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**Postfeminism and
Neoliberalism. A critical
discourse analysis of Gender
Mainstreaming**

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I. A Hundred-Year-Old Story

As I begin my work on the current situation of Feminism and gender equality, I cannot help but stop for a moment and ponder how far this story, the story of the empowerment of women, has come. At the time of my writing, for the first time in history a woman has been declared the presumptive presidential nominee of the American Democratic Party. The country I currently live in, Germany, has been ruled by a woman for the past eleven years. Courses at my university are regularly attended by at least as many girls as boys. If I were to tell this to any woman or man who lived a hundred years ago, I am pretty sure she or he would have not believed me. As it turns out, what many would have regarded as impossible actually became reality.

Without indulging any further in the sentimentality of this moment, it is still important to acknowledge how far the process of the emancipation of women has come. Over the last hundred years, women have gained the right to vote in every single country on the planet (with exclusion of the Vatican City), the last being Saudi Arabian women last year. Perhaps the most salient document in the context of women's rights is the United Nations' "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" (CEDAW), which was signed by 99 countries in December 1979 and became effective in September 1981. In it, member states pledge to take appropriate measures to guarantee women the same fundamental rights as men and to eliminate any form of discrimination against women.

A number of other fundamental rights, such as the right to own land and property and the right to education, are formally secured by law in a range of countries, being highly industrialized ones at the forefront. Indeed, in the so-called "West" women can claim to have obtained the exact same rights and opportunities as men, and that inequality between the sexes has been thus overcome. As Bryson reminds us,

"[n]o longer can we be refused employment or promotion just because we are women, no longer can the bank refuse to give us a loan unless we can find a man who can act as guarantor, no longer can schools refuse to let girls study physics or technology. Previous generations fought for these rights and won" (2007: 39).

In other parts of the world, big international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), national governments and smaller, grass-root Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are working to find appropriate methods to raise awareness on the still-existing incidents of discrimination against women, to investigate the causes and to cure the symptoms. Phenomena that have received increased attention in the past few years are gender-based violence and sexual harassment, child marriage and what is known as the "gender pay gap",

defined as “the difference on average gross hourly wage between women and men across the economy” (European Commission 2015).

More and more is being done today to increase awareness on the matter of female discrimination, to discuss its consequences and to find solutions: data are collected, conferences are held, organizations are founded, treaties are signed, speeches are broadcast, messages are tweeted... people are talking more about the topic of women empowerment as ever before. The best evidence to exemplify this new tendency is the establishment, in 2010, of the “United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” (simply known as UN Women), created to unite the various efforts of numerous UN agencies towards female empowerment into one coordinating instance. But not only in the UN’s dedicated branch, in other UN organs and committees as well, and also within the European Union (EU) and a wide number of smaller organisations, the tendency to focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women, or to combine it with other debates (on human rights, or protection of the environment, or sustainable growth, just to name a few), seems to have boomed in the past ten to twenty years¹.

A discourse, whose birth-hour might be traced back to the upshots of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution², has evolved over the past hundred years and has recently gained increasing momentum. Without losing sight of the development it has undergone, from the early Women’s Suffrage movement to the Feminist movement up until today, the main point of interest in this paper is the turn that has characterized this particular narrative in the past ten to fifteen years. In fact, when looking closely at the arguments in support of gender equality, it is impossible not to notice that something in the way women empowerment is being pursued has changed: not only more people from more backgrounds have started talking about it, but new grounds and motives have been brought to the table and a fresh narrative of gender equality is unravelling under our eyes.

This new strategy, now practiced by various institutions and organizations (including the UN and the EU, as I shall show in the upcoming chapters), bears the name “Gender Mainstreaming” and has become increasingly popular in the last few years.

¹ An illustrative example on this matter is that, in the UN Millennium Development Goals, the promotion of “Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women” had its own goal, whereas in the Sustainable Development Goals, to be met by 2030, not only does gender equality have its own goal again, but in 10 out of 17 goals, equality and women’s empowerment are mentioned in the targets as a key element to obtain that respective goal (especially in the fields of Poverty Eradication, Food Security, Quality Education and Economic Growth). “Gender-sensitive development strategies” are considered indispensable in the various efforts of the UN (United Nations 2015).

² I am thinking of the trailblazing works of Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791) and Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

According to the definition given by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1997,

“Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality” (UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs 1997: 2).

This method many different institutions rely on in their pursuit of gender equality is a top-down approach, which comprises a wide range of measures, from reformulating the goals of one’s organization to relying on the expertise of “gender experts” to expose gender-based discrimination on the workplace, from special gender trainings and workshops for employees aimed at uncovering the mechanisms of gender-stereotyping to cost-benefit-analyses carried out taking gender variables into account, just to name a few (Stiegler 2000).

While many have welcomed Gender Mainstreaming as a fresh and positive approach to women’s empowerment, there is another camp that has proved to be very sceptical of the new tactic, their main argument being that Gender Mainstreaming is nothing more than a neoliberal invention, crafted and promoted with the single aim to mobilize as large a workforce as possible and to exploit the “human resources” available to a country or an institution (see Bereswill 2006, Klinger 2014, Knapp 2001, Pühl 2003, Schunter-Kleemann 2001, and Wetterer 2003). Although most authors have analysed Gender Mainstreaming as a tactic deployed by the EU (of particular interest here are contributions by Annesley 2007, Hofbauer/Ludwig 2006, and Lewis 2001), there is no doubt that very similar claims can be made of the type of Gender Mainstreaming practiced by the UN or any other national and international organization. These authors see Gender Mainstreaming as yet another governmental measure resulting from and to be understood in the light of the processes of rationalisation, “subjectification”, economization and professionalization that accompany the rise of Neoliberalism.

Even if not explicitly concerned with Gender Mainstreaming itself, the works of Fraser (2006, 2009) have also expressed their misgivings on the influence Neoliberalism and market-based economy have had on Feminism and on the struggle against gender injustice. The common thought behind these critical pieces is that Neoliberalism has somehow “taken advantage” of the claims made by Feminism and used them to its own benefit, a sort of “empty gesture” to

satisfy the request for a more progressive approach to women's empowerment, but that Neoliberalism in and of itself has no particular interest in achieving gender equality.

Therefore, the research questions of this thesis are the following: What kind of gender equality narratives are promoted and promulgated by international organizations and institutions today and what relationship, if any, do they bear to Neoliberalism? Secondly, how have neoliberal arguments and neoliberal intentions permeated the (post)feminist discourse? And thirdly, what implications do these neoliberal discursive structures have for the future of Feminism?

In my attempt to give an answer to these questions, I will deploy a constructivist approach, which contends that "everything we perceive, experience, and feel, but also the way we act, is structurally intertwined with socially constructed forms of approved and objectified knowledge" (Stuckrad 2013: 8). This knowledge takes the form of discourses, which determine the way it is deemed possible to talk about a certain topic. Therefore, it is imaginable to grasp Gender Mainstreaming as one of the many discourses surrounding gender equality, which acknowledges and legitimizes some opinions, motives and practices instead of others. The chosen method for my enquiry will therefore be a critical discourse analysis inspired by the works of French philosopher Michel Foucault³.

I will start by providing some historical as well as theoretical remarks on how the discourse of the emancipation of women has unfolded, thereby making use of the canonical model of the three "waves" of Feminism⁴. This will help underscore what debates have stirred the advocacy for women's rights from its beginnings⁵, which are still relevant for today's approaches to gender equality. I will proceed by giving a concise definition of the term "Postfeminism", bearing in mind that the expression has been used ambivalently to designate two different tendencies towards the previous feminist activism.

Subsequently, the two main currents that make up the present gender equality discourse, Queer Theory and Gender Mainstreaming, will be presented. Their description should highlight the profound differences between these two approaches, which root in two fundamental debates of the second-wave Feminism: the debate of "equality versus difference" and the deconstructionist debate.

³ The two main models for this particular approach are Foucault's *Histoire de la folie* (1961) and *Naissance de la clinique* (1963).

⁴ Although the paradigm has been criticized and is considered updated by some, it still provides a good reference point to differentiate the evolution of both the requests made by feminists and the methods they used to achieve their goals.

⁵ An excellent historiographical reconstruction of these controversies is provided by Biermann (2009).

My theoretical foundation would not be complete were I not to mention what, to the purposes of this argument, is to be understood under “Neoliberalism”. Here my definition, however brief, stems from a number of reconstructions which do not necessarily bear ties to Feminist and/or Gender Theory, but are vital to grasp the main aspects of this phenomenon which has marked our society since the 1970s. On the basis of this definition, I shall present Nancy Fraser’s argument on the coincidence of Feminism and Neoliberalism, the foundation of my upcoming reflections.

What my discourse analysis will be examining are a number of selected documents from both the UN and the EU, which depict and epitomize the functioning of Gender Mainstreaming and highlight what connections it bears to Neoliberalism. Afterwards, I shall move to a critical review of Gender Mainstreaming, which rests on a number of deconstructionist, queer-theoretical assumptions on gender. Not only will I argue with some of the aforementioned authors that Gender Mainstreaming is not primarily concerned with gender equality (or at least it does not have gender equality as its main goal), I shall also try to dig out what relation it has to “subjectivation”, professionalization and economization – typical phenomena associated with the rise of Neoliberalism.

In my concluding remarks, I will try to answer the last question I posed on what meaning Gender Mainstreaming has for the future of Feminism and if, indeed, the struggle for the emancipation of women could somehow “profit” from this discourse in order to see its claims and demands recognized and promoted.

II. Research framework

Before moving on to the historical reconstruction of the women's movement and to the investigation of Gender Mainstreaming, the chosen style of inquiry, discourse analysis, will be presented: a short description will be provided, which should expose how this is the most suitable approach to face the task at hand.

To start with, it should be said that “*discourse analysis is not itself a method*” (Stuckrad 2013: 14). Instead, it would be best conceived of as “*a research perspective or research style*” (Ibd.), which has consequences for the way analysed phenomena are viewed, understood and interpreted. To give a concise definition,

“[d]iscourses are practices that organize knowledge in a given community; they establish, stabilize, and legitimize systems of meaning and provide collectively shared orders of knowledge in an institutionalized social ensemble. Statements, utterances, and opinions about a specific topic, systematically organized and repeatedly observable, form a discourse” (Ibd.: 15).

The notion of “discourse” is usually referred to in relation to the works of Michel Foucault, who in *L'ordre du discours* (1971) puts forward the hypothesis that

“in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality” (1972: 216).

For Foucault power and knowledge are strictly related concepts that influence one another, and the notion of “discourse” was crafted with the purpose of outlining the power relations created through language and practices within society. This is one of the underlying premises of Foucault's work, who develops this assumption in his book *Surveiller et Punir* (1975), where he suggests that

“we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. [...] We should admit rather that power produces knowledge [...]; that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (1977: 27).

