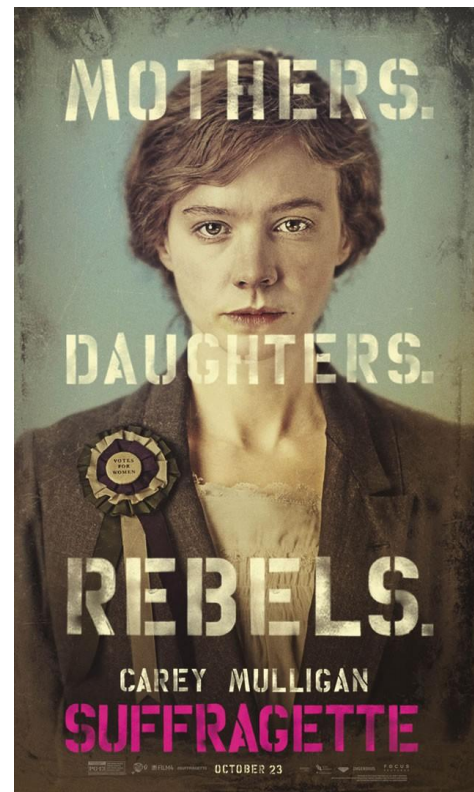


Feminist or Housewife?

The Negotiation of Gender Roles and Stereotypes in Two Contemporary British Films About Feminist Icons



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Abstract

This thesis examines how two films about feminist icons, *The Iron Lady* and *Suffragette*, negotiate between conventional and feminist ideas and structures. The research question this thesis answers is: In what ways do two contemporary British films about feminist icons negotiate between conventional and feminist views on gender roles and power relations? The theory derives from Marxist and Gramscian theory that explain that popular culture is the site of a negotiation between dominating and subversive ideologies and cultural values. This concept is also applied to gender issues and feminism, which are part of a social conflict. Films, as expressions of popular culture, are media of this negotiation. This thesis consists of two chapters. These chapters contain a visual and a narrative analysis respectively. The visual analysis explains how in the visuals of the films these films show a negotiation between conventional and feminist ideas on gender roles. The theory is based on Laura Mulvey's influential essay on psychoanalysis and feminist film theory. The narrative analysis does the same but looks at the narrative of the films. This chapter looks at conventional and feminist narrative structures, patriarchy, and stereotypes. The theory in this chapter is based on Lehman and Luhr's chapter on narrative structures in films. This thesis concludes that in the visuals the films express more conventional ideas rather than feminist ideas, but the narrative seems to be more of a struggle between both.

Keywords: feminism, film theory, Marxist theory, negotiation, male gaze, patriarchy

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Introduction

The Bechdel-Wallace test is explained by Alison Bechdel in one of her comics. It is a simple measure that shows that the film industry is still dominated by men. A film has to meet three conditions to pass the test: a film has to have at least two named female characters who have a dialogue or conversation and that conversation has to be about something other than a man (Agarwal et al. 830). Only about half of the films produced pass the test on all three conditions; it is of course a rather simplistic test, but it does show the imbalance of gender representation in films (Hickey).

Two films that pass the test are *The Iron Lady* (2011) and *Suffragette* (2015). These films are both directed and written by women (Phyllida Lloyd and Sarah Gavron respectively, both screenplays were written by Abi Morgan). *The Iron Lady* is about Margaret Thatcher's political years as MP, Education Secretary, and Prime Minister, and her life after that, which shows a different side of her as an older lady who suffers from dementia. The film shows her struggle to fit in with the Conservative Party as a woman and the turbulent years when she was Prime Minister during the Falklands War, the UK miners' strike, and the bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton when she stayed there with her husband and other members of the Conservative party.

The film *Suffragette* was released at the end of 2015. The film is about the fictional character Maud Watts, who, after she got caught up in a riot, was dragged into the Suffragette movement in 1912. She radicalises and becomes a militant member of the movement. Her husband bars her from their son and later disowns her. Two of the characters in the film are non-fictional: Emmeline Pankhurst (Meryl Streep) and Emily Davison (Natalie Press), who were both well-known suffragettes. Several events in the film are historical events, such as the militant actions including the bombing of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer's house and the death and funeral of Emily Davison.

Feminism is an aspect in both of these films, as they both have feminist icons of the 20th century as main characters. Feminist film theory has been influential on film studies since the 1970s, especially Laura Mulvey's essay on feminist film theory. Feminist theory could be said to have become one of the most important aspects of film studies, and is still relevant for analysing films (Chaudhuri 1). Maggie Humm wrote about feminism in film. She explains why it is important to apply feminist theories to films. She states that "all representations ... make gendered constructions of knowledge and subjectivity possible. Without representations we have no gender identities, and through representations we shape our gendered world" (vii). Films represent society, and with those representations people construct a gendered vision on society. This thesis tries to shed light on how those (feminist) icons and feminist ideas are represented in these films. The research question is: In what ways do two contemporary British films about feminist icons negotiate between conventional and feminist views on gender roles and power relations?

The Iron Lady and *Suffragette* are part of popular culture. It is hard to give a clear definition of what popular culture entails. John Storey tries to give a definition of popular culture. He states that "popular culture is in effect an empty conceptual category, one that can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the context of use" (1). Storey concludes that popular culture "only emerged following industrialisation and urbanisation" (12). Dominic Strinati argues that "popular culture can be defined descriptively as covering a specific set of artefacts" (xv). Strinati includes films in this set of artefacts (xiv). He states that popular culture is not bound to time or only one society, but also appears "within different groups in societies, and ... in different historical periods" (xiv).

Theoretical Framework

This thesis uses concepts of Marxist theory that are part of cultural theory. Chris Barker explains how Marxist theory has been influential on cultural studies (13). He states that in cultural studies Marxist theory is criticised but at the same time several aspects of Marxism are used to examine cultural structures (14). The theoretical framework this thesis incorporates largely derives from that theory, especially the concepts of negotiation and hegemony. Marxist theory explains the concepts of base and a superstructure and their place and influence on capitalist societies. Karl Marx talks about “relations of production” which in their totality form the “economic structure of society”, the “superstructure” derives from that economic structure of society (70). Those relations of production are the base in society. Samuel L. Becker states that “the base is the economic structure of society, while the superstructure is the state and all of the rest of the elements ... that derive from it” (70). The state, authorities, institutions, and the social standards that they embody together make the superstructure. The base is the fundament of the economy in societies, namely everything that has to do with production. As Marx argues: the base is the productive “foundation” in society from which the superstructure arises (70).

