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Paper 2

### Inequality of power in gender issues

Power evokes discrimination and inequality. It's widely accepted that power should be an essential element of our society that has impacted many lives, should it be of humans or any other creatures. It can be observed between the social hierarchies which have formed centuries ago and still not abandoned completely as instruments for discrimination between people. For issues like these, films thrive to demonstrate the societal factors to either incite changes in them or to portray them in its realistic form so that people were encouraged to bring changes into societies. With that in mind, the films during a time of turmoil were basically a tool for communicating with people, and urging them to look around at the existing factors in their society. For this essay, we'll discuss how the special time of post-war enlightenment focused on the theme of gender power to present the audience with the consequences of such factors in societies.

Such phenomenon had been showed in the Polish experimental film *Knife in the Water* which drew the patriarchal power existing widely in societies. The film told a story of two men in all kinds of conflicts with each other for the lady's 'approval'. And even though it appeared like the lady was in charge of the final decision, such power conflicts regardless of the female character's feelings was still a reflection of the existing male chauvinism in societies.

A similar portrayal, but in a more explicit way, had been undertaken in the film *A Woman Alone* where the filmmakers have focussed on the story of a woman named *Irena* who lives alone with her eight-year-old son. She had the divorce with her first drunken husband, even realizing that she would very probably need a male support who could attempt to fulfil

the role in a complete family for the child and would take care of both of them. She had faced the society's hatred for not only her gender, but also her sexual choices (from neighbours and her ex), her desire of survival and her efforts to fight for the family. This film also focused on domestic abuse and marital violence. In terms of this essay, we are attempting to draw a comparison between the power relationships that both the films *Knife in the water* and *A Woman Alone* have displayed through their characters, especially the dynamics of power demonstration based on gender that had been depicted through the female characters. We are arguing about a harsh reality, that the gender issues as a woman had been subjected to the chauvinism of men in societies in both the films.

### *Stereotypical female character*



*[Knife in the Water] Stereotypical female image of someone who did not know driving*

The film *Knife in the Water* began story with a man named *Andrzej* and a woman named *Krystyna*. This couple had been experiencing emotional exhaustion and fatigue in their marriage, displayed by details such as their awkward talk in the car and their division in opinions. In this particular scene, they were going on an overnight excursion to a nearby lake on their car driven by Krystyna. However, during this trip, she was being criticised by her

husband for the bad driving skill, a stable acknowledgement against women which is popular even today. This very scene was a portrayal of the stereotypical opinion that ‘females were not good drivers’. They were depicted as being lack of good automotive behaviour and therefore, tending to end up on the wrong side of the road or even stuck in accidents. This image in the film was taken when Andrzej criticised Krystyna for not being able to drive well, even though we didn’t catch any evidence supporting so. The element of power inequality was evident in the way he managed to take charge of the car and let her sit in the passenger side of the vehicle. Her silence and natural obedience implied this as being a frequent and acceptable order.



*[A Woman Alone] Mother and her son*

The film *A Woman Alone* focused on the story of a single mother named *Irena*, a divorcee, and her eight-year-old child. They hardly managed to make ends meet. After getting divorced, she was being treated with contempt in society as she lived without her husband. People living nearby tried to create problems in her life by stealing fuses, hiding water pumps and other disturbance. All such contemptuous behaviour against her was due to the fact that societies have formed the stereotypical notion that a woman was supposed to be dependent on her husband financially. If she stayed alone without a male figure in her house, people started spreading rumours about her sexual lives. However, this stereotypical female figure of a woman relying on her man had been discarded by the character of *Irena* who despite all the

grievances that people held towards her, never tried to back down or give up fighting. She spoke out without hesitation when her boy was misunderstood and defamed in the school, in front of a group of arrogant parents. She also refused to leave the government building even being dragged out by force. Her fight against the power was explicit and fierce.

While comparing the characters of *Krystyna* and *Irena*, the differences in power and strength associated with the characters were evident. While facing men's pressure, *Krystyna* easily gave up driving after receiving criticism from her husband, *Irena* decided to fight with her husband and chose to be a divorcee. Irena chose to make her own living and to keep on living among the people who despised her and spread rumours about her family without paying any heed to them.

### *The Male Gaze*



*The male gaze that women have been subjected to in the past*

Moving on to the very next scene, another factor of power had been manifested into the plot where the element of the male gaze was being portrayed. While on their journey, they nearly crashed the car as a hitchhiker comes in front of the vehicle. The husband got angry at