Instead of trying to understand discourse from the viewpoint of the speaker, or from its formal structures, in *Les mots et les choses* (1966) Foucault suggests doing it “from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse” (1970: xiv), meaning

the necessary conditions for that particular discourse to come into being, both material and immaterial.

Discourse analysis therefore “aims at reconstructing the processes of social construction, objectification, communication, and legitimization of meaning structures” (Stuckrad 2013: 9). As an approach to a given topic, it will look at the “orders of knowledge, the social agents that are involved, the rules, resources, and material conditions that are underlying these processes, as well as their impact on social collectives” (Ibd.: 15). Applied to Gender Mainstreaming, it means exploring how this very specific and original way of introducing the “gender perspective” into the current arena of policy measures and development strategies is legitimized, in accordance namely to which arguments or claims, by whom it is supported, in which circumstances and with what means it is broadcast, and what reactions it reaps.

Given that “[w]hat is regarded as legitimate knowledge in a given society is generated on the level of institutions, organizations, or collective actors” (Ibd.: 9), I am especially interested in examining the Gender Mainstreaming discourse propagated by the UN and the EU. For this purpose, a selected number of documents from both organizations related to Gender Mainstreaming (including resolutions, treaties, websites and pamphlets) will be scrutinized, although, due to the length of the paper, a full account of the context and the material preconditions for the formation of the analyzed evidence cannot be provided.

III. Historical and theoretical remarks

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this chapter is to lay the historical and theoretical grounding of my work. In the first paragraph, I shall give a brief review of the evolution of the discourse of gender equality from its dawning at the end of the 19th century to the so-called “third-wave Feminism”. Related to this last turn, in the second paragraph I shall try to give a short definition of the term “Postfeminism”, which has come to mean at least two different ways of placing oneself towards second-wave Feminism. Particular attention will also be paid to the debates originating from the second wave, since they are of utmost importance for the currents I will be describing in the third paragraph, Queer Theory and Gender Mainstreaming. These will be portrayed as inherently different and therefore conflicting modes to look at the issue of female empowerment, from which a number of contrasting approaches, opinions and practices stem, especially in the political arena. Lastly, in the fourth paragraph, I shall briefly outline a definition of “Neoliberalism” fit for the purposes of this paper, bearing in mind that the word itself has come to have a number of different meanings and describes a variety of phenomena, which cannot be exhaustively covered by the content of this work.

1. The “Waves” of Feminism

Before setting off with a concise recapitulation of the main stages of the fight for the emancipation of women, it might be useful to give a brief definition of “Feminism” itself. Feminism is “the advocacy of women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes” (Oxford Dictionaries 2016). This description is both interesting and problematic: if, on the one hand, there is no mention of the negative connotations usually associated with the term, such as “man-hate” and “female domination”⁶, on the other we have an explicit reference to “women’s rights”, which makes Feminism a movement that claims to represent the interests and the demands of *all* women across the globe, regardless of age, ethnicity or social status. How this became an issue for feminist theory and its rhetoric will be discussed later.

1.1. Suffragettes and the First Feminist Wave

Even though, as mentioned in the first chapter, the first pleas for the emancipation of women can be traced back to the aftermath of the French Revolution, with the works of Olympe de

⁶ Which are historically the by-product of anti-feminist rhetoric and propaganda and have lesser to do with the claims of the feminist movement itself, as will be clarified shortly.

Gouges, Mary Wollstonecraft and, about eighty years later, John Stewart Mill⁷, it was not until the late 1800s that women came together to appeal for the same rights as men. In what can be considered the first wave of Feminism, women petitioned for a number of basic rights, including the right to vote, the right to education, the possibility to divorce, the first property and inheritance rights and the right to work in certain fields that, up to that point, had been precluded to them. Because the hinge of their demands was indeed universal suffrage, these early feminists were called “suffragettes”, a group composed almost entirely of white, middle-class women (Coprook et al. 1995: 9f.).

While the main concern of all militants were access and equal opportunities, the arguments they put forward diverged in many cases: if on the one hand some maintained the claim that “women and men are, in fact, fundamentally different and that women have a natural disposition towards maternity and domesticity” and that “it would therefore be advantageous to society to enfranchise women, so they would then enrich politics with their “innately” female concerns” (Kroløkke/Scott Sørensen 2006: 5), others alleged that “women and men are, at least in legal terms, equal in all respects; therefore, to deny women the vote was to deny them full citizenship” (Ibd.).

Already at this point in time we can detect the first formulation of what later would be called “difference Feminism”, a bundle of concepts founding their arguments for female empowerment on the inherent difference of women (be it their “moral superiority” or, years later, their “emotional intelligence”). Difference Feminism highlights the positive impact women, with their specific characteristics, can make on society and politics but, at the same time, completely disregards the “distinction between sex and gender” (Ibd.: 6). The underlying notion is one of “equity” (not to be confused with equality!), a synonym of “fairness” and “justice”, which postulates that equals should be treated equally, unequals differently⁸, a point that has widespread implications for how gender equality should be pursued.

The struggles of the first wave were not in vain: in 1920, women in the United States were granted universal franchise, to be followed eight years later by their British counterparts. A number of countries granted women the right to vote in the same years or soon after⁹.

⁷ *The Subjection of Women* (1869), written together with his wife Harriet Taylor, can be considered one of the first pieces arguing for women’s suffrage as well as for a number of other fundamental rights.

⁸ I am ever so thankful to Professor Cornelia Klinger for pointing out this semantic finesse and all the implication it entails. She traces the debate of equity and equality back to the Aristotelian notion of ἐπιείκεια (epieikeia), which can be translated with “considerateness”, “fairness” or “natural justice” and posits that equals must be treated equally and unequals must be treated unequally (2014: 149f.).

⁹ A good overview of the fundamental stages of the German *Frauenbewegung* is given by Gerhard (2008).

1.2. Radical Feminists and the Second Feminist Wave

In the period of time after the two world wars, a relative calm enveloped the feminist movement. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that a new wave of Feminism came about. If the first wave was mostly concerned with basic rights regarding the public sphere, the focus then shifted to the private life of women: what is usually called “radical Feminism” had the “liberation of women” as its main goal, its slogan being “The Personal Is Political” (Kroløkke/Scott Sørensen 2006: 7f.). Women fought for reproductive rights, equal opportunities, representation and equal pay; some of the movement’s most relevant campaigns were the anti-pornography and the anti-prostitution campaigns.

Radical second-wave Feminism cannot be fully understood without mentioning its allies, the New Leftist, Black Liberation and Gay Liberation campaigns risen after the 1968 student movements, and its principal enemy: Patriarchy. Similarly to Feminism, “Patriarchy” is a very complex concept: defined as a “system [that] oppresses and exploits women, works in men’s interests and legitimizes male domination” (Milestone/Meyer 2012: 10), the Patriarchy was grasped as a structure deeply rooted in our culture through which men traditionally held hegemonic power¹⁰ over women (be it over their lives, over their bodies, or over their choices). According to this conception, men were “naturally” predestined to occupy higher and dominating positions, whereas women were sanctioned to inferior, subordinate roles, a notion second-wave feminists declared war on. In their fight against sexism, second-wave feminists believed that women could and should empower one another, because there was at least one thing all women had in common, namely being oppressed collectively, as a group, by the Patriarchy.

The theoretical underpinning of second-wave claims came from a number of new discoveries made in the field of sociology and philosophy: as a consequence of the “constructivist turn” taken by these disciplines¹¹ and developing ideas put forward by the works of Simone de Beauvoir, especially in *The Second Sex* (1949), and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), we see an increasing criticism and scepticism towards essentialist claims on the natural coherence of the difference between men and women. The central idea behind this new strand of Feminist Theory was that nobody is born a woman (or a man), but that instead people become men or women through education, traditions, norms, institutions and ideologies (Villa 2001: 17).

¹⁰ The term “hegemonic power” is borrowed from Antonio Gramsci and originally used by Raewyn Connell (1987, 1995) to describe the type of hierarchical relations existing between male and female members of society.

¹¹ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) can be righteously considered the main contributor to this break in the social sciences.

According to the theory, previous assumptions that saw the difference between men and women as being normal, natural and unquestionable began to crumble, because even the difference itself started being understood as a socially constructed product – a product that people in everyday life perceived as external, objective and immutable, because for centuries it had been passed on to the next generation and thus reproduced and solidified, but that in reality was nothing other than a human construct, and therefore changeable (Ibd.: 20).

These new assumptions were coupled with those coming from Gender Theory, which postulated the existence of a biological “Sex” and a socially constructed “Gender”. Accordingly, “Sex are the biological traits that societies use to assign people into the category of either male or female [...]”, whereas Gender “is a concept that describes how societies determine and manage sex categories; the cultural meanings attached to men and women’s roles” (Zevallos 2014: 1). These considerations opened the way to a number of further critiques, investing the existence of two and only two sexes, or the notions that these would be naturally attracted to each other and that sex and gender (and sexuality) would necessarily be aligned in a stable and “healthy” matrix.

Although a number of feminists stubbornly continued to use the argument of difference to sustain their claims for the emancipation of women, appealing to the biological difference to justify their views as well as the necessity for women to be integrated in the public and working sphere (Hagemann-White 1988: 24), another strand used these new theoretical foundations to build a movement whose central objective was gender equality, understood as the dismantling of traditional gender roles based on biological attributes of male and female and the accomplishment of full and undivided parity of men and women.

The relevance of this schism cannot be stated enough: already at this early point we see two blocs building, the first insisting on the inherent difference (natural or constructed) of the sexes, which they saw as a positive feature, an enrichment, so to speak, of the public landscape, the second pleading for the conscious rethinking of gender roles, for the end of any form of discrimination (positive or negative) against women, and for the exact same rights, positions and chances granted to men to be given to women as well on the grounds of the social, man-made character of the diversity between man and woman.

This discussion occupied a conspicuous part of the debates of the 1980s, but was not without internal issues: indeed, as Irigaray among others pointed out,

“[t]he distinction between sex and gender, emphasized by second-wave feminists, provides a sociological or cultural explanation, which at first seems to solve the dilemma between sameness and difference but does not entirely answer questions

related to the sexed body, as well as differences among women” (Kroløkke/Scott Sørensen 2006: 14).

This last element, the “differences among women”, became a very sore point for the feminist movement. Indeed, it became increasingly evident that despite declaring to represent “women” as a category, second-wave Feminism did not take into account the diversity and variety of the female experience. Especially black and lesbian feminists highlighted how the apparently universal subject “Woman” was not the neutral, universal term it claimed to be: indeed, it usually described the experiences of white, heterosexual, middle-class women and did not consider other elements such as class, nationality, ethnicity, age, sexuality, religion, etc. (Villa 2007: 169). During the so-called “sex wars” of the 1980s, differences of opinion animated the feminist debate, with lesbian feminists accusing their heterosexual counterparts, for instance, of sleeping with their oppressors, or black feminists condemning white ones of blending out important variables of discrimination such as colour and race.