At this point hegemony and negotiation come into play. Raymond Williams explains that superstructural elements, such as “laws, constitutions, theories, [and] ideologies” are all expressions of and contribute to “the domination of a particular class” (134). Hegemony goes even further than superstructure according to Williams; for “most people” it is “the substance ... of common sense” and “the reality of social experience” (135). The concept of hegemony was introduced by Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony is maintained in society by the “dominant group,” either through “spontaneous consent” by the subordinate groups in society, or through coercion where “discipline” is enforced “on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively” (Gramsci 145). Tony Bennett argues that in contrast to earlier Marxist theorists,

Gramsci states that it is not so much about the domination over subaltern classes, but more about the “struggle for hegemony” (95).

Tony Bennett explains how this theory is applicable to popular culture studies. Hegemony works through the articulation of the subordinate culture, so it becomes a version of subordinate culture that is adapted, or negotiated, to the dominating culture (95). The sphere of popular culture is the place where the struggle or negotiation takes place; therefore it not only contains the dominating culture and ideologies, but also the “subordinate and oppositional cultural and ideological values” (96). It is important to realise that this struggle for hegemony in popular culture is not political as such, but rather “a consequence” of the values and ideologies it articulates (97). Negotiation is the reciprocity between the dominating, ruling ideologies and cultural values and those of the subordinate class that ultimately result in the hegemony of the former over the latter.

Judith Gerson and Kathy Peiss have applied the concept of negotiation to gender studies, to understand the gender roles and relations in society where men belong to the dominating class and women to the subordinate (321). Men and women actively negotiate, and these negotiations “either maintain or change structural boundaries” (323). There is however a “fundamental asymmetry,” which derives from the dominating position of men in society (323).

Dominic Strinati argues that hegemony both constructs and derives from “class and other social conflicts” (154). Feminism in society could be seen as a form of social conflict. Films, as expressions of popular culture, are media of the process of negotiation and the struggle for hegemony. Joanne Hollows states that “mainstream cinema” reproduces “our notions of what ‘woman’ signifies”, and it also reproduces “patriarchal ideology” (45). In this patriarchal ideology man is “the norm” and women is “the other” (45). There are films that tried to go against these notions, “feminist counter-cinema,” that might offer “non-patriarchal

modes of expression” (45-50). Laura Mulvey argues that “[p]atriarchal meanings cannot be removed, because the very structures and conventions which underpin mainstream cinema are patriarchal” (qtd. in Hollows 48). This means that all “mainstream” films have underlying patriarchal structures that cannot be avoided. She further states how in psychoanalysis of films popular cinema is often seen as “a site of domination rather than struggle”, but the audience “may produce diverse meanings and uses from both film texts and cinema-going” that “may not always be ‘complicit’ with patriarchy” (66). This again implies a struggle between different interpretations.

The negotiation between gender identities but also between feminists and patriarchal society is thus also visible in films. The two films this thesis examines are both history films. They represent iconic historical events and feminist movements, ideals, or figures that were important for women’s rights and/or gender equality. These films represent both dominating and subordinate ideologies, cultural values, and social classes.

Laura Mulvey connected psychoanalytical concepts to feminist film theory in her influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” In this essay she states that in cinema women signify “the male other” which is the result of phallogentric and patriarchal structures in society (44). Mulvey then relates this to cinema; she uses some of Freud’s concepts to explain that films satisfy “a primordial wish for pleasurable looking” (46). She explains that male characters are the representatives of power (48). These notions will be used in the analysis of the films to see how gender roles and power relations are expressed in *The Iron Lady* and *Suffragette*.

Structure

This thesis is divided in two chapters. The chapters both contain an analysis of the films. The first chapter is a visual analysis and the second is a narrative analysis. The chapters are then

also divided in several subthemes. The visual analysis covers the visuals, mise-en-scènes, and cinematography of the films. This chapter examines how several themes of psychoanalysis and women's cinema are depicted in the films and if the films represent conventional structures or rather feminist criticism. Concepts that are used include the male gaze, scopophilia, narcissism, fetishism, and voyeurism as explained by Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". The narrative analysis is about the events, characters, and dialogues in the films. This second chapter analyses how female characters are depicted in the narrative and how the stories of these films relate to and/or represent feminist ideas. Aspects that are examined are narrative patterns, such as dichotomy and polarisation, active-passive split, and other aspects that come forward in the narrative like the female voice, (sexual) violence, patriarchy, and stereotypes. Where chapter one deals with the visuals of the films, chapter two deals with the sound, so to say. Chapter two contains quoted dialogue to illustrate the arguments. Chapter one only considers the visuals so it does not contain film dialogue but descriptions of the scenes.

This thesis tries to show that the films were perhaps intended to show issues of gender inequality in society and could call for action or change, but are at the same time subject to inherent patriarchal structures in society and films. Although there may have been a positive change towards gender equality in society, with more and more debate on instances of gender inequality (gender pay gap, the small percentage of female CEOs, politicians, etc.) and feminism (what it means for men and women and what it entails nowadays), it seems that the imbalance in gender representations in films and other media remains. It is important that this imbalance is illustrated in order to be able to change it.

Chapter 1

This first chapter will cover the visual analysis of *The Iron Lady* and *Suffragette*. This analysis examines the visuals of the films, and finds out how the images show the negotiation between conventional and feminist views on gender roles and stereotypes and power relations. Chapter two further elaborates on female protagonists and their relation to feminist and/or traditional structures in films. The question this chapter answers is: in what ways do these films challenge gender stereotypes in the visuals of films, and where do they actually conform to these structures? In this context, the gender stereotypes are related to patriarchal structures, in which men are superior and women inferior.

This chapter applies critical concepts from feminist film theory to see how gender roles and stereotypical patterns are represented in the films. Amelia Jones states that images “not only narrativise power relations..., but bear these relations within their very formal structure and in their conditions of distribution” (3). So visuals can play an important part in either cultivating and perpetuating power relations, or challenge them. In this chapter several aspects of the visuals in films will be discussed. These will include “the gaze”, the representation of bodies in the films in ways of fetishism, and cinematography. This chapter also works with concepts such as the female gaze, scopophilia and narcissism. These themes will be further introduced below. Many of these concepts come from Laura Mulvey’s article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. This article has been influential on feminist film theory and has been interpreted by other feminist film theorists since it was published. This chapter applies these concepts to the films, so it looks for instances of for example the representation of the female body, or film techniques such as a high or low camera angle.

The first section explains Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze and how other theorists reacted to this theory. The three sections that follow further look into other aspects that draw on this theory, but an understanding of Mulvey’s concepts is necessary before this chapter

looks into other aspects. The last two sections do not use theory by Mulvey but other concepts that are related to the visuals in the films.

1.1 The Gaze

Laura Mulvey argues that in cinema men are the bearers of the look, while women are the image. Men are active, while women are passive. This stereotypical structure is found in mainstream cinema. The male character in the film is “the representative of power” (48). He transfers the look of the male spectator to the female character. Maggie Humm interprets Mulvey’s essay as an argument for saying that the gaze shapes cinema while the cinema is also created around the gaze, which is always male (17). John Berger argues that a difference between men and women is the way they are seen by others and by themselves. Men are “surveyors”; they “survey women before treating them” (37). At the same time women are both surveyors and the “surveyed”, she surveys herself so as to see how she will be surveyed by men (37). He claims: “Men act and women appear”; this defines the “relations between men and women; ... she turns herself into an object- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight” (38).

