gender exploitation, argues that “as a group, women are subjected to specific forms of gender exploitation in which their energies and power are expended, often unnoticed and unacknowledged, usually to benefit men by releasing them for more important and creative work, enhancing their status or the environment around them, or

providing them with sexual or emotional service". This formulation of gender exploitation by Young can be used to read the femmes fatales in the films discussed by this paper. This can be done by particularly making reference to the gaze relations in the films. I want to proceed with the view that women are exploited because they are gazed at, dissected with an intention to interrogate, give pleasure to men and the same cannot be done for them. They do this without reward. It is in this spirit that I argue that the femme fatale uses her sexuality as a weapon to gain material things and destroy the male as a form of reward to themselve for the unrecognized effort they put in. I also want to argue that the destruction of the man by the femme fatale is a form of protest to challenge or disrupt the unequal looking relations.

Young also identifies marginalization as a form of oppression. She conceptualizes this marginalization as material deprivation. Earlier in the paper, using this formulation by Young, I suggested deprivation of agency in line with material deprivation. With this formulation, I want to argue that women are deprived of agency in cinema in a sense that they are made to be mere sexual objects of the male characters and rendered inactive. It is as if women, as characters, are there but not there, needed but not needed. It seems as if they are needed in the narrative to the extent that they can support the male. I want to argue that the femme fatale character, by displaying its fatality, provides a space to address this marginalization. It becomes a figure that challenges this marginalization by creating for herself a space for agency. By recognizing herself as fatal and actually performing the fatality, she becomes active in a sense that she is able to look and change looking relations, and also becomes the driver of the dramatic action.

The question may be asked, however, if agency is really something that individuals can be deprived of? If there is that possibility, then how is this achieved? In cinema, as I have demonstrated with the arguments advanced in this paper, as well as the reading of the four films, individuals can be deprived of agency or activity when their characters are rendered inactive. We see Sil, in *Species*, without an identity. The only thing we get to know about her is that she wants to mate. In this way, she could be seen as a marginal and oppressed because she is only needed when male destruction or sex is concerned. This is a problematic representation of women and to a certain degree, does advance ideas about women to the audience. Of course the advancement of these ideas does not mean that they will be accepted. Audiences bring with them different identities, ideas, cultures and politics. These are the major factors in deciding whether or not they accept the ideas advanced by the films they watch.

Today, as I have also demonstrated in my reading of the four films, cinema is trying to imagine a different image of a woman from the patriarchal images that we are given. We see most women in dominant film roles where they are given agency and power. However, the misogynistic representations still remain. Throughout a film, a female character may be powerful and active, but in the end, she will reinforce the patriarchal tale; she must fail in her attempts to 'act out of character' within the patriarchal cinematic frame. This can be seen in the four films analyzed in this paper. The women are equipped with the monopoly on violence, but they fail in their resistance against the system that oppresses them. This is partly because patriarchal cinema has established itself as a hegemonic force that requires a war of position to challenge.

I want to argue here that the channels or tools that oppress a group cannot be used to liberate that very same group. Lorde Audre puts it much clearer when she states that "the master's tools cannot be used to dismantle the master's house". The films discussed in this paper do, to a certain extent, employ the tropes of their genre to construct the fatale woman. This is a clear demonstration of using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. There is a need to rethink genre so that there can be a proper or at least diverse construction of gender in cinema. There has to be a counter cinema; a cinema with a different imagination to challenge patriarchal images. I want to argue that this cinema cannot be achieved unless the issue of the structural exclusion of women from the means of production is addressed.

Another thing I want to suggest is Chantel Mouffe's ideas on radical democratic thought. Mouffe argues that consensus should not be a goal, because consensus entails exclusion. She argues that rather than aiming for consensus, there should be a space to allow dissent. In Mouffe's terms, we should view those who disagree with us as legitimate adversaries rather than enemies. In order to understand this idea, one needs to approach it with the view that there exist, within any space, the multiplicity of varying or conflicting views, politics, interests and values. I want to argue, particularly making reference to men in feminism, that men who write about or advance or disagree with feminist ideas should be viewed less as enemies and more as legitimate adversaries. For feminism to work, it needs to speak to or change the minds of the very people that are against it; men. What needs to be done is less employing the master's tools and more ideological and disruptive work. At an ideological level, enough is not being done about the misogynistic representations of women in cinema. Both male and female spectators, as a result of hegemonic articulations of ideas and values of the dominant group, have come to accept the patriarchal representations of gender presented

to them through the cinema. Women suffer most than men. Some men suffer because of this patriarchal order because it places on them a burden of masculinity in a sense that ideas are spread about their expected gendered behavior. The only difference is that they benefit a great deal compared to other gender groups. In this paper, I speak more about men and women, and no other genders because of the nature of the characters I am dealing with; they are mostly women.

Young's five faces of oppression have helped us in the understanding of the position women occupy in cinema, particularly her ideas about cultural imperialism as a face of oppression. Young maintains that the dominant group's claim to universality can be challenged by an encounter with other groups. She argues that given that the dominant group's ideas, values and identity are widely disseminated as normal and common sense of all, they construct the differences which other groups have as lack and negation. This is how women and men have been presented in the four films discussed in this paper. Throughout the history of cinema, men have enjoyed this position as the dominant group and their ideas, and values have been widely disseminated that it has become common sense for cinema to project images according to their views and interests. The objectifying gaze is one example that can be employed to demonstrate this point. The male gaze has been widely disseminated as universal and the female look has been contained and disallowed.

In *My Cousin Rachel*, the female character is not allowed to gaze in the same way that the male characters gaze at her. However, she is critical of the gender relations in the film. Her behavior, her resistance is punished because it does not find place within the common sense framework of the hegemonic order. This is also the case with the femmes fatales present in *Audition*, *Species*. In a Marxist view, this has been achieved because of the material conditions both groups find themselves. Men have been the owners of the means of production in cinema. Women have not so much enjoyed this position because the social conditions and the patriarchal system have excluded them from such ownership. In all the films, power is defined by who can to what and to whom. It is defined by the roles the characters occupy professionally and socially.

To deal with the misogynistic representations of women in cinema, we first have to recognize patriarchal cinema as a hegemonic form that should be countered. In this sense, I suggest a counter-hegemonic approach to change the way women are represented. Less than the Gramscian notion of War of maneuver, the notion of War of position is appropriate in dealing

with patriarchal cinema. War of maneuver is less appropriate because it entails the use of force, which will be ineffective because patriarchal cinema is hegemonic; it has the support of the public or civil society; that is those who have succumbed to the male view. As such, what is really needed is a deployment of ideological strategies with which hegemonic power will be challenged and the civil society exposed to the 'truth'.

Employing the Marxist framework to this cinematic resistance, I want to argue that one of the first and fundamental steps in challenging this male centred cinema is to recognize the material conditions of various groups. We have to interrogate the political economy of cinema in terms of who owns the means of production and who does not; the ones with power and the ones without. Throughout history, women have been awarded little space and opportunity to own the means of production, which consequently led to the spreading of male-centred cinema and patriarchal cinema as a hegemonic form. If the ideological power of the patriarchal cinema is not properly challenged at an ideological level, then cinema for women will always entail struggle.

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