1.3. “Grrls” and the Third Feminist Wave

With the 1990s and the expansion of phenomena such as globalisation and the Internet came what many consider to be the third wave of Feminism, characterized primarily by a multiplicity of currents. “Third-wave feminism is tied up with the effects of globalisation and the complex redistribution of power, which challenge feminist theory and politics. It also mirrors the diversification of women’s interests and perspectives [...]” (Kroløkke/Scott Sørensen 2006: 19). “Grrl” rhetoric symbolizes a new form of activism based on “performance, mimicry, and subversion” (Ibd.: 18) as well as exaggeration of stereotypical images of femininity. Common themes in this phase were the criticism of privilege and gender bias, the increased awareness for phenomena such as sexual harassment and violence against women, and the promotion of individual choice, seen as “the right (a) to define one’s own identity and expect society to respect it and (b) to make decisions regarding one’s own body” (Ibd.: 19). Grrls made use of the new information technologies in order to spread awareness on these topics and to bring together women from different social and cultural backgrounds. Through these expedients, third-wave Feminism tried to set aside a number of theoretical and political questions, including the debate of sameness versus difference.

This did not stop a variety of feminists from the academia and the political world to discuss on which theoretical underpinnings the fight for female emancipation should rest or which

policy measures were the most apt to get rid of the persistent female discrimination¹². Indeed, the ones arguing from the sameness-position disregard the difference (biological or cultural) between men and women completely and focus instead on the asymmetries and the uneven distribution of chances between the sexes¹³. They plea for more leftist policies, including antidiscrimination laws regulating all fields, an equal division of housework, and affirmative action in the form of quotas for political and vocational posts to combat structural inequality in our society (Knapp 2011: 74). Feminist insisting on the difference-standpoint see the main problem of the aforementioned policies in the fact that the symbolic order of the public sphere remains a “male-oriented” one and that women have to “become like men” if they want to succeed. Instead, they petition for a valorisation of both female qualities in the workplace and of female work in the home (housework should be paid, etc.). The issues that come with this second perspective are that firstly, the traditional division of labour remains unaltered, and that secondly, the classical gender roles (male-breadwinner and female-caregiver) are thereby reproduced and solidified (Ibd.).

2. Post-feminism

As of today, the term “Post-feminism” is a very ambiguous one, as it has been subjected to a number of misinterpretations of both its meaning and its supposed project. The prefix “post” can (and does) signify two things: from a pure chronological perspective, it is what comes “after” Feminism (some consider it indeed the “fourth” wave of Feminism); from a semantic perspective, “post” can however also mean that Feminism has somehow become obsolete or redundant, thus the need for new currents of thought and new political movements which do rest upon some of the assumptions of the previous Feminisms, but that at the same time are more up-to-date with the present political, social and cultural landscape.

Consequently, “Postfeminism” is used to describe two contrasting tendencies, which have developed since the 1990s in concomitance with the third wave of Feminism: on the one hand, it labels a complete rejection of Feminism, especially the second wave, rooted in the

¹² An illustrative example is the international conference held in October 1989 in Frankfurt entitled *Menschenrechte haben (k)ein Geschlecht. 200 Jahre Aufklärung – 200 Jahre Französische Revolution*, focused on the relevance of human rights for women’s rights, in which the various lecturers debated the tense relation of sameness and difference. Italian feminists such as Rossana Rossanda and Adriana Cavarero, regarding the two sexes as inherently different, argued for the need of a fully developed female perspective independent from the men’s, whereas their German counterparts, like Cornelia Klinger and Annedore Prengel, highlighted the dangers of arguing only from a difference-standpoint. A collection of the speeches is to be found in: Gerhard et al. (eds.) (1990).

¹³ A traditional example of equality Feminism is the position of German journalist Alice Schwarzer, who insists on the existence of a *unitary* subject being collectively oppressed: Women. Her most famous work depicting her perspective is *Der „kleine Unterschied“ und seine großen Folgen* (1985).

conviction that the movement has reached its goals and it is therefore dismissed as superfluous and unnecessary, as will be delineated in the first section; on the other hand, it encompasses an approach that builds on second-wave claims and seeks to integrate and adapt them to the newest assumptions of Gender Studies, as shown in the second section.

2.1. Who needs Feminism? – The backlash argument

Commonly, the term “Postfeminism” is used to describe those currents in the media, in politics as well as in industry which are founded on the premises laid down by the second and third wave of Feminism but at the same time display, for one reason or the other, a critical distance towards the claims and tactics of the previous Feminisms. Copprock et al. (1995: 3) point out that “‘post-feminism’ emerged as initiatives in government and industry were announced promoting the 1990s as the decade of gender equality”, a result of the campaigns and activism of the previous two decades. The most common assumption underlying Postfeminism is that “women have ‘made it’, or they have the opportunity to ‘make it’” (Ibd.: 4) and that Feminism, especially of the second-wave kind, is today both anachronistic and irrelevant. Similarly to Bryson’s arguments presented in the introductory chapter, “[q]ualifications, access, promotion and job security are assumed to have been accepted and established principles of equality, prevailing in all organizations and their management structures” (Ibd.). This leads to the (highly problematic) conviction that “women have only themselves to blame if equality is not achieved in their personal lives” (Ibd.: 5)¹⁴.

One of the possible explanations for the phenomenon of Postfeminism is the so-called “backlash” argument, meaning that feminist theory and politics have been rejected on the grounds that equality has already been reached and these are no longer needed, and that, allegedly, women are unhappy with their current condition, since “independence and career success [are] incompatible with true happiness found within the ‘natural roles’ of wife and mother” (Ibd.). Indeed, the achievements of previous feminist struggles are viewed as poisonous and destabilizing, whereas many put forward *pre-feminist* arguments advocating for “a return to ‘traditional’ roles and attitudes” (Ibd.). Moreover, second-wave Feminism has been criticized with the accusation of practicing reversed sexism and oppressing men.

Both British professor Angela McRobbie in her book *Top Girls* (2010) and German sociologist Ute Gerhard in her article *Feminismus heute?* (2007) detect the tendency of girls and young women today to feel the necessity to distance themselves from the word “feminist”

¹⁴ We shall come to the implications of this line of reasoning later; what can be highlighted at this point is the disregard, behind said assumptions, of the difference between equality of *opportunity* and equality of *outcome*, which essentially means that the societal structures reproducing gender inequality are bluntly overlooked.

and the statements of the previous Feminisms. These “new” women, contends Gerhard, believe in most of the clichés associated with “those” Feminists (meaning principally second-wave feminists, regarded as aggressive misandrists), present themselves proudly and consciously as female women¹⁵ and share the “common sense” assumptions that the parity of the sexes has been reached¹⁶.

This attitude is branded by Hall and Rodriguez (2003) as a “*no, but...*” version of Feminism, one in which girls are “reluctant to define themselves with the feminist label, but they approve of and indeed demand equal pay, economic independence, sexual freedom, and reproductive choice” (Ouellette 1992: 119, in: Hall/Rodriguez 2003: 879). The main reason the authors detect for this behaviour are the “negative representations of the women’s movement in popular media” (Ibd.: 884), one which prompts young women to discard Feminism for fear of being perceived as “unattractive, unfeminine, and lesbians” (Ibd.). As a result of this perception, the women’s movement is depoliticized and undermined, as it loses its appeal to the next generation.

An interesting point Hall and Rodriguez draw attention to in their empirical analysis of public opinion data on Postfeminism is that the claim upheld by the postfeminist argument, namely the “erosion of support” for the women’s movement (Ibd.: 898), is nothing other than a self-fulfilling prophecy: indeed, “the media’s coverage over the past two decades has socially constructed the category of postfeminism” (Ibd.: 884), but the authors do not find enough empirical evidence to substantiate these assertions for the 1980 to 1999 period. It seems as though this process was created and broadcast “to undermine the viability of collective action to improve the status of women” (Ibd.: 885), and that consequently, as McRobbie also indicates, young women subscribe to “a depoliticized form of “no-risk feminism”” (Ibd.: 880) because everybody else seems, or is reported to be doing the same.

2.2. The next stage in Feminism

The feminist discourse of the 1990s and early 2000s was enormously influenced by the works of American philosopher Judith Butler. Her writings build the basis for what can be considered an alternative reading of the term “Postfeminism”, namely a subsequent stage in the way gender equality is being pursued, which takes into account the developments coming from postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. Here, the salient elements of Butler’s thought will be presented.

¹⁵ On the concept of “Emphasized Femininity” as the counterpart of “Hegemonic Masculinity”, see Connell (1995).

¹⁶ On the dangers of such “common sense” assumptions, see Bryson (2007).

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1990), Butler openly criticises Feminism for asserting the universality of a shared “gendered identity”:

“For the most part, feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued” (Butler 1990: 1).

Butler deems this assumption problematic, because by blending out the diversity of female experience and reducing it to the specific personal history of white, educated, heterosexual women of the Western middle-class, Feminism cannot claim to represent “women” in general: “By conforming to a requirement of representational politics that feminism articulate a stable subject, feminism thus opens itself to charges of gross misrepresentation” (Ibd.: 5). As Butler points out, “[i]n the course of this effort to question “women” as the subject of feminism, the unproblematic invocation of that category may prove to *preclude* the possibility of feminism as a representational politics” (Ibd.), meaning that representation will be possible for Feminism only once it lets go of the category “women”. Indeed, she is very critical of taking identity as the basis for one’s political demands, since identity itself is nothing other than the effect of political and discursive structures (Villa 2003: 103).

Butler moves on to condemn the distinction between sex and gender and what she calls “the compulsory order of Sex/Gender/Desire” (Butler 1990: 6): since “gender” is “culturally constructed” and thus “neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (Ibd.), there is no proof that there have to be two and only two genders, mimetic of the two biological sexes. And if sex itself is the historical product of various discourses (scientific, political, etc.), then its immutable character comes into question, too; and when sex stops being an unchangeable, “natural” variable, thus revealing itself as being “as culturally constructed as gender” (Ibd.: 7), the whole sex/gender divide falls to pieces.

Furthermore, Butler takes issue with the normative and normalizing power of the “biological sex”, which forces the subject to identify with a predetermined gender and to display a predetermined desire. Butler’s critique moves consequently to the “heterosexual matrix”, the presumed convergence of sex, gender, identity, desire and sexuality (Hark 2009: 34), which exists because “[t]he internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, [...] requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality” (Butler 1990: 22). Butler exposes heterosexuality as the main instance reinforcing the gender divide:

“The institution of a compulsory and neutralized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of

heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire” (Ibd.: 22f.).

Therefore, in Butler’s eyes, Feminism is not just problematic inasmuch as it fails to represent the variety of the female experience, but also because it contributes to reproduce and thus naturalize the difference between the sexes (us, women, versus them, men) and the “normality” of heterosexuality (Hark 2009: 35).