Anneke Smelik states that there are three kinds of cinematic gazes “that objectify the female character and make her into a spectacle” (10). These are the camera, the character, and the spectator. Maggie Humm expands on this, she explains how the camera looks at the female characters as “objects”; at the same time the men in the film are represented in such a way “to make their gaze powerful” (14). The film has a structure that allows the male spectator to identify with the camera and the male characters who gaze at the “women represented in fetishistic and stereotypical ways” (14). There is one silent scene in *The Iron Lady* which shows an explicitly stereotypical image of gender roles in which Margaret Thatcher wears an apron while calling her children and husband to come inside, but the

stereotype that is meant throughout this chapter is the way women are the objects of the male gaze.

Both *Suffragette* and *Iron Lady* are exceptions to the unspoken rule that the main characters are male, because in both films the main characters are women. Laura Mulvey later talked about the “female gaze”, so the gaze of important female characters in films, in her article “Afterthoughts on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)”. This was written some time after her first article, and is a reaction to criticism the first article received after it was published. This entailed criticism that she assumed the viewership is heterosexual and passive. Mulvey claims that films with active female characters, or female main characters are not necessary “feminist” films, the norm can still be male. She argues that the female gaze is the gaze of the female audience who identifies with masculinity, but this just results in a “phantasy [sic] of action” (78). Masculinity is the norm or convention, whereas femininity is either the “opposition” and the “passivity”, or the similarity (76). Mulvey further argues that “femininity leads to increasing repression of “the active”, so films offer “an identification with the active point of view”, and that activeness is what the female spectator “rediscovers” (71). This means that active female characters in films merely conform to the norm of masculinity. Mary Ann Doane has also written about the concept of a possible female gaze in cinema. She has remarked that apart from identifying with masculinity, or as she states, “adoption of the masculine position”, female spectators have two other options: “the masochism of over-identification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one’s own object of desire” (70). Doane argues that there is an “over presence of the image” for women, because they are the image (63). The female image in films is the object of desire for the spectator, so female spectators over-identify with that image, which is a narcissist process. The masochism is that they thus voluntarily become the object of the

male gaze. She sees her own image on screen, so in identifying herself with that image she makes herself her own object of desire.

1.2 Analysis

This analysis will look at how the above theory can be applied to the films. This analysis also introduces the concept of scopophilia that draws on theory by Jacques Lacan. Mulvey used his theory on the mirror phase to explain patterns in films.

As said before, in *Suffragette* and *The Iron Lady* the main characters are female. In *Suffragette* the narrative is told mostly from the point of view of Maud Watts, a young woman who is dragged into the suffragette movement. There are, however, several instances in *Suffragette* where the film changes to the perspective of Brendan Gleeson's character Inspector Steed or that of another male character. In the narrative Inspector Steed is brought in to investigate the suffragette movement and arrest Mrs. Pankhurst and the other rioting women. He is one of the main male characters in the film.

During the film, Maud and her son are "photographed". The film uses several film-freeze shots to illustrate this. This means that the film frame freezes and there are sounds of camera "clicks" so it seems like the viewer looks through a camera and takes the pictures himself. The next shot shows the photograph sitting in a stop bath and it turns out Inspector Steed and other male police agents took the photograph of Maud. They took more photographs of other women who they believe to be suffragettes. The spectator looks at those women through the eyes of male characters. The spectator sees the female characters being looked at by male characters and through the "photo camera".

Later, when Maud and several other suffragettes are in prison, there is an aerial shot of the female prisoners. Again, there are men taking photographs of the women. These scenes are examples of the three kinds of cinematic gazes mentioned above; the camera, the male

characters, and the spectator. The male characters represent authority, while the women are subject to their investigation.

Other instances of the representation of this power relation between the male and female characters in *Suffragette* is another scene in which Inspector Steed is looking at a group of suffragettes who are getting beaten, kicked, and whose clothes are ripped from their bodies by male police agents. He does nothing to prevent the women from getting hurt. Just before this, the women are also filmed from the perspective of Mr Lloyd George. It starts with him giving a short speech outside the Parliament where he explains that government will not grant the vote to women. The attending women start protesting and when he drives away there is a shot of the women shouting at him. These two men are looking at the women from their authoritative position. The image of men as the representatives of power is explained by Mulvey as a structure in cinema for the male spectator to identify himself with (48). This notion stems from a narcissist scopophilia (45). Scopophilia means “pleasure in looking”. Mulvey explains that the image of the male main protagonist is (mis)recognised by men. This derives from the mirror phase in childhood which was introduced by Jacques Lacan (Mulvey 46). This phase starts when children start to recognise themselves in the mirror. This image is recognised by the child “as the reflected body of the self”, but the image is actually misrecognised as superior, “an ideal ego” (46). The main male characters in films represent a reflection of the male spectator, and like the mirror phase of children, the male characters in films are recognised and identified with as the ideal ego. The male character thus also represents “the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror” (48).

There are more examples of the importance of the look of the male characters in *Suffragette*. When Inspector Steed is talking to Maud to convince her to instead work for him in his investigation, he explicitly asks her to look at him. Before that, the spectator sees Steed

looking intensely at Maud, the camera is positioned in such a way that Maud is specifically depicted as the object of Steed's gaze and the camera. There is also a scene in which the women look at themselves through the eyes of men. Their photographs have been posted in the newspapers, as they are deemed dangerous and "undesirable". Then the women are also stared at by other women. This also happens another time when Maud is kicked out of her house by her husband Sonny and her neighbours all stare at her.

The main perspective in *The Iron Lady* is that of Margaret Thatcher, and this stays the same throughout the film. There are however many instances in which the spectator takes the place of Margaret Thatcher as it were. The person on screen looks almost directly at the camera, and therefore also at the spectator in those situations, and they always occur with a male character who speaks to Thatcher. In some cases they also yell at her or at the spectator so it seems. The female character in the film is looked at and screamed at by male characters, and this way of filming allows the spectator to see this through the eyes of the female character. The male characters are filmed from a position where it looks like they are above the spectator and looking down, a powerful position. This is like Mulvey's arguments that women are passively looked at, while men are the "bearers of the look" and the active characters, and the concept of narcissist scopophilia. The male spectator can identify with an image of a superior, ideal ego. This way of positioning Margaret Thatcher opposite the male characters happens several times throughout the film. A re-occurring setting is when Margaret Thatcher is shown sitting at a (dinner) table. Most of the people at the tables are male. When they are asking her questions, it seems as though the spectator is addressed because the male characters are looking almost directly at the camera, again allowing the spectator to identify with Thatcher in the film. The men who are addressing her are almost always authoritative men: MPs; Ministers; American representatives, including the Secretary of State; and the top of the military. These scenes accentuate the majority of the number of men and the status of

those men by how it is filmed. Thatcher is filmed sitting down, the men standing around her. The camera is positioned among the men in the room, who are towering over and literally looking down on her (more on the camera angle later). This position among the other men allows the spectator to identify with the powerful male characters.