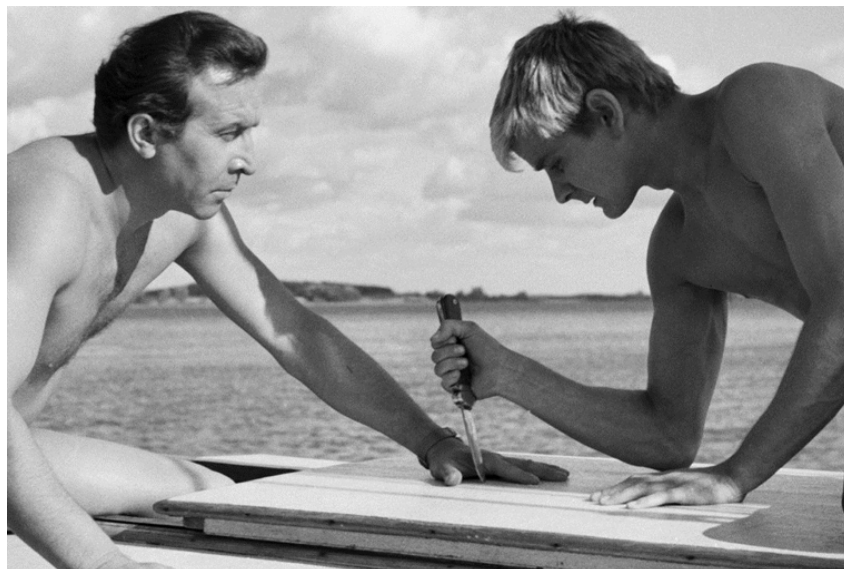
the nineteen-year-old hitchhiker but decided to prove a point in front of his wife and so convinced the boy to go with them for the trip. The male gaze was deployed in the scene when the hitchhiker was attracted to her beauty and therefore kept on staring at her secretly. This scene alongside with the shot angle proved the male gaze that women have been facing for so long in the past and even in today's world that they had to live with being subjected to such incautious actions or thoughts their whole life. This power of male chauvinism in the theme of male gaze revealed how most men acted as sexual predator towards the feminine gender and tended to stare at their bodies without considering how uncomfortable the female might be, as Finzsch argued. In the above scene, *Krystyna* had changed into a skimpy bikini as soon as the group got into the boat. The male gaze was drawn to her as the hiker being always aware of her whereabouts. It was visible from the angles where the scene has been shot that the hiker was catching every glimpse of her and also sneaked a peek while she changed. This scene focused on the sexual appeal that the feminine gender had always been associated with. In the past women had been associated with beauty, and the sexual appeal were expected to dress up for wooing men to marry them, as Schur mentioned. They had no identity of their own roles, and were hardly permitted the liberty to dress up for their personal image in society. By stirring erotic attributes in this scene, the filmmakers were trying to show how uncomfortable a woman would feel in her day to day lives as they are being predated upon.

In the film *A Woman Alone*, *Irena* was subjected to the male gaze because of the fact that she was living alone without a man in her family who could take care of her dignity. She was viewed by people as a pathetic figure with the belief that a woman without a male figure was easy to be kept sexual relations with. This was why even though *Irena* was dealing with the problems created by her neighbours without triggering big mess, she still felt compelled to get into close contact with a man in order to take care of her and her child. She found it necessary for her child to have a 'fatherhood' who would teach him good and bad habits (like

the drawing) and also found it necessary for her to have a man stand by her. She happily shared the new-bought television just like what a wife would do to her husband in a real family, only to make the relationship more pleasant and stable.

Both the characters *Krystyna* and *Irena* have been subjected to the male gaze as women had been during the past times. This was widely acknowledged and rebelled during the time the film was made. Women had always been viewed as sexual objects who were always dependent on men. This notion had been demonstrated by both the filmmakers to give a realistic portrayal of how this mentality affected the living of women. The films showed how women were forced to settle with different solutions that they might not agree with themselves just like how *Irena* did in the film. Even though she was happy with her son alone after divorcing her husband, she felt it necessary to marry someone to get rid of societal taunts and rumours. *Krystyna* however, chose not to acknowledge this male gaze on her since she was dominated by the power of both the male characters that her voice and her actions get diluted.

### *Masculine power*



### *The antagonism between both men to be the 'alpha' person*

In the above scene, the two men were in a knife game where both the male characters were in an awkward conflict to show their superiority to each other for *Krystyna*. In this game,

the element of power had been thickly deployed since both the two male characters were involved in the game to show off their power. In the game, the young man stabbed a knife in the space between the outstretched fingers of *Andrzej*. The theme of male chauvinistic power had been demonstrated in this scene through the way both the male characters were obsessed with the conflicts for *Krystyna* and showing off their ego without even considering what she actually wanted. They were in the conflict to demonstrate their power to the female presence in the boat, yet her independent personality had been negligible to them. They only focused on showing their power to one another for being the ‘alpha’ male in the boat.



In the film *A Woman Alone*, masculine power was shown in the sense that society asserted the power to the importance of male in the life of a woman. Even though *Irena* did not feel the need to stay with a man after breaking up her marriage with her drunken husband, the conditions that had been messed up in her life had pushed her towards the decision of marriage again. She initially found herself ‘nothing’ to be told about, despite her story being adventurous in fact. She came to realize the need to have a romantic relationship with someone who could

listen to her. But the way she got rid of discrimination against both her and her male partner with disability was yet to 'leave the country'. Such masculine power inserted into a woman's life had been reflected in the life of *Irena* by force from society, not by her own character.

When both the films were compared, it is evident that the masculine power played both a vital role in *Knife in the Water* and *A Woman Alone*. The former one talked more about the explicit fight, and how the lady went through these silently. The later one gave more implications about the society, but the lady had a more fierce fight. Both the films showed how masculine power embedded an dominant connotation into the society, despite the fact that doing so would deprive women of their own independence in their lives. Such power inequality still exists today, and were again written into the scripts.

#### Reference:

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