In her book *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of “sex”* (1993), Butler develops these arguments to demonstrate how the heterosexual hegemony *produces* sexual as well as political objects through socially accepted norms, and decides which are the bodies that “matter” and which are not:

“[...] it will be as important to think about how and to what end bodies are constructed as it will be to think about how and to what end bodies are *not* constructed and, further, to ask after how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary “outside”, if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter” (Butler 1993: 16).

Butler’s reflections build the theoretical base for one of the most recent developments in the discourse of gender equality: Queer Theory. This current of thought, which I shall describe in the following paragraph, tries to present a way out of the sameness versus difference dilemma: the deconstruction of gender, promulgated by one corner of the feminist academia.

3. Recent developments in the gender equality discourse: Queer Theory versus Gender Mainstreaming

This paragraph entails the characterizations of two present discourses related to gender equality, Queer Theory and Gender Mainstreaming, which can both be regarded as “postfeminist”, albeit for different reasons.

I believe there is no need at this point to explain or reiterate why Queer Theory can be classified as a “postfeminist” movement: its critique of Feminism has been summed up in the position of Judith Butler and in the remarks coming from black, lesbian and postcolonial Feminists among others. A concise characterisation of Queer Theory and Queer Politics will be provided in the first section, but I deem its postfeminist connotation (in the second meaning attributed to the term) to be self-evident.

In the brief recapitulation provided in the previous paragraph, a number of issues related to how the concept of Feminism is perceived nowadays were presented, which account for the emergence of Postfeminism (in the first meaning attributed to the term). Being the term

“Feminism” so negatively connoted, a pile of new, better-sounding terms has been coined: “Gender Mainstreaming”, “Managing Diversity”, “Gender Democracy”, “Total E-Quality”... Today, there is no more talk of Feminism and women’s rights. But still, all these currents and/or strategies have a very clear picture of what is to be understood under “women”. The aim of the second section of this paragraph is to show how Gender Mainstreaming is nothing other than a modern, rhetorically enhanced version of the “difference Feminism” previously presented.

3.1. Queer Theory, Queer Politics

A proper description of Queer Theory would start by reconstructing the genealogy of queer from its roots in the gay and lesbian studies of the 1970s, to its thematization of sexuality as a variable alongside gender¹⁷ for both sociological enquiries and political demands in the 1980s, to its criticism of identity politics in the 1990s, and would characterize it as an approach with clear deconstructionist, poststructuralist and postmodern ambitions¹⁸. Sadly, a detailed recounting of the evolution of queer lies outside the scope of this paper, therefore this chapter will merely outline the cornerstones of the movement and leave out the rest.

The term itself, “queer”, comes from the verb “to queer”, which means “spoil, ruin”, and as an adjective it means “strange, odd” (Oxford Dictionaries 2016); in the late 19th century, it was used to describe homosexuals in a defamatory way. In the 1980s, lesbians, gays and other members of the community reclaimed the term for themselves, as an alternative to the classic LGBT acronym or as a provocative slogan against gender binarism and heterosexuality as the dominant pattern of sexual orientation (Degele 2008: 42).

Indeed, what “Patriarchy” represented for feminists is for queer embodied by the term “Heteronormativity”¹⁹. Heteronormativity is the name given to the combination of (a) a two-gender system in which only “male” and “female” figure as possibilities and (b) a regime which sees heterosexuality as the norm, the only “right”, “natural” sexual orientation. These two structures mutually influence and reinforce one another, thus producing a matrix according to which what is “normal” and what is “abnormal” can be told apart. What is deemed “normal” stabilizes in time and will consequently not be questioned anymore, but

¹⁷ On the original allocation of fields of competence between Feminist Theory (which claimed the field of *gender* relations) and Queer Theory (which looked at the social, political and cultural organization and regulation of *sexuality*), see Hark (1998).

¹⁸ Many consider Michel Foucault’s work the foremost inspiration for the queer project, especially *Historie de la sexualité* (1976).

¹⁹ The term was made popular by Michael Warner in his essay *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1991), where he refers to “the pervasive and often invisible heteronormativity of modern societies” (Warner 1991: 3).

seen instead as right, healthy and preferable/privileged²⁰ (Hark 2009: 28f.). Where heterosexuality has homosexuality as its opposite, heteronormativity has no counterpart: it is the rule we live by, the unquestioned system that marks all our interactions, and relegates what does not comply to the norm in the realm of the “wrong”, “unnatural”, “perverted”, “monstrous” and “inhuman”.

The project of queer is to show how this distinction is socially constructed and to call into question its validity: “Queer theory de-essentializes identity [...] and destabilizes the binary divide of heterosexuality and homosexuality – and sometimes the gender binary” (Jackson/Scott 2010: 20). Queer theory does not *per se* question the existence of different biological traits for men and women, but it criticizes the relevance and power given to those to determine a person’s place, role, behaviour, and sexual orientation. As a current of thought therefore, queer translates into a theory that criticises all forms of normalisation and naturalisation, especially the ones linked to coerced heterosexuality and heteronormativity, and seeks to delegitimize and disintegrate definite, undisputable identities and to deconstruct clear categorisations and attributions (Degele 2008: 52f.).

As a movement, queer is open to a wide range of genders (not only the “standard” male and female, but also non-binary identities such as transgender, agender, intergender, genderfluid, etc.) and sexual orientations (gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, etc.). Indeed, queer is a collective term for all those who refuse to be labelled “as something”, thereby being forced into a set of preferences and/or behaviours: the strength of queer is its indeterminacy and its elasticity, resulting from its refusal to succumb to a fixed definition and to circumscribe a specific thematic field as its own (Jagose 2001: 13).

As a political project, queer seeks to build an alliance of all those “social outcasts” who do not fit in the existing categories (or refuse to do so) and to plea for their rights to be recognized and for all members of the community to be integrated in society. Indeed, the principal element of queer is solidarity, not on the grounds of a common identity (queer is open to everyone, regardless of their colour, ethnicity, disability, etc.), but based on a shared commitment against all forms of discrimination. As Butler (2004: 7) suggests,

“more important than any presupposition about the plasticity of identity or indeed its retrograde status is queer theory’s claim to be opposed to the unwanted legislation of identity. After all, queer theory and activism acquired political salience by insisting that antihomophobic activism can be engaged by anyone, regardless of sexual orientation, and that identity markers are not prerequisites for political participation”.

²⁰ On the hierarchical order stemming from the different worth attributed by society to various sexual orientations, see Rubin (2003).

3.2. Gender Mainstreaming & Co.

The standard definition of Gender Mainstreaming was provided in the introduction of this paper. In this section, a brief reconstruction of the genealogy of the strategy will be sketched, along with a recapitulation of its fundamental characteristics. Concrete examples of Gender Mainstreaming in international organizations will be provided in the fourth chapter, whereas an in-depth critique of the approach will occupy the fifth.

Gender Mainstreaming is based on a concept developed in the United States during the 1980s called “Managing Diversity”. The underlying principle of both approaches is that an organisation can profit from an ethnically and sexually diverse workforce. Managing Diversity is a bundle of measures taken by the management of a company to insure equal chances to all employees, regardless of their gender and their ethnicity, in order to create optimal working conditions, which should encourage the expression of one’s full potential and enhance the productivity of the staff (Schunter-Kleemann 2001: 16).

A number of arguments support the strategy: not only the advantages to be reaped from reducing costs and augmenting the flexibility of the organisation, but also better marketing and more creativity and originality. Related to women, Managing Diversity (and Gender Mainstreaming) seek to unleash their unexpressed potential and to integrate their emotional and social skills into the work of the organization, as well as valorising their availability for flexible work (Ibd.: 17). What Managing Diversity and Gender Mainstreaming have in common is the focus on Gender Diversity, perceived as a potential instead of a threat (Wetterer 2003: 9).

During the UN Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in June 1985, Gender Mainstreaming was first mentioned as a possible approach to tackle the discrimination of women around the globe. Its most important conclusion was that “gender equality was not an isolated issue, but encompassed all areas of human activity. It was necessary for women to participate in all spheres, not only in those relating to gender” (United Nations 2016). This highlighted the necessity to deal with the problem of female discrimination through a holistic approach, which comprised juridical, social and political measures to grant women more inclusion.

The idea gained momentum ten years later, with the Platform for Action of the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women committing to Gender Mainstreaming as its primary strategy to overcome gender inequality. In the report that followed, it was stated that governments had pledged to “promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the

effects on women and men, respectively” (United Nations 1996: 68). The UN itself vowed to “[d]evelop a comprehensive policy programme for mainstreaming the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system, [...] and play an active role in the implementation of the programme” (Ibd.: 95).

Without being formally mentioned, Gender Mainstreaming permeates the Treaty of Amsterdam, adopted in 1998 by the EU: even if not explicitly appearing in the title of any protocol or declaration, we see that “equality between men and women” figures in the second article as one of the main tasks of the Community (European Communities 1997: 24) and again in the third as an important objective: “In all the activities [...], the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women” (Ibd.: 25).

Essentially, Gender Mainstreaming is a public policy strategy aimed at creating gender equality through the consideration of the gender perspective in the decision-making process. It is a top-down approach ideally suited to organisations, especially those that are part of the political process, but can be applied to educational institutions as well (Stiegler 2003: 5). Its core is built by the so-called “gender analysis”, an inspection of how decisions at the top level influence the outputs of the organisation in regard to the gender variable (Ibd.: 6). What is “new” about Gender Mainstreaming is that it is an instrument that can be used regardless of the specific gender of the actors (Ibd.: 7): indeed, the question of “gender” should, at least in theory, permeate the conceptions, decisions and behaviour of all of the involved. As a guiding principle, “gender” is considered at every level of policy formulation: from its preparation and conception through its implementation to its evaluation, the variable is monitored and plays a fundamental role.

Moreover, Gender Mainstreaming promises to have beneficial effects in other fields outside politics. In a pamphlet published by the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women entitled *Gender Mainstreaming – An Overview*, it is stated that, although gender equality builds an important goal in and of itself, “steps toward greater equality can also contribute to the achievement of other social and economic objectives. It is important to be able to illustrate for economists that gender equality is relevant to issues of economic growth and efficiency” (2002: 10).

Elements that are paid special consideration to are representation, meaning the number of women involved in and/or affected by the measure; resources, i.e. how time, space and money are allocated to the two genders through the policy; and realisation, which entails an attentive consideration of both the existing relations between genders and what consequences might come up in the future. Examples of methods to analyse and/or control the gender variable are

the creation of gender-specific statistics, cost-benefit analyses that take gender into account, the compilation of checklists for the different stages of the process, and the consultation of gender experts, who can both advise the management of the organisation and hold gender-trainings to convey the importance of the topic to all the staff (Stiegler 2000).

Similarly to other akin concepts such as Managing Diversity and Total E-Quality, Gender Mainstreaming promises to be a win-win strategy for all: by taking into account the different necessities, wishes and viewpoints of women as well as their attitudes, abilities and talents, the chances of women are improved, their potential is fully expressed and the organisation can present itself as a modern, forward-thinking and efficient body (Wetterer 2003: 10f.).