The point of view in these scenes alternates from the male characters to that of Thatcher. For example in one scene, when Thatcher discusses the course of action during the Falklands war with the military, the perspective changes several times. She is surrounded by all the men in the room who all stare at her. Either Thatcher appears alone on screen, or the group of male characters. This stresses how the female character is the “other” and the male characters the norm. These scenes combine the male gaze of the camera and the characters that are pointed towards the female character. The scenes show how the narcissism and masochism Mary Ann Doane described work in films. The female spectators have to put themselves in the position of the female characters, in which they remain passive as objects of the male gaze.

1.3 Fetishism and the Representation of Bodies

This section includes further theory by Mulvey that draws upon the concept of the male gaze. Mulvey argues that women in film are ambiguous for men. On the one hand they represent their desire, “the male gaze projects its fantasy on the female figure”, on the other hand they represent a threat to men, as she represents and remind men of their castration anxiety (47). Mulvey explains that this anxiety is triggered by women’s “lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure” (49). So the image of women, who are represented for the “enjoyment of men” threatens to “evoke the anxiety it originally signified” (49).

Anneke Smelik has remarked that the appearance of female characters in film is “ambiguous” (11). Female characters are attractive for the “male subject”, but at the same

time remind him of his “castration anxiety” (11). There are two ways to solve this threat of castration: through the narrative structure (see chapter two), or through fetishism in the visuals. Mulvey explains that this fetishism is the “complete disavowal of castration”, which is either “the substitution of fetish object”, or the transformation of women into something “reassuring rather than dangerous” (49). Peter Lehman and William Luhr define fetishism as the “overvaluation of a part or parts of a woman’s body” (270). Lehman and Luhr list ways how women’s bodies can be fragmented or emphasised, for example by close-up or by lighting (271). They also state that this fetishism in films is not necessarily sexual, but it is meant to “objectify their bodies for male visual pleasure” (271).

In *Suffragette* there are several scenes to which these concepts could be applied. In one scene some characters appear naked, when they are incarcerated and given prison clothing. Their bodies appear fragmented; some parts seem to have been emphasised with the lighting. This happens also later when Maud is once again in the interrogation room, and this time her chest appears to be emphasised.

Edith, as an apothecary, examines Mrs Withers when the police come to arrest Mrs. Withers. The policemen burst through the door to arrest her even though she is said to be treated. Her blouse is still open and the policemen can see her chest: she becomes a spectacle and an object of the look of the men while they look at her.

There are also several close-up shots of Maud’s and other female character’s hands: there is a close-up shot of Maud folding laundry, of her shaking hands when she tries to read the testimony, and when she is interrogated by Inspector Steed. Those last shots show a weak side of her; she is trembling when she talks with authoritarian men. Maud’s hands are also shown when she removes her wedding ring. This action goes against the conventions of that time, because she actively defies her husband this way.

Later it appears that Maud's back and arms are covered in burn scars, which she got from working in the laundry factory. She only has scars on her body, and not on her face. William Luhr explains how scars are different for men than for women. Men only appear stronger with scars; scars give them an empowered look, while women are judged for their beauty so scars means they are diminished in value (41). For women scars mean they are less desirable. Maud's scars serve as a constant reminder of the factory and the result of her place in the patriarchal society she lives in, where men are superior over women, and her lower class position.

The same is the case in *The Iron Lady* the. There are many close-up shots of Thatcher's hands, the film starts with it and ends with it. Shots of hands opening doors also occur frequently throughout the movie. The way hands appear in one scene, emphasises that she is the only woman in a room. In that scene Margaret Thatcher is the Secretary of Education, and the only female in the Cabinet. She is sitting at the Cabinet table during a meeting, and the hands are filmed in a panoramic shot, ending with Thatcher. Later, her hands are shown shaking after she had a confrontation with her Ministers and fumbling when she has to take an important decision. There are more examples of this throughout the films; hands are repeatedly represented as a fragmentation of the body.

Feet and shoes are also a re-occurring motif in this film. Throughout the film there are several shots of her heels: when she drives to the Palace of Westminster starting her first day as an MP, or when she walks through Parliament. There are several shots throughout the film in which Margaret Thatcher is seen standing among a crowd of men with a close-up shot of their shoes. This draws the eye to the fact that Parliament was dominated by male MPs, and that she does not blend in.

1.4 Cinematography

The next sections explain how in the cinematography of the films the negotiation between conventional and feminist structures is represented. The mise-en-scène also works towards this structure of authoritative men against subjective women in both *Suffragette* and *The Iron Lady*. Robert N. Kraft conducted several experiments. He examined how camera angle influences the perception of films. He argues that camera angle influences the way characters are evaluated by the spectator. If there is a high camera angle, the spectator looks down on the character, which is usually associated with a weak image whereas in case of a low camera angle, the character looks bigger, and the spectator looks up to the character (305).

In *Suffragette* there is a scene in which Maud has to read a testimony to Mr Lloyd George and other MPs. She is positioned in the middle of the screen, and the women are placed at the far end of the room, whereas the men all surround her. Lloyd George is on a platform and actually looks down on her. This shot emphasises the patriarchal structures in society of that time; by literally placing women opposite of men.

The cinematography of *The Iron Lady* works to emphasise how Margaret Thatcher stands out of the crowd in the film. There are a few scenes with an aerial view of her standing or walking surrounded by men. The colours also work to emphasise that difference. In one case, when in the narrative she is just elected MP, the characters are waiting to enter a room, and are filmed with a bird's eye shot. She wears a blue outfit and hat, which stands out from the crowd of men in grey around her. Another scene does the same: she wears a blue outfit as well, when she is surrounded by male journalists and police agents in black, brown, and grey. The scenes that were mentioned before, those of the shoes, are also ways of emphasising that she was the only woman in a male-dominated institution. The scene of her first day at Parliament is also a good example of this: it shows the men's and ladies' room. The men's

room is crowded, whereas the ladies' room is empty, and has an ironing board in the middle of the room. The ironing board works as a reinforcement of the gender stereotype.

The high camera angle that was mentioned before and the way Thatcher is filmed in silhouette help her to look more powerful. The high camera angle is visible in more scenes throughout *The Iron Lady*, but this time it works in favour of the female character, Margaret Thatcher. In the narrative, when Thatcher is giving speeches and campaigning for leader of the party, she is filmed from below, so the spectator looks up to her in a way. This gives her a more authoritative, powerful look.