The difference between Gender Studies/Queer Theory and Gender Mainstreaming lies in their view on the possible strategies to overcome inequality: the first tries to undermine and to foil the habitual thoughts and assumptions related to gender roles, the second, being a public policy concept that will reflect into programs and legislations, seeks to compromise with and adapt to them, thus renouncing a radical rethinking of gender roles (Degele 2008: 35).

4. Feminism's "Other": Neoliberalism

Similarly to "Postfeminism", "Neoliberalism" is a both evasive and multifarious concept, which is very complicated to pin down. As Boas and Gans-Morse observe, "the term is often undefined; it is employed unevenly across ideological divides; and it is used to characterize an excessively broad variety of phenomena" (2009: 137). Not only has Neoliberalism "come to signify a radical form of market fundamentalism with which no one wants to be associated" (Ibd.: 138), but as the authors substantiate in their article, "those who employ the term in empirical research often do not define it" (Ibd.: 140)²¹. What will be provided in the first section is a quick recapitulation of its fundamental traits and of the social phenomena it causes, namely economisation, "subjectification", and professionalization. Secondly, the "coincidence" of Neoliberalism and Feminism will be concisely addressed with particular reference to Nancy Fraser's observations (2006, 2009).

4.1. The concept of "Neoliberalism" and its corollaries

Whereas "present-day scholarship often identifies Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman as the fathers of neoliberalism" (Boas/Gans-Morse 2009: 147), the expression was "first coined

²¹ I myself can subscribe to this observation: in the number of texts I have read denouncing Gender Mainstreaming as a *neoliberal* strategy, not one single author has provided his/her own definition of "Neoliberalism", or of any other of its corollaries. Based on my own observations, I share Boas and Gans-Morse's view, namely that "neoliberalism conveys little common substantive meaning but serves as a clear indicator that one does not evaluate free markets positively" (2009: 145).

in post-World War I Germany by a small circle of economists [...] affiliated with the ‘Freiburg School’ to refer to their moderate programme of reviving classical liberalism” (Steger/Roy 2010: ix f.). To give an all-encompassing definition of the current of thought,

“Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices” (Harvey 2005: 2).

Not so differently from the student movements of 1968, “[t]he founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as ‘the central values of civilization’” (Ibd.: 5), but they believed additionally that these could only be guaranteed by market and trade freedom. In fact, one of the cardinal believes of neoliberal thinking is that

“[...] economic and political matters are largely separable, with economics claiming a superior status because it operates best without government interference under a harmonious system of natural laws. Thus, the state is to refrain from ‘interfering’ with the economic activities of self-interested citizens and instead use its power to guarantee open economic exchange” (Stager/Roy 2010: 3).

Not only were state interventions to be largely minimized, the new economic configuration was characterized by a great number of “[...] institutional reforms, such as cuts in welfare expenditures, more flexible labour market laws, and privatization” (Harvey 2005: 29). A further strategy the US began to actively promote in the 1970s was the “liberalization of international credit and financial markets” (Ibd.: 28). A number of industries were deregulated, the power of trade unions was greatly reduced and workers as well as companies were requested to become more efficient, which meant higher flexibility for the former and increased expense-reduction measures on the basis of cost-benefit-analyses for the latter²².

Historically, neoliberal thought gained increasing relevance at the end of the 1960s, with the breakdown of embedded Liberalism: Keynesian policies that had been practiced for the previous three decades began to be called under question in the light of the raging fiscal crisis, which was causing serious unemployment und disastrous inflation. In the 1970s, both American President Richard Nixon and the British Labour Party sought to maintain a social democratic welfare state by deepening state control of the economy and introducing a number of policy measures summarized in the term “austerity” (Steger/Roy 2010).

²² This tendency is also visible in the “New Public Management” approach of the 1990s, with economic principles being applied to *public* infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, etc. (McNulty/Ferlie 2004).

The spreading of Neoliberalism gained pace with the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1979 and of Ronald Regan as President of the United States in 1981. As a political doctrine, Thatcherism

“entailed confronting trade union power, attacking all forms of social solidarity that hindered competitive flexibility [...], dismantling or rolling back the commitments of the welfare state, the privatisation of public enterprises [...], reducing taxes, encouraging entrepreneurial initiative, and creating a favourable business climate to induce a strong inflow of foreign investment [...]” (Harvey 2005: 23).

Consistent with the neoliberal credo, Thatcher believed that “[a]ll forms of social solidarity were to be dissolved in favour of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values” (Ibd.). Emphasis was put on the formation of a “‘flexible’ and skilled workforce” (Stager/Roy 2010: 43), which would have enhanced Britain’s competitiveness in an increasingly globalized world. The individual became responsible for his/her own employability, which rested on the assumption that highly skilled and well-trained workers would have had no problem finding a job. The underlying principle was a switch “from ‘welfare’ to ‘workfare’”²³.

Similarly, the Regan administration pushed for deregulation, as well as “tax cuts, budget cuts, and attacks on trade unions and professional power” (Harvey 2005: 25). A firm believer of ‘supply-side’ economics, the President had clear economic doctrine in mind, entailing a number of policy measures (for instance minimal taxation, deficit reduction and the New Federalism Initiative), which became known as “Reaganomics”. Needless to say, these measures caused increasing social inequality, which was not resisted because deemed structural to the process (Ibd.: 16).

The neoliberal tradition persisted, even though slightly moderated, during the Clinton administration, as it was upheld by British Prime Minister Tony Blair: both sought a “middle-of-the-road approach that embraced major portions of neoliberalism while also seeking to incorporate parts of a socially progressive agenda traditionally associated with political parties of the democratic Left” (Steger/Roy 2010: 50). The vast majority of countries complied with this blueprint (or were forced to, on the basis of the newly established “Washington Consensus”), which after the fall of the Soviet Union became the hegemonic discourse in economic policy up to the global financial crisis of 2008.

A number of trends have been observed in society since the adoption of Neoliberalism by national governments as the leading economic strategy: firstly, many recognize a tendency

²³ The phrase has been used in a number of different contexts, not least by President Bill Clinton in 1996, and it is one of the fundamental assumptions behind the Treaty of Lisbon, as we shall see shortly.

towards economization, meaning the introduction of commercial principles in public and non-profit sectors, which up until then had been focused on the delivery of basic services and products to the public without taking economic criteria into account (Bode 2010: 63). With the aim of improving the efficiency of a specific infrastructural branch (education, health provision, social housing, etc.), measures are taken to increase productivity: the kind of rationalization typical of business management becomes the new canon, optimization is reached through cost-benefit calculations, citizens are now seen as users and/or clients (Ibd.: 64).

Secondly, since one of the salient characteristics of Neoliberalism is that “[...] it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey 2005: 3), two main consequences are to be inferred for workers: in a deregulated market, “flexibilization”, understood as a combination of acceptance of lower wages, less legal restrictions for hiring, increased mobility and availability to work flexible hours, will be made even more necessary; and inasmuch as one’s chances of being employed have become a “personal responsibility”, a trend towards “subjectification” will also become unavoidable.

Described by Foucault in *Le Souci de soi* (1984) and closely linked to his concept of “governmentality”, “subjectification” comes from the fusion of external regulation and self-regulation in determining the individual’s behaviour. Governing does not take place through sovereignty and authority anymore; instead, an increasingly important role is played by personal responsibility, self-discipline and the “technologies of the self” in determining and directing one’s decisions and actions (Pühl 2003: 68f.). This new inclination leads to the principle of the “entrepreneurial self”, meaning that it becomes the responsibility of each single person to present and “sell” him-/herself in a successful way, to care about one’s qualifications and to seek the best way to develop one’s full potential (Ibd.).

Another visible trend is that of “professionalization”, i.e. “the process by which producers of special services sought to constitute *and control* a market for their expertise” (Larson 1977: xvi). Being professions “occupations with special power and prestige” which “have special competence in esoteric bodies of knowledge [...]” (Ibd.: x), traditionally but not limited to law or medicine, “this structural position allows a group of experts to define and construct particular areas of social reality, under the guise of universal validity conferred to them by their expertise” (Ibd.: xiii). This is particularly relevant inasmuch as an increasing number of occupations will try to obtain the status of “profession” in order to reap economic gains from providing their expertise.

Before moving on to the next section, an interesting feature of Neoliberalism which should be kept in mind is that it has brought “much ‘creative destruction’, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers [...] but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities [...]” (Harvey 2005: 3). How this has been relevant for Feminism will be explored in the following section.

4.2. On the coincidence of Neoliberalism and Feminism

There are a number of reasons to stop for a moment and reflect on the concurrence of Feminism and Neoliberalism. From a pure historical perspective, the shift from state-organized capitalism to Neoliberalism took place in the middle of the second feminist wave, during the 1980s. But there is more: noticing this peculiar concomitance, American professor Nancy Fraser investigates the “disturbing convergence of some of its [of second wave Feminism, ed.] ideals with the demands of an emerging new form of capitalism” (2009: 97f.). According to Fraser, the affinity existing between the two currents “lies in the critique of traditional authority” (Ibd.: 115), which presented a disturbance for both ideologies.

German philosopher Cornelia Klinger sees as further element in which both Feminism and Neoliberalism coincide in the desire to overcome the divide, stemming from the bourgeois society of the 19th century, between the public and the private sphere, production and reproduction, work and life (2014: 135)²⁴. Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell also makes a point that “[t]here is a gender dynamic in neoliberalism, a capacity to construct and reconstruct gender orders” (2009: 29, in: Klinger 2014: 135).

By analysing the four typical characteristics of the Keynesian economic order, namely economism, androcentrism, étatism and westphalianism, Fraser shows how second-wave Feminism had already started to question the legitimacy and to unsettle the dogmatic position of state-organized capitalism, possibly (if unconsciously) paving the way for the rise of Neoliberalism. Conversely, once it became established, Neoliberalism proceeded to “resignify feminist ideals” (2009: 108) by incorporating and co-opting them in its project, thus making them less radical and less dangerous. Indeed, Fraser contemplates the possibility that “the cultural changes jump-started by the second wave, salutary in themselves, have served to legitimate a structural transformation of capitalist society that runs directly counter to feminist visions of a just society” (Ibd.: 99).

²⁴ The motives behind the push to get rid of the existing divisions between public and private, though, differ considerably.

To substantiate this idea, Fraser (2006) tracked the evolution of the “feminist imaginary” throughout the 1970s and 1980s, thereby showing how feminist demands relocated from redistribution to recognition. Through this ideological shift supervised (or coerced) by Neoliberalism, feminists abandoned their demands for egalitarian redistribution, which they had sought to extend from class to gender (Fraser 2006: 41), and focused rather on recognition based on identity politics, “aimed more at valorising difference than at promoting equality” (Ibd.).