1.5 Other

This section includes an idea that could not be included in the theory, but it is an example of the message *Suffragette* tries to convey. The film ends with authentic images of the funeral of Emily Wilding Davison. Then the film states some facts on the history of women's suffrage and when women ultimately were granted the right to vote in the UK. There is also a timeline of the past century to illustrate when different countries around the world introduced women's suffrage; it ends with Saudi Arabia in 2015. This shows how this film tries to draw attention to and raise the issue of gender inequality around the world. It works as a reminder to people that there are still countries where voting rights for women are not taken for granted.

1.6 Conclusion

So in what ways do these films challenge gender stereotyping structures in the imagery of films, and where do they actually conform to these structures? The films demonstrate instances of conventional structures. In both films there are several scenes in which the gaze of male character determines the perspective, and set the scene in a way, even if the protagonists of the films are female. The camera angle and the way the characters are

positioned in *The Iron Lady*, when they tower over Margaret Thatcher for example, repeatedly spotlight the combined gazes of the camera, characters, and the spectator. The same goes for *Suffragette*; a powerful male protagonist often determines the perspective of the narrative.

Both films also display an overvaluation of the fragmented female body. Throughout *The Iron Lady* and *Suffragette* there are images of hands, and in *The Iron Lady* there are even more close-up shots of Thatcher's high-heeled, colourful shoes in a sea of dark-coloured dress shoes. The same kind of image, but instead with a bird's eye shot is also a re-occurring image throughout *The Iron Lady*. This kind of cinematography works as a spotlight in a way; the female character is depicted as an opposite, the odd woman out. However in the cinematography of *The Iron Lady* there are also scene settings that are actually give her a more authoritative look. The low camera angle makes her look bigger and taller and therefore more important, but the same is also applicable for some male characters, members of the opposition in the narrative, when they are shown yelling at her with a head-on frontal shot.

The setting with Maud in the middle of the screen, surrounded by men, is an image that highlights the patriarchal structures in society. The scrolling text at the end of the film, with the timeline of when other countries gave the vote to women draws the attention to the history of the women's vote. It is an attempt to shed light on the inequality in countries, to call attention to the fact that the women's vote and women's rights are still an issue.

These films are negotiating between conventional structures and challenging structures in mainstream films. There are however more scenes that follow the patriarchal structures that are seen in films, than there are scenes that attempt to do away with or challenge these structures.

Chapter 2

This chapter contains the narrative analysis of *The Iron Lady* and *Suffragette*. The narrative of a film is the story that is told; it covers the characters and their relationships, the events, and the dialogues. The analysis will look at how in the narrative of the films the negotiation between conventional and feminist views on gender roles, stereotypes and power relations is represented. The question this chapter answers is: in what ways do these films challenge gender stereotypes in the narrative of the films, and where do they actually conform to these structures?

This chapter is divided in several sections, each examines how a different concept is established in the narrative of the films. The sections consider: dichotomy and polarisation, violence, punishing and saving, the female voice, and patriarchy and stereotypes. These concepts are all patterns and aspects that are represented in the narrative or are related to the dialogue and sound of the films. They were chosen because these explain the role of male and female characters and how those characters relate to each other in the narrative. They will be explained at the beginning of each section, and will then be applied to the films, to see how these concepts work in the films. The concepts mostly derive from feminist film theory and/or psychoanalysis. The first section is divided in subsections. There are several structures in films that are similar and they will be discussed separately.

2.1.1 Dichotomy and Polarisation

In their chapter about gender in *Thinking About Movies* Peter Lehman and William Luhr include the concepts of the mother/whore- and the good-girl/bad-girl dichotomies. These structures are visible in the narrative of many films. These dichotomies explain the role of the female characters in the narrative. Lehman and Luhr claim that in films women are “represented as either being good, dutiful mothers and wives or independent and sexual

beings” (266). They state that women are either represented as “mother figures” who are “under the protection of a man”, or as “whores in spirit” or profession (266). A female character who fits the latter description is “usually represented as dangerous to herself and/or men” (266). The good-girl/bad-girl structure is another example of a polarisation in the representations of female characters. Lehman and Luhr explain that this dichotomy is much alike the mother/whore split in representations. The good girl is “a heterosexual female in a monogamous relationship”, whereas the bad girl is “mentally unstable” or lives “outside the confines of a socially acceptable, safe relationship with a man” (267).

These polarisations in the representations of women are also visible in *Suffragette*. Maud Watts starts out as a nurturing mother who takes good care of her husband Sonny and their little boy, while also doing the household work and working at the launderette. Then she joins the suffragette movement and gradually starts questioning the conventional, patriarchal structures in society. She is arrested a few times and even has to go to prison. After she is brought home by a policeman, her husband Sonny bans her from their house and their son. Lehman and Luhr state that “‘good’ women who venture outside these confines [the socially acceptable relationship with a man] place themselves in danger” (267). This is what happens in the film. Maud started out as the good girl/mother, but when she starts to question her role and women’s roles in society and wants to become more independent, her husband disowns her and she is deemed dangerous, not only by him but also by her neighbours and the authorities. Lehman and Luhr also state that in films these dangerous women are placed either “under the safe control of a powerful man” or are punished “with death” (267). Maud does not die, but Emily Wilding Davison does. She becomes the martyr of their cause. It illustrates that women who are too independent are dangerous for themselves and others. Inspector Steed, the representative of the authorities, tries to control them. He also tries to place the women under the control of their husbands when the suffragettes are arrested again:

STEED. Don't bother arresting them, let their husbands deal with them. Drop them at their front doors (Gavron, *Suffragette*).

This makes it seem as though the suffragettes, and women in general, can only be "tamed" when they are under control of their husbands.

This polarisation is different in *The Iron Lady*. The film has an un-chronological order, it varies between the scenes about her earlier life and older life. In the scenes about her political years, Margaret Thatcher is represented as "career woman" from the start. She does not intend to become a housewife, she is very clear about that:

THATCHER. ... I will never be one of those women, Denis, who stay silent and pretty on the arm of her husband, or remote and alone in the kitchen doing the washing up for that matter. ... I cannot die washing up a tea cup. I mean it, Denis (Lloyd, *The Iron Lady*).

The film shows her struggle to find a place in a man's world. Her husband Denis is shown to be mostly supportive of her career choices, sometimes he struggles with it but she ultimately gets her way. The film has flashbacks from the present day in the film (2008) to her political years. The scenes of her life as a politician show her in her powerful, authoritative position as politician and Prime Minister. As a politician, she has to deal with many authoritative, powerful men. She is shown fighting for her position and when she confronts them, her male colleagues often come off worse, whereas her second role as mother and wife, is mostly seen in the scenes of the present day. On the one hand she is, to use Lehman and Luhr's words like the "bad girl", or an "aggressive career woman" (267). Thatcher's children are begging her to stay at home after she is elected MP, but she leaves them home to start her career as a politician. On the other hand she is represented as a housewife who fusses about her husband's clothes and in the end, in a present-day scene, she is ironically seen washing up a tea cup. To use Lehman and Luhr's terms again: the female character in *The Iron Lady*

transforms from bad girl to good girl, as opposed to *Suffragette*, in which the female character transforms from good girl to bad girl.

2.1.2 Active-Passive Split

These two polarisations in film structure are like the active/passive split that is also explained by Lehman and Luhr. Chapter one also talks about how men are more active than women in film, men are the bearers of the look, and women are the objects of that gaze. This active/passive split is not only seen in the visual structures of the films, but also in the narrative structures. Lehman and Luhr explain how in many films the male characters are more active than the female characters, and if they are active, they are “restricted to the spheres of romance and/or the family” (268).

In *The Iron Lady* Margaret Thatcher is both active and passive. As the protagonist, she sets the narrative, but within the narrative there are instances in which she acts passively and male characters take over the active role. When Thatcher is running for leader of the party, two of her colleagues agree to help her: Gordon Reece, a political strategist, and Airey Neave, her campaign manager. Reece and Neave try to convince her to actually run for Prime Minister as well, and to change her looks and voice to become more “authoritative”. Eventually, she is persuaded and agrees to let them help her:

THATCHER. What, Prime Minister? Oh no, no, no, in Britain? There will be no female Prime Minister, here, not in my lifetime no. And I told Airey, I don't expect to win the leadership, but I am going to run, just to shake up the party.

NEAVE. Respectfully Margaret, I disagree. If you want to change this party, lead it. If you want to change the country, lead it. What we are talking about here today is surface, what's crucial is that you hold your cause, and stay true to who you are. Never be anything other than yourself.

...

THATCHER. Gentlemen, I am in your hands ... (Lloyd, *The Iron Lady*).

She takes on a passive role. In the scene that follows she gets a haircut and voice coaching lessons. In the narrative it is accentuated that two male characters urge Thatcher to take a more active role, and they also determine how she should do that.

Suffragette also has a female protagonist. She starts out as a passive character, dependent on her husband and her job, but after she joins the suffragette movement she becomes more and more active, literally and figuratively. Her actions with the suffragettes are more and more militant and increase in number, but the way the men try to suppress her seems to only aggravate her determination to keep going with their cause.

Several times Sonny, Taylor, and Steed try to suppress her and stop her, but they are not able to. Although she is under investigation, she still continues with the militant actions. She also stands up for herself after her boss Norman Taylor threatens her, she smashes a hot iron on his hand and just walks away and even when her husband bans her from her house and son Maud does not stop. When Inspector Steed tries to convince her to betray her friends, she sends him a letter to explain her reasons:

MAUD V/O. ... I've thought about your offer, and I have to say no. You see I find I am a suffragette after all. You told me no one listens to girls like me. Well I can't have that anymore. All my life I've been respectful. Done what men told me. I know better now. I'm worth no more, no less than you. ... If the law says I can't see my son, I will fight to change that law. We are both foot soldiers in our own way. Both fighting for our cause. I won't betray mine. ... Yours sincerely, Maud Watts (Gavron, *Suffragette*).

2.2 Violence

In *The Cinema Book*, Anneke Smelik writes about female subjectivity. This term is related to the active and passive split. Subjectivity is the reproduction of narration; “each story derives its structure from the subject’s desire ...” (358). Narrative distributes “roles and differences, and thus power and positions” (358). So the narrative determines the power relations and the agency of the characters. Smelik further notices that it is believed that it is impossible for female characters to desire in the narrative (358). From this follows that desire is “bound up with violence against women”, the narrative reflects and sustains “social forms of oppression of women” (358). Maggie Humm argues that sexuality and specifically “male violence”, causes “women’s oppression” (6). She also states that “films reflect social power structures”, so women’s oppression deriving from social power structures is reflected in film (13).

Violence in films is a reflection of women’s oppression in society, as this kind of violence is most of the time directed at female characters. *Suffragette* contains scenes that depict the rape of female characters or other acts of violence to women by men. One scene shows the rape of the twelve-year-old Maggie by Norman Taylor. Later it becomes clear that he had been raping Maud as well. Maggie’s mother Violet Miller is also regularly abused by her husband. This kind of violence to women is repeated throughout the film. Male characters also often talk about it, so it becomes normalised:

MALE LAUNDRY WORKER 2. You [Sonny] should be keeping her under control!

LAUNDRY WORKER 2. Police are bringing these bitches to their knees, at least

Maud’ll be used to that.

Another example of this practice:

TAYLOR. Why don’t you tell Mr Miller that I’ll give you a clip ‘round the ear and knock some sense into you if he won’t (Gavron, *Suffragette*).

Maud and her fellow suffragettes are arrested after a protest escalates. It started out peacefully, but suddenly they are pushed, hit, kicked, and their clothes are ripped from their bodies. Another time Maud is on a hunger strike in prison. She is brutally force fed; Inspector Steed later even talks about this “barbaric treatment” of Maud and the other suffragettes, he argues that if one of them dies, they will have their martyr, and “Mrs Pankhurst will have won” (Gavron, *Suffragette*).

The Iron Lady also contains violent scenes. Throughout the film there are several scenes with archive footage of the riots against Margaret Thatcher and the Falklands War. There is also a scene on the bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton. Except for the bombing scenes, the violence in these scenes is all directed to the rioters themselves, rather than women. The bombing was directed at Margaret Thatcher and the Tory party members because of their policies rather than at Thatcher because of her gender. These scenes are therefore not relevant for this analysis.

2.3 Punishing and Saving

Chapter one talked about fetishism as a solution to the threat women pose for men, as representations and reminders of their castration anxiety. This threat can also be solved through the narrative structures in films. Anneke Smelik argues that in the narrative structure, “the female character has to be found guilty”, she will then be punished or saved and in the end she will either “die or marry” (11). Lehman and Luhr explain that although punishing and saving the female character seem like opposites, for the women in the films there is not much difference, as “both lead to eliminating their independent status” (269).

In the case of *Suffragette*, this notion also plays a part in the narrative. Maud, a threat to the male characters, is found guilty by both Sonny and Inspector Steed. She is punished by her husband who bans her out of her house and gives their son up for adoption. She also loses

her job after she hurts her boss, Norman Taylor. She is repeatedly locked up by Inspector Steed for her actions as a suffragette. The film ending is open; there are storylines that are not resolved. Maud does not die and does not marry again in the film. The concept of punishing or saving the female character works only partially in *Suffragette*. In the narrative structure of *Suffragette* the threat she posed is solved partly by means of Maud's punishment. She was not independent before; she mostly relied on her husband. The way she is banned is a punishment, but she is more independent than she was before.