Klinger (2014) builds on these findings and tries to understand through which mechanisms Neoliberalism succeeded at co-opting feminist demands and redirecting them in an innocuous, if not outright useful direction. Her answer is quite simple, yet full of complicated implications: through the strategy of Gender Mainstreaming.

IV. Discourse analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to canvass a selected number of documents, resolutions, treaties, and articles published by the United Nations (in the first paragraph) and by the European Union (in the second paragraph) that exemplify how Gender Mainstreaming is practiced by both organisations. Whereas the first section of each paragraph will present evidence of Gender Mainstreaming in more “traditional” UN and EU organs, in the second section special attention will be paid to two peculiar cases, one for each organization, which explicitly address gender equality: UN Women and the Treaty of Lisbon.

1. “Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” – United Nations’ type of Gender Mainstreaming

Quite a few examples of the type of Gender Mainstreaming practiced by the UN have already been provided in the previous chapters of this paper: the Sustainable Development Goals for instance, as well as statements from the third and fourth World Conference on Women. Since analysing only material that explicitly describes Gender Mainstreaming or directly comes from committees dealing primarily with gender equality would not bring any further evidence to the actual workings of the strategy, the first section of this paragraph will look at data coming from other agencies, to survey how the Gender Mainstreaming discourse unravels there. The second section will deal with the newest project of the UN to promote gender equality, UN Women and its online campaign, HeForShe.

1.1. Discourses within “classic” United Nations bodies

There is a wide range of topics the UN deals with in its specialized agencies: from security and peace-building to food security and poverty eradication, from the advancement of education to sustainable development and the preservation of the environment. A clear tendency to mainstream the gender perspective and highlight the role women play in each of these fields can be detected in UN official documents from the 1980s, and has massively picked up in the last decade.

In October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted *Resolution 1325*, which

“reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security” (OSAGI 2016).

Although men are usually the ones actively involved in conflict situations as soldiers or rebels, the resolution states that “civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict” (S/RES/1325 2000: 1), since they are “increasingly targeted by combatants and armed elements” (Ibd.). Moreover, the document emphasizes “the need for all parties to ensure that mine clearance and mine awareness programmes take into account the special needs of women and girls” (Ibd.: 2), without however specifying what these may be (especially in relation to the issue of mines). Another interesting aspect of the resolution is the request for “all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict” (Ibd.: 3), completely disregarding the number of men, particularly young boys, who are also very often victims of sexual abuse in conflict situations. Finally, the resolution calls for “all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants” (Ibd.).

Another interesting document related to the issue of security and conflict resolution is the Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security of 2013. In it, a number of indicators are proposed to assess the progress the UN has made in this specific field, for instance “Extent to which Security Council missions address specific issues affecting women and girls in the terms of reference and mission reports” (S/2013/525: 4), “Representation of women among mediators, negotiators and technical experts in formal peace negotiations (and consultations with civil society)” (Ibd.: 9) and “Women’s share of senior positions in United Nations field missions” (Ibd.: 13). Special attention is paid to women’s participation in peace-building processes, since “[c]apacity-building for women leaders increases the impact of consultations” (Ibd.: 10), and “Women’s leadership and increased capacity for organizing and participating in decision-making are key factors in accelerating progress” (Ibd.: 26).

As far as poverty eradication, another central goal of the UN, is concerned, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has a clear vision of how the issue can be tackled through gender equality. On the section “Gender and Poverty Reduction” of the UNDP website, it is stated that not only is gender equality a “matter of social justice”, but that it “also makes good economic sense” (UNDP 2016). The view upheld by the agency is that

“[w]hen women have equal access to education, and go on to participate fully in business and economic decision-making, they are a key driving force against poverty. [...] Their increased earning power in turn raises household incomes. By enhancing women's control over decision-making in the household, gender equality also

translates into better prospects and greater well-being of children, reducing poverty of future generations” (Ibd.).

A further concern of the UN, food security and malnutrition, is also seen as related to the issue of gender equality. In the 2013 Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) report entitled *Gender Equality and Food Security – Women’s Empowerment as a Tool against Hunger*, the role women can play in tackling world hunger is underlined. An integrated approach to the problem is deemed indispensable, since it is “essential for gender equality strategies and food security strategies to complement each other and maximize their synergy” (FAO 2013: ix). A key aspect of the problem is identified in the fact that “the discrimination they face not only exposes women to material deprivation, it also makes it more difficult for them to fulfill their vital roles in food production, preparation, processing, distribution, and marketing activities” (Ibd.). The idea of food security and gender equality being strictly interrelated is reiterated in various passages, and as a further incentive, the article states that “[s]uch an approach is achievable, it is inexpensive, and it can be highly effective. The cost to society of not acting urgently and more decisively will be considerable” (Ibd.).

Another issue dear to the UN is the protection of the environment. Here also women can play a key role, as exemplified in a pamphlet published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) called *Women and the Environment*. “In terms of the environment,” can be read in the second chapter,

“women around the world play distinct roles: in managing plants and animals in forests, drylands, wetlands and agriculture; in collecting water, fuel and fodder for domestic use and income generation; and in overseeing land and water resources. By so doing, they contribute time, energy, skills and personal visions to family and community development” (UNEP 2016: 11).

Moreover, “[w]omen’s extensive experience makes them an invaluable source of knowledge and expertise on environmental management and appropriate actions” (Ibd.).

From this limited sample of statements, it is clear what kind of narrative traditional UN organs pursue: women are valorised for their intrinsic capacities, attitudes and qualities, as well as for their special perspective and knowledge background. Importance is given to their roles as caretakers, especially in relation to their families and children. Their special necessities and requirements are to be met differently, since standard UN approaches are deemed unfit for women and girls. One element all the surveyed documents have in common is indeed a discourse inserting and managing the gender perspective in their related field.

1.2. UN Women and its campaign, HeForShe

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, UN Women was called to life in 2010 to merge into one coordinating agency the work of four previously distinct UN groups. Its main task is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as tackling fundamental issues such as gender-based violence and female discrimination. This is considered of special importance, since “[g]ender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth” (UN Women 2016). The ultimate goal is the “achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security” (Ibd.).

In September 2014, UN Women launched an online campaign called HeForShe, specifically targeted at men and boys, to encourage them to actively support gender equality. At the inauguration, British actress and goodwill ambassador Emma Watson closed her speech with the following statement: “Men, I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too” (UN Women 2014)²⁵. As visible on the campaign’s website, “HeForShe invites people everywhere to come together as equal partners to craft a shared vision of a gender equal world and implement specific, locally relevant solutions for the good of all of humanity” (HeForShe 2016).

A few people have criticized the narrative behind both UN Woman and HeForShe, as they seem to be only concerned with the type of discrimination faced by women and girls, and leave out all the issues related to gender stereotypes being projected onto men and boys. Indeed, despite Watson having eloquently pointed out in her speech how boys and men are also affected by a wide number of injustices and limitations due to their gender (not the least not being able to be emotional or to express their feelings, or playing only a minor role in their children’s upbringing), the wording of the pledge one is invited to take on the website has been considered by many quite unfortunate. The pledge reads as follows: “I commit to take action against all forms of violence and discrimination faced by women and girls” (Ibd.), meaning that the focus of the solidarity movement is ultimately on females and it does not take into account how stereotypes affect males across societies.

The name of the campaign itself has also raised some perplexities: if the objective is to encourage men to brace Feminism and fight for gender equality, some critics have expressed their worry that, by making men the subject, HeForShe puts them (once again) in charge of

²⁵ The full content of the speech can be found under: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too>.

the freedom and future of women (McKenzie 2014), while others disapproved the implication that, by being there a “He” and a “She” in the first place, the movement further reproduces and perpetuates the gender binary of male and female.

2. Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union

A couple of examples of Gender Mainstreaming within the EU have already been presented in the previous chapters, too: for instance, the Treaty of Amsterdam was mentioned as one of the first instances where the equality of men and women figures in an official EU document. After having submitted a couple more examples of the kind of narrative the EU follows in the first section, in the second the focus will be on what is considered by many authors the crucial link between Gender Mainstreaming and Neoliberalism: the Treaty of Lisbon.

2.1. Gender Equality strategies of the European Union

When analysing the Gender Equality discourse in EU organs, one of the features that mostly stands out is the deep relation it bears to the economy of the Union. Even in the Treaty of Amsterdam, which was previously mentioned, gender equality always emerges in connection with employment policies: “equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work” (European Communities 1997: 36) is viewed as one of the measures necessary to “maintain the competitiveness of the Community economy” (Ibd.: 35); Article 119 addresses the gender pay gap, stressing the importance of “[e]qual pay without discrimination based on sex” (Ibd.: 38).

Today, the topic of gender equality is primarily addressed by the European Commission (EC). In the subsection “Justice” on the EC’s website, gender equality is referred to as “one of the European Union’s founding values,” which “goes back to 1957 when the principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the Treaty of Rome” (European Commission 2016). Gender Mainstreaming, understood as the “integration of the gender perspective into all other policies” (Ibd.), figures as one of the three measures that has granted the EU significant progress on this particular matter.

Since the EC recognizes that there still is much to be done in respect to women’s empowerment, it has set up a reference-framework to be carried out in the period of time between 2016 and 2019, summarized in the *Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality*. The five key areas for action presented in the proposal are: (1) “equal economic independence for women and men”, (2) “equal pay for work of equal value”, (3) “equality in decision-making”,

(4) “dignity, integrity and ending gender-based violence”, and (5) “promoting gender equality beyond the EU” (European Union 2016: 6).

The relevance of this approach is, according to the strategy, both a social and an economic one: during the aftermath of the 2009 financial crisis, unemployment reached alarming levels for both women and men, but in 2014, a peak in women employment was registered across the EU (64%) (Ibd.: 7), meaning that “more and more families depend financially on women’s work” (Ibd.). Moreover, inequality in occupation is highlighted as another problem related to gender stereotypes and female discrimination, with women being “the biggest untapped source of entrepreneurial potential, representing only 29% of entrepreneurs” (Ibd.: 8), and “still generat[ing] a much lower proportion of income on the labour market than men” (Ibd.). Even the topic of gender-based violence seems, at least according to the reference-framework, to bear direct ties to the economy: physical or sexual violence, rape and harassment harm “victims not only in terms of their health and well-being, but also their working lives, thereby damaging their financial independence and the economy in general” (Ibd.). As in most Gender Mainstreaming agendas, in the implementation of the key actions “attention will be paid to the role of men, dismantling gender stereotypes and promoting non-discriminatory gender roles” (Ibd.: 9).

The EC is also concerned with the role women play in fields not strictly economy-related, such as science and technology. In a report issued by the EC in 2000 and carried out by the ETAN Working Group on Women and Science, for instance, a point is made that the presence of women in science has been inferior to that of men, even if “they make a substantial contribution to the taxes that pay for the development of science and technology and they are on the receiving end of outcomes derived from science policy” (ETAN 2000: 1). The gender perspective has to become part of the work of the scientific community “[i]n recognition of the importance of using human resources wisely and fostering equal opportunities” (Ibd.: 2). Indeed, alongside classic arguments of equity and human rights, two more reasons are mentioned for the importance of mainstreaming equality in science policy: efficacy, since “the ageing population makes it essential to target both genders in the shrinking pool of young scientists” (Ibd.), and efficiency, because “it is wasteful to educate and train young women scientists but then not to use their skills in employment” (Ibd.).