Margaret Thatcher could also be seen as a threat to male characters in *The Iron Lady*, as a strong female character. It is, however, difficult to say if either of the two, a punishment or salvation, is present in the narrative structure. There is something to say for both. In the end, when she is forced to leave 10 Downing Street, it is both a punishment and salvation. A salvation because now she is back to the safe confines of her marriage. For Thatcher herself it is a punishment, because it means the loss of her powerful status as Prime Minister of Britain. The present day scenes in the film show her as an old lady who suffers from dementia. This emphasises the contrast with the present and the past.

2.4 Female Voice

Kaja Silverman has written about the concept of the female voice in films. She claims that "the female subject ... is associated with unreliable, thwarted, or acquiescent speech" (309). Shohini Chaudhuri wrote a chapter in response to Silverman. She states that "[w]omen's voices are invariably tied to bodily spectacle, ... for example, crying panting, or screaming" (45). Chaudhuri also talks about castration anxiety. She states that not only female bodies are "lacking", their voices as well (48). *Suffragette* contains multiple scenes of Maud and other female characters begging, crying, screaming, and other utterances that are tied to the "bodily

spectacle”, for example when they are arrested and manhandled in prison. Maud screams and begs Sonny to not let George go, but Sonny does not listen, she has no authority over him.

Margaret Thatcher’s voice is a reoccurring theme throughout *The Iron Lady*. Once a member of the opposition makes fun of her voice:

MP. Methinks the right honourable lady doth screech too much. And if she wants us to take her seriously, she must learn to calm down!

THATCHER. If the right honourable gentleman could perhaps attend more closely to what I’m saying rather than how I’m saying it, he may receive a valuable education in spite of himself (Lloyd, *The Iron Lady*).

Before this scene there is a shot of the MPs yelling at each other, and after this the MP continues to yell. It shows how he and the other men are “allowed” to lose their calm, but she is not. Later, Thatcher is running for leader of the party. She is instructed to get coaching lessons because her voice sounds too weak:

REECE. ... But the main thing is your voice: it’s too high and it has no authority.

NEAVE. “Methinks the lady doth screech too much”

REECE. People don’t want to be harangued by a woman, or hectored. Persuaded, yes.

That “oh, yes” at the end of the interview, that’s authoritative, that’s the voice of a leader (Lloyd, *The Iron Lady*).

Reece and Neave explicitly say that her voice “lacks”, it has no authority. She sounds too much like a woman and to be taken seriously she has to change her voice so she sounds more like a leader.

2.5 Patriarchy and Stereotypes

Patriarchy is a structure in society which Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan define as “the social system of masculine domination over women” (93). They discuss two forms of

patriarchy: private and public patriarchy. In private patriarchy women are “confined to the household sphere” and are limited in their participation in public life, whereas “[i]n public patriarchy, women are not excluded from public life but face inequality and discrimination within it, for example, in paid work” (95).

Stereotypes relate to these patriarchal structures in society. They are the result of the patriarchal structures in society. Pilcher and Whelehan explain gender stereotype “as a standardised and often pejorative idea or image held about an individual on the basis of their gender” (167). They claim that in the media women are often depicted “as housewives, or in jobs which were reflections of their domestic/caring role” (167). They further argue that studies showed that in films and media women are more likely to be represented as married or out of employment.

The Iron Lady show instances of public patriarchy and both breaks and perpetuates the gender stereotype of men working and women staying home to take care of the children. She is of course mostly shown in her political role as the first female Prime Minister in Britain, but is also depicted as a mother and housewife.

One scene shows how she struggles with her two roles as mother and politician. Margaret Thatcher leaves for her first day at Parliament. Her children are begging her not to go. Later this struggle is seen again when she announces she will run for leader of the party:

...

DENIS THATCHER. You're insufferable Margaret, you know that?

MARGARET THATCHER. Denis you married someone who is committed to public service, you knew that. And it is my duty...

DT. Don't call it duty, it's ambition that got you this far, ambition! And the rest of us, me, the children, we can all go to hell! ... (Lloyd, *The Iron Lady*).

It shows how her career negatively influences her family life. This kind of scene, but then with genders reversed would be less likely to occur in films. Women are more often depicted as supportive of their husbands who have important jobs than the other way around.

There are several instances that illustrate the public patriarchal structures. It is emphasised that Margaret Thatcher is struggling and “battling” to find a place in the male-dominated society and that she is the exception to the rule.

THATCHER. We will stand on principle or we will not stand at all.

HAIG. But Margaret, with all due respect, when one has been to war....

THATCHER. - With all due respect, sir, I have done battle every single day of my life, and many men have underestimated me before. This lot seems bound to do the same, but they will rue the day. Now, shall I be mother? Tea, Al, how do you take your tea? Black or white? (Lloyd, *The Iron Lady*)

In the beginning of that last line she is talking about her struggle as a woman fighting her way up in government. She first reacts to his sexist comment, to then pour him tea. She both challenges the stereotype and reinforces it in this scene. It emphasises her two roles as tough career woman and that of mother and housewife. Another scene also emphasises her “battle”. In this scene Thatcher wants to impose a controversial law in Britain. She tries to convince her ministers to agree to this. Her statement also accentuates her position as a woman in a man’s world:

... your problem, for some of you, is that you haven’t got the courage for this fight. You haven’t had to fight hard for anything, it’s all been given to you. And you feel guilty about it. Well, may I say, on behalf of those who have had to fight their way up, and who don’t feel guilty about it: We resent those slackers ... (Lloyd, *The Iron Lady*).

This statement makes her look tough, but she distances herself from the men in the room.

Thatcher reminds them of her unique position.

Suffragette starts with several sexist quotes from politicians:

POLITICIAN 1. Women do not have the calmness of temperament or the balance of mind, to exercise judgment in political affairs.

POLITICIAN 2. If we allow women to vote, it will mean the loss of social structure. Women are well represented by their father, brothers, husbands.

POLITICIAN 3. Once the vote is given it would be impossible to stop at this. Women would then be demanding the right of becoming MPs, cabinet ministers, judges (Gavron, *Suffragette*).

They serve as an introduction to the story and to explain the story of the suffragettes, but also to emphasise the position of women in the film. These quotations are good examples of how this film represents the patriarchal structures at that time. There are many more instances in *Suffragette* where this is the case. Several scenes illustrate the dependence of women on their male relatives and husbands. When Maud and several other suffragettes are arrested, the husband of Alice, the wife of MP Benedict Haughton, bails Alice out. She wants to help the other women too, but he will not let her:

ALICE. Twelve pounds to release all the women. Please sign it. It's my money. My money.

BENEDICT. But you're my wife. And you'll act like a wife. I have humoured you Alice, thus far but... this is an outrage (Gavron, *Suffragette*).