Whereas the UN narrative relies more on the specific capacities and qualities of women, or uses the arguments of justice and fairness, to ground its claims for gender equality, the EU argues more from a rational, if not downright economic perspective: it is considered inefficient not to profit from the potential of half of the population, especially if the EU wants

to remain competitive with the rest of the world. “[W]e need the best human resources at our disposal,” seems to be the motto of the EU, “both those of women and men” (Ibd.: 1).

2.2. The Treaty of Lisbon and the *Adult Worker Model*

The Treaty of Lisbon, signed by 27 EU members in December 2007, partly addresses the necessity for the EU, alongside economic and fiscal measures, to pass regulations aimed at the creation of a distinct European social model (Hofbauer/Ludwig 2006: 206). Despite being primarily aimed at changing the structure and functioning of the organisation, the Treaty entailed some fundamental amendments and supplements to redefine the EU’s social policy, which “can be characterized as a Europe-wide Adult Worker Model (AWM)” (Annelsey 2007: 195). The AWM outlines a social system “in which all adults – male and female, old and young, able and less-abled – are required to take formal employment to secure economic independence” (Ibd.: 196). This is the crucial point of the Lisbon Treaty: the focus of the European Employment Strategy (EES) is “not only on activating the unemployed [...], but also on activating the economically inactive” (Ibd.: 198), a shift “from welfare to workfare”, which targets the necessity for every citizen to be economically independent. For women in particular, this approach means creating the basic conditions to enable them to participate in the labour market and to overcome the struggle of combining work with family life, since “their absence from the labour market represents a wide productivity gap” (Ibd.).

Three guidelines are proposed to implement the AWM: (1) “to make work pay”, which in feminist terms could be read as the abolition of the difference between production and reproduction, between paid and unpaid work, and granting both sexes equal pay (Klinger 2014: 145); (2) “to promote the reconciliation of work and family life”, thus reflecting “the need for an adequate provision of good quality child care and care for other dependants [...] to facilitate a return to the labour market” (Annelsey 2007: 201); and (3) “to seek to tackle discrimination in the workplace”, in order to make women feel more welcome at work, thereby highlighting “the EU’s long-standing commitment to promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming” (Ibd.).

By looking at the guidelines, it seems that for the first time an alternative is proposed to the traditional Male Breadwinner Model, even if “there is some evidence to suggest that these policies may still be driven more by attention to public expenditure levels than by a belief that waged labour will promote the welfare of women” (Lewis 2001: 161). Indeed, after a closer look, one gains the impression that the principal objective of the proposed guidelines is to reach full employment *via* opening the labour market to women and putting measures in place

to grant gender equality, and not the other way round. Rather, the fight against female discrimination seems to be not a target in and of itself, but instead the means to an end, namely that of keeping the EU productive, efficient and competitive in comparison to other economies worldwide. Interestingly, “[b]rief reference was also made to the importance of addressing the uneven division of labour in households, though it later disappeared from the EES documents” (Annesley 2007: 202).

V. *Cui prodest?* Criticism of Gender Mainstreaming and uncovering of the link to Neoliberalism

From the discourse analysis carried out in the previous chapter, it will be clear that the concern with Gender Mainstreaming is twofold: from a pure queer-theoretical perspective, which, as we have seen, is based on the criticism of the “naturalizing” effect of Feminism, there is an issue with its insistence on the term “women” and the replication of gender differences, as will be discussed in the first paragraph; from a socioeconomic perspective, there is a general mistrust on the actual objectives of Gender Mainstreaming, which is dubbed by a number of authors as a “neoliberal strategy” to exploit the “human capital” available to a certain country or institution. Their positions will be presented in the second paragraph.

These concerns do not apply to “UN-style” Gender Mainstreaming and its EU counterpart in equal measure, but they are both to be kept in mind when providing a critical review of the strategy.

1. Debate Equality versus Difference and queer-theoretical criticism of Gender-Mainstreaming

In spite of the claims made in one UNESCO document by Breda Pavlic, who greets and justifies the use of the term “gender equality” instead of “advancement of women” by stating that this choice marked a clear paradigm shift in the way women’s rights are pursued²⁶ and that this has been of fundamental importance because “[w]hile this term encompasses policy guidelines and actions in favour of the advancement of women and girls, it reaches beyond these to include also men and boys” (Ibd.), we have been able to see both how often the term “women” is still used in UN formal documents, and how little the expression “gender” relates to or includes men and boys.

This already is, in itself, a problem, because similarly to the way Feminism was criticized in the 1980s for limiting the scope of the word “woman” only to white, heterosexual, middle-class females, it is still true today that not everyone will feel represented by this denomination. Furthermore, in UN as well as EU documents the wording “women and men” is frequently used, a phrase that reproduces the gender binary and leaves out all those who do not, or choose not to fit in this categorization. A third danger that comes with this recurrent use of the term “woman” is the consequent (re-)naturalizing process: there seems to be both in EU and UN guidelines a clear picture of what a woman is, what her necessities are, and what

²⁶ “From the “women in development” (WID) paradigm to the “gender and development” (GAD) approach, which now prevails in the UN system and beyond” (Unit for the Promotion of the Status of Women and Gender Equality 2000: 4).

is the best way to meet them. Not only is the definition of woman based on biological attributes, it appears further that most UN and EU concerns are related to the reproductive function of women, as the special focus on the topics of child-bearing and care-work shows (for instance in the goal “to promote the reconciliation of work and family life”). This of course leaves out transgender women or women who do not conform to the traditional feminine gender role on the one hand, and continues to reproduce stereotypical images of womanhood on the other.

These three critical points are better understood in light of the debates that were presented in the third chapter, namely the “equality versus difference” debate and the deconstructionist debate. As we have seen, the “difference” camp tends to emphasize the discrepancies between the sexes and to highlight what makes women special, being that their experiences or their innate talents “as women” (thus completely disregarding that most, if not *all* of women’s features stem from their sociocultural upbringing). From this perspective, everything that classifies as “female” should be valorised: experiences, qualifications and interests should be seen as a potential, not as an obstacle (Knapp 2011: 73). The main goal of this approach is to successfully integrate “women’s qualities” and make them utilizable and/or profitable (Hofbauer/Ludwig 2006: 211). We have seen many examples of this tendency in the gender equality discourse upheld by the UN: women’s and girl’s special necessities have to be taken into account in conflict situations and their participation in the peace-building efforts is considered vital; women are an essential element in the fight against poverty and malnutrition in force of the role they play in their families and their communities; women’s innate knowledge of and direct contact with the environment is a crucial tool to secure sustainable development.

What speaks against this approach is that it does not really challenge the stereotypical role of women, who are mostly still seen as wives, mothers, and caregivers, or the division of labour in the domestic realm: on the contrary, when encouraged to work and become economically independent, women are usually affected by another phenomenon, called “double-shift”. Employed women who spend their days working outside the home frequently have to come home and take care of the (unpaid) housework without any help, a chore that is usually neither seen, nor valued, nor rewarded (Klinger 2014: 140).

This shows that the customary division of labour is still present and functioning, even in Western countries: the traditional conception of “women’s tasks” is not put into question and the competency spheres of man and woman remain thus unaltered, which is one of the reasons why women have such difficulties in obtaining high-ranking positions and to become fully

integrated in the labour market (Knapp 2011: 74). Indeed, when it comes to childcare, most women will accept to work part-time to meet all the incumbencies of motherhood and family commitments, whereas men put very seldom their duties of fatherhood before their personal careers²⁷. Through the constant discursive dramatization of gender differences typical of Gender Mainstreaming and similar approaches, the bipolar system of male and female is seen as natural and reproduced as well as solidified, not discarded or “deconstructed” (Ibd.).

“This kind of ‘solution’” claims Bryson, “does not challenge existing patterns” (2007: 46), and the picture usually does not change even when the “equality” approach is being favoured. In fact, even if those who argue from the equality/sameness-perspective discard in their substantiations any kind of reference to the natural or cultural difference of the sexes and look instead at the structural asymmetries existing in society, which explain the unequal chances for social participation men and women have, as well as the discriminatory practices which keep women away from positions of power (somewhat like the EU proposals for achieving gender equality do), the paradigm they refer to in their claims is still a masculine one. The norms and values women have to comply with to be successful have not changed in their favour, but are still today those of a male-dominated culture and a male-dominated society, whereas the particularities of female socialisation are disfavoured and overlooked, causing women to have to deny and hide their femininity if they want to move forward (Knapp 2011: 74). When equality is demanded, it is important to ask *for* whom and *to* whom, and what happens to those who still deviate from the standard ideal.

A solution to this dilemma is put forward by those arguing from a deconstructionist perspective, similar to that of Queer Theory: both criticise identity as the grounding of political requests, and at the same time seek to overcome the divide between women and men and the binary order by pleading for the abolition of categories altogether. This is what makes this position “postfeminist” in the first place: lifting the framework itself on which feminist difference and equality claims are based, that of the existence of such thing as “women”, for whom Feminism fights. What the deconstructionist/queer-theoretical effort tries to achieve is the complete destabilisation of standard gendered attributions and the critical questioning of identity politics as legitimate foundation for political claims, as it seeks to avoid the common mistake of subordinate groups to ground their requests on pretended virtues or qualities not

²⁷ This is not to say that men are always egoistic, self-centered beings who unload all the weight of housework onto their wives/partners. On the contrary, the choice of becoming a working-father or a stay-at-home-mother is usually met after a rational calculation, which bears ties to the structural societal problem that men usually earn more than women and it would therefore not be convenient for the female partner to go to work and for the male partner to stay at home.

possessed by the ruling group (Ibd.: 75). It criticises the recourse to stereotypical conceptions of what men and women are, can or want as the reasons provided when trying to reach parity and justify the necessity of emancipation, because it sees those as the very reason why discriminations and hierarchical orders are still in place.

The deconstructionist approach wants to do away with classifications and to delegitimize groupings because it considers them to be the fundamental cause for the biases investing both women and men and limiting their options. The main point of the deconstructionist line of argument therefore will not be the rights of the gendered category of “women” or the intrinsic qualities a person possesses in virtue of his/her gender, but instead the criticism of those hierarchical relations between genders sedimented in and reproduced by power structures as well as stereotypes, which account for the discrimination men and women alike suffer because of their gender assignment (Ibd.: 76).

It is clear how far this approach is from the Gender Mainstreaming discourse promulgated by the UN, which is much closer to the difference arguments, and that encouraged by the EU, which predominantly mirrors equality contentions. The purpose of this paragraph was to highlight the shortcomings and conceptual flaws of Gender Mainstreaming as it is currently conceived by the EU and the UN. The next paragraph will build on the findings of the previous chapters to unravel the link it bears to Neoliberalism.

2. Gender-Mainstreaming as neoliberal strategy

Beside the points made in the previous paragraph, namely that Gender Mainstreaming is anything but deconstructionist (Wetterer 2003: 22), and that the discourse takes something for granted (i.e. the inherent diversity of women and men), which Gender Studies and Feminist Theory have considered counterproductive and obsolete for at least ten years (Ibd.: 11f.), there are a number of other reasons authors state for being weary of this approach to gender equality. One particularly interesting one is identifying the Gender Mainstreaming discourse as a neoliberal strategy to increase the workforce, coated with feminist concerns.

We have seen a number of examples in the previous chapter which could substantiate these claims: in most EU documents, gender equality comes up not only as one of the “founding values” of the Union, but also as an economic necessity, and phenomena related to female discrimination (from the gender pay gap to sexual harassment) are perceived as bad for the economy. Particularly in the Treaty of Lisbon, granting women employment and therefore economic independence is, on the one hand, a strategy to overcome their dependency on a male partner, but on the other, a way to have fewer people relying on state welfare systems.

In UN documents too, there are a few mentions of how ending discrimination towards women could benefit their families and communities, and that through their full participation, the economy would thrive. Women's empowerment is to be pursued not only because it is right and just, but because it makes "good economic sense", it "is inexpensive and [...] highly effective" as well.

If at a first glance it seems, as Hofbauer and Ludwig (2006: 201f.) point out, that through Gender Mainstreaming the EU and other big organisations have incorporated some of the central assumptions of the feminist movement (namely that gender is socially constructed and that discrimination is a problem not only relevant for women, but involving society as a whole), critics claim that, since the concept remains often open to interpretation, it leaves a lot of room for different measures of its political implementation, and being these mostly of technocratic nature, the basic aspects of gender theory are quickly forgotten. Another related critical point that both Schunter-Kleemann (2001) and Stiegler (2003) make is that Gender Mainstreaming appears to claim the field of gender relations and gender politics for itself and to oppress all other movements and/or approaches toward gender equality²⁸.

Moreover, Hofbauer and Ludwig detect a direct link between the policies of deregulation, flexibilization and liberalization typical of the neoliberal paradigm and the strategy of Gender Mainstreaming: this is seen primarily as a means to reach economic equality by strengthening the female human resources and improving their inclusion in the labour market (Ibd.: 209).

A similar point is made by Bereswill (2006), who sees gender politics falling progressively into the realm of economisation, with equality demands being transformed in management strategies (Gender Mainstreaming) and gender itself being regarded as a "human resource" that stems from the diversity of women and men. By looking critically at the so-called "gender trainings" offered by gender experts, Bereswill highlights how the categories of man and woman are reproduced, naturalized and neutralized, and interpreted instead as a human resource useful for strategies of self-optimization and self-marketing.

The project of Gender Mainstreaming, Hofbauer and Ludwig warn, is in reality not bent on increasing awareness on how gender discrimination works, but merely on incrementing the number of women involved, for example, in positions of power in businesses or as part of government cabinets. The focus of the strategy is not on the *quality* of the integration, but merely on the *quantity* of women participating. This resonates with the criticism moved

²⁸ A very illustrative example for this risk is when, in 1998, German Chancellor Schröder, at the time still Prime Minister of the federal state of Lower Saxony, ordered the dissolution of the Ministry for Women with the elegant explanation that, from that moment on, women politics would be debated in every cabinet and in every department of the government (Schunter-Kleemann 2001: 20).

towards equality Feminism, which seeks through quotas to augment the number of women in certain positions, but does not address the whole framework, which remains a male-oriented one (Ibd.: 210). Through this kind of solutions, only equality of opportunity is being addressed, but not equality of outcome, and the persisting lack of parity can be blamed on *individual* choices and wrong behaviour of the single²⁹, an argument that very much resembles the “personal responsibility” approach to one’s own employability proper of subjectification on the one hand, and moves the attention away from the institutions which help maintaining the hierarchical order of the genders on the other³⁰.

Furthermore, the focus on raising the female labour force participation rate, as we have seen, is deemed a necessary requirement in order to keep the EU competitive with other markets such as Japan and the United States (Hofbauer/Ludwig 2006: 212). Accordingly, discrimination in the labour market is not considered a question of unfairness, but a problem of reduced competitiveness of the EU: here we see how logics of the market are being applied arbitrarily to social politics and how the main goal is to bring more people into the workforce. This is what Butler means when she refers to “[...] pro-business forms of feminism that focus on actualizing women’s entrepreneurial potential, hijacking models of self-expression from an earlier, progressive period of the movement” (Butler 2004: 175). Consistently with their observations, Hofbauer and Ludwig evaluate the emancipatory potential of Gender Mainstreaming as very limited, since its priority is to facilitate the access, participation, and integration of women in the labour market, but not to subvert its male-oriented structures and the institutionalized cultural patterns that support it (Ibd.: 214).

A very similar conclusion is reached by Wetterer (2003), who adds the interesting finding that Gender Mainstreaming should be regarded not as an instrument for gender equality, but instead as an integral part of a professionalization strategy pursued by a new group of experts, the gender experts namely, who try to convince the wider public of the necessity of their knowledge and skills (2003: 13f.). Wetterer makes a very convincing argument that, by firstly using a technical jargon (“gender” instead of “women”) signalling their special competence and setting them apart from ordinary people, by convincing secondly their clients (mostly organisations) of the benefits they would reap from the expertise they bring, and thirdly by demonstrating the social validity of their supposed goals, gender experts create a market for their alleged competences and profile themselves as the only ones able to assist the shift

²⁹ For instance, deciding not to continue one’s education or extend one’s vocational training, or to remain at home and/or work part-time after having a child.

³⁰ More on how subjectification permeates the Gender Mainstreaming discourse in Pühl (2003).

towards Gender Diversity (Ibd.: 14). Even from this point of view, gender equality becomes an item that can be bought and sold, thus losing its pure ideological value and becoming part of the neoliberal matrix.

While asking herself if Gender Mainstreaming and similar tactics are a complete change of paradigm in the way gender equality is being pursued or if we are just dealing with a “rhetorical modernisation”, Wetterer comes to the conclusion that, from a pure feminist-theoretical perspective, Gender Mainstreaming is nothing other than a mere rhetorical modernisation, and that it represents more of a step back than a step forward: indeed, the binary system seems to be undergoing a new revival under Gender Mainstreaming (Ibd.: 24), as the perception of being naturally and essentially different is encouraged in both men and women³¹. Wetterer remains very sceptical of what this approach will obtain in terms of equality, since the main goal appears to be to include women in the workforce, accordingly to criteria coming from business economics, and not to promote gender equality as a value in and of itself.

³¹ This resonates with some of the *prefeminist* arguments that make up the postfeminist discourse as conceived by Copprock et al. (1995), Gerhard (2007) and McRobbie (2010).

VI. What future awaits Feminism?

From the discourse analysis and critical reviewing of Gender Mainstreaming presented in the previous chapters, a number of observations can be inferred. Firstly, despite being a postfeminist strategy seeking to avoid and overcome the difficulties and misconceptions encountered by the previous waves of Feminism, Gender Mainstreaming is a discourse based on a mixture of equality-feminism and difference-feminism arguments: the kind of Gender Mainstreaming upheld by the EU relies more on the former, whereas the one practiced by the UN on the latter. What they both have in common is the tendency to treat “women” as a separate, unique category with different qualities, attributes and necessities, which have to be valorised, used and met differently. In fact, Gender Mainstreaming does not change the way men and women are viewed: general assumptions and stereotypes are naturalized and reproduced, not abolished and not even really questioned. Secondly, the thesis has been presented and corroborated that Gender Mainstreaming is, above all, a neoliberal strategy to bind more workforce in the labour market. Not only have explicit claims been found in EU official documents stating the relevance of equal opportunities to secure Europe’s competitiveness in the future, but the implications of Gender Mainstreaming have been mirrored in phenomena such as economization, subjectification, flexibilization and professionalization that were previously highlighted as the main corollaries of Neoliberalism. Now, to the final point of discussion: what does Gender Mainstreaming mean for the future of Feminism? Can Feminism “profit” from the discourse to advance its claims? Can Feminism, perversely, “ride the wave” to obtain more than it has ever obtained thus far?

Among the authors who hold a positive view of Gender Mainstreaming, Stiegler (2003) argues that the discourse is primarily a tool, which will bring positive or negative consequences depending on the hands in which it falls. She believes that, without the participation of women and without a serious democratization of decision-making structures and procedures, Gender Mainstreaming will become the instrument of those who make the rules to keep the *status quo*. Stiegler also maintains that Gender Mainstreaming is one of the three means of achieving gender equality, alongside gender politics and policy measures for the advancement of women, and it still very much depends on the success of those two to be effective.

Much more sceptical are other authors, not the least Schunter-Kleemann (2001), who sees Gender Mainstreaming as a project created *ad hoc* for highly educated and qualified European women, in order for states to profit from their talents and skills (as we have seen, for example,

in the fields of science and technology), but that it has no interest in obtaining actual gender equality. Rather, it tries to absorb and neutralize potentially dangerous emancipatory forces.

When asking herself if a partial alliance between the neoliberal remodelling of society and feminist concerns and requests is at all possible, Klinger (2014) comes to the conclusion that the two ideologies are based on too different principles to be compatible with one another. For the philosopher, what Neoliberalism does is perverting human, societal and political goals, not the least the goal of female emancipation, and making them means to an end, whereas the universal medium that is money is made into the main goal, so that principles, norms and values are translated into economic considerations and profit calculations (2014: 154).

It seems to Klinger as if the wellbeing of the individual, man or woman, is subordinated to the wellbeing of the economy and to international competitiveness (she refers especially to the EU context). Conversely, she warns, should there come a time when the deployment of female workforce is not necessary or profitable, when the formation of young female professionals is not seen as a good investment anymore, then we would be cast “back to the 19th century”, and the only lesson we would have learnt is that there can be no stable link between principles of fairness and justice and economic considerations of the market (Ibd.: 155f.).

My own opinion on Gender Mainstreaming and on the chances Feminism has in the future? Without incurring in the tragic, ominous views of other critics, I believe that Feminism or at least feminist claims are being used as sugar-coating for a number of measures which, in fact, have little interest in achieving gender equality. The empowerment of women should not be the means to an end, but the end itself, pursued because of deep convictions in its rightfulness and legitimacy. I am also convinced that the real solution, the only way to achieve gender equality once and for all, has been under our eyes all this time: it is through the deconstructionist approach proposed by queer theory. Only if we manage to deconstruct and eliminate gender categories, with all they entail in terms of norms, values, ideals, stereotypes and hierarchies, it will be possible to be completely free as human beings, regardless of colour, age, social status, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and, of course, gender.

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