Maud gradually becomes aware of this imbalance in society, which is perhaps also why she radicalises. After a second arrest Sonny kicks her out their house because he feels he cannot control her anymore. Maud does not behave like he expects her to, like women would have done normally.

SONNY. I took you on, Maud. I thought I could straighten you out.

MAUD. What if you don't need to?

SONNY. You're a mother, Maud. You're a wife. My wife. That's what you're meant to be.

MAUD. I'm not just that any more-

...

SONNY. Get out! (Gavron, *Suffragette*)

Later in the film, Sonny will not let Maud see their son George. She has no right to see him even though she is his mother because according to the law George belongs to Sonny.

MAUD. Let me see him. Please.

SONNY. Trust you with him? After what you did to Taylor?

MAUD. ... George belongs with me.

SONNY. The law says he's mine, Maud. Where he belongs is up to me.

That's the law (Gavron, *Suffragette*).

Sonny later gives up George for adoption because he cannot take care of him by himself. He also told George that Maud "is not well in the head" to explain why Maud is not coming home. After this she is only more determined that she has to fight for her rights.

There are many other scenes that also illustrate these structures and that stress the inferior position of women in relation to men in these films and society. Other than these conventional structures, the film also has scenes that actually go against those structures. Edith Ellyn basically owns her husband's apothecary, and she does the treatments and diagnoses. Her mother fought for her to be educated. Her husband supports her as a suffragette and for that reason was arrested for "abetting his wife's activities". This shows how men were held responsible for their wife's activities, and that women had no rights of their own.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter answers the question: in what ways do these films challenge gender stereotypes in the narrative of the films, and where do they actually conform to these structures? It seems that conventional structures such as the mother/whore dichotomy and the active/passive split could be applied to the narrative structure of both films. Thatcher and Maud are both mothers, but are at some point punished for their behaviour. They are both also relatively active in the narrative, in some ways more than others.

Suffragette contains several scenes that depict violence directed to the female characters. These scenes reflect the social power structure where women are oppressed. These scenes and the film perpetuate these power structures this way.

A conventional narrative structure where female characters are either punished or saved also seems to be only partly applicable to both films. Maud is punished by her husband and the authorities, but after that her position does not change. The same is the case with *The Iron Lady*, as for Thatcher the solution can be said to be both a punishment and a salvation.

The female voice and how it is described by Silverman and Chaudhuri are depicted in both films. The films both only depict women in this “weak” position. In the case of *The Iron Lady* it is actually a recurring motif in the film. The description also fits *Suffragette*, which has many scenes where the female voice is shown to be vulnerable and lacking when men are harassing them.

The Iron Lady goes against the stereotypical gender roles, but also has some scenes that perpetuate them, especially the scenes about the older Margaret Thatcher. The patriarchal structures in society are emphasised throughout the film, but the film also shows her fight to challenge those structures. The same goes for *Suffragette*. The patriarchal structures are depicted throughout the film, but the problems following from that and the fight against it as well. The film starts out to perpetuate the gender roles and stereotypical image of husbands

and wives, but later in the film Maud's actions result in the film deviating from the standard gender roles.

These films both negotiate between conventional narrative structures and structures that challenge them. There is more variation in the extent those different structures explained in the subsections challenge stereotypes and mainstream narrative.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the representation of genders in two films to look into the (in)equality in the way men and women are represented in films. The theoretical framework was based on the theories of negotiation based on work by Gramsci and Marx. This was applied to two expressions of popular culture: *The Iron Lady* and *Suffragette*. The question this thesis set out to answer was: in what ways do two contemporary British films about feminist icons negotiate between conventional and feminist views on gender roles and power relations? To answer this question, this thesis conducted two analyses.

Cinematographically and visually, both films seem to display more conventional ideas than in the narratives in which they depict more subversive ideas. The conventional ideas that women are inferior to men were more present in the visuals than in the narrative.

Psychoanalytical concepts that demonstrate the conventional structures in films, such as the male gaze and fetishism, and in other cinematographical patterns were clearly present in both films. *The Iron Lady* seems to convey more feminist ideas in its visual structures as well; at least more than *Suffragette*. The main character is often presented as standing out from the male crowd. *Suffragette* has more conventional patterns, the male gaze was present throughout the whole film, and although the protagonist is female, one of the male character often determines from which perspective the story is shown. Although in the editing of the begin- and closing credits the film asks attention for women's right issues, the film seems to convey that feminist message only superficially, as the visuals of the film mostly consist of conventional visual structures.

The narratives have more variation when it comes to the negotiation of feminist and conventional ideas. There are examples of structures that are clearly conventional but also examples that go against the mainstream in both films. The theories by Lehman and Luhr that explain mainstream narrative structures, the dichotomy and active/passive split, are not fully

applicable to both films, so in that respect they could be said to be more feminist. The representation of the female voice in both films is, in contrast to the Lehman and Luhr theories a conventional representation of women in films. The same can be said for the representation of violence against women in *Suffragette*. The patriarchal structures and the gender roles and stereotypes that go with that are in themselves a negotiation of feminist and mainstream representation of men and women, as in some ways the films perpetuate the stereotypes but also challenge them.

Overall, the method of analysing the films has proven to be useful, with results that were relevant to answer the question. The results of the analyses were valuable and show how gender roles work in the films. The theories that were used were most of the time applicable to both or one of the two films. Some theory used in this thesis, such as Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", that certainly was groundbreaking, is already a few decades old. That essay is cited in almost every article about psychoanalysis that was used in this thesis, proof of its influence on film theory. The article has been criticised ever since it was published, however. Mulvey answered to that criticism in later articles, and further explains her theory in a follow-up article. There are more aspects of feminist film theory that could have been applied to the films, but this thesis aimed to look at the concepts that are part of the bigger debate and not go in too much, unnecessarily complicated details.

The main topic of this thesis is gender structures in films. While watching these films, there were also other topics and issues that were notable throughout these films which could be further researched in the future. Some of these structures also came forward in the theory that was used for this thesis, for example racial issues in films. The books by Jones, Lehman and Luhr, and *The Cinema Book* by Cook also contain theories on race. Several film reviews of *Suffragette* put forward that there is not one character portrayed by an actor or actress of colour throughout the film. The actresses who portrayed Maud, Edith, and Emmeline

Pankhurst were criticised when they wore t-shirts that said “I’d rather be a rebel than a slave” during a promotional campaign for the film. Another possible topic could be class. *The Iron Lady* and *Suffragette* both touch upon issues with class. The protagonists both belong to a different class. Maud is a lower class laundry worker and Margaret Thatcher was born in a middle class family. The relationship between class and gender issues as represented in films could be something to look into in more detail.

Apart from further research into both these films, the same theory that has been used in this thesis and the analytical approach could be applied to other films as well. In order to structurally change the way women are represented in films, it also needs to be researched to see how and why it happens. Films and other cultural expressions as mirrors of society can influence how people see the world and therefore also change it.

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