



'Le patriarcat nique son père'?

Chains of Equivalence, Hegemony and #MeToo

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A poster at a #MeToo protest in France summed up a shift in feminist discourse: "Le patriarcat nique son père". The suggestion that patriarchy, indeed, is a 'fatherfucker' seems to turn around the power structures and questions hegemony¹ from a new speaker position. However, these speaker positions are articulated within a highly contested and fraught discourse within the #MeToo-movement. Especially when it comes to representing people of color from white speaker positions, the #MeToo movement runs into the danger of reproducing the very hegemonic discourses it sets out to undermine. To illustrate this: While black activist Tarana Burke founded the hashtag already in 2006 to raise her voice against white patriarchal suppression, it was only after the appropriation through white actresses like Alyssa Milano, Scarlett Johansson and others that the demands of black activist Tarana Burke gained broader mainstream attention. The emanci-

¹ Perhaps such a questioning of hegemonic constellations is also articulated in the context of a crisis of subjectivity noted by Alain Badiou (2017), which is particularly evident in Freud's *Totem und Tabu* (1991). Freud tells the founding myth of modern subjectivity as a myth of the lost ground, namely as the story of the murdered father (cf. Wittig 2020). This myth runs through three central steps: First, in describing the original state of society, he draws a picture of a violent and jealous forefather who keeps all the females to himself and disperses the growing sons (cf. Freud 1991: 195). Second, he describes that the sons who were driven out by the father came together and slew and devoured the father (cf. Freud 1991: 196). By consuming him now, they identify with him as an envied and feared role model (cf. Freud 1991: 196). They try to take his position as the one who owned the desire of mothers and daughters. However, this now presents a precarious situation: the brothers who eliminated their father in a joint act in order to be able to take his libidinal position instead, now become rivals, resulting in a struggle of all against all, which can no longer be regulated by a position of the overly strong (cf. Freud 1991: 198). That is why the brothers, thirdly, impose a double prohibition on themselves: On the one hand, the animal standing for the father, the totem, must not be killed by the totem group; on the other hand, the fraternity forbids sexually lusting after women of the same totem in order not to lead to the dissolution of any social organization. The dead now became stronger than the living had been. What he had prevented earlier through his existence, they have forbidden themselves now (cf. Freud 1991: 197-198). The reason why the parricide was committed, namely to eliminate the father as a prohibitive authority and to take his place, is declared null and void by a self-imposed prohibition of incest. Because in a different way this fatherly prohibition is now brought about again by the fraternity itself, in that the figure of the father – as the "father's surrogate" (Freud 1991: 199) of the totem – is shifted into something that no longer necessarily has a material existence. Freud also indirectly relates an invention of patriarchy, which, however, is turned around in precisely such a formulation of patriarchy as a 'fatherfucker'. But what exactly the reversal consists of must be explored in more detail elsewhere.



patory struggle against patriarchal hegemony seems to articulate #MeToo as an intersection between different discourses. What I am interested in here, can be brought to the following problem: Social movements like #MeToo produce crowds. On the one hand, they often constitute emancipatory interventions in a fight against specific forms of oppression. On the other hand, however, it can also be noticed that precisely these crowd producing movements are articulated as powerful constructs, which in turn produce exclusions. And this is because movements depend on representations to get their dynamics unified. In the following, my aim is to show that the #MeToo movement in the fight against patriarchal hegemony, in turn, occupies the empty concept of femininity with a hegemonic white position and thus systematically excludes the positions of women and girls of color. To get an overview of this as well including as excluding dynamics of that crowd producing social movements, I propose to understand them with Laclau and Mouffe as 'chains of equivalence' (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 113). The #MeToo movement (like other movements) articulates itself as a powerful construct (of equivalence) that can only enter into an emancipatory struggle by distinguishing positions of legitimate speech from positions of illegitimate speech (cf. l'Amour laLove 2017). My question is, how this dynamic structure of #MeToo can be described and how it can be analyzed?

In the following, I would like to analyze potentially hegemonic dynamics of the #MeToo movement. Firstly, I want to ask how the movement is constituted in a fight against a patriarchal hegemony. In this regard, I want to frame my considerations with Claude Lefort's perspective on the 'empty place of power' to be able to take a closer look at the dynamics of social movements (1.). Therefore Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theory of hegemony serves as an analytical foil to be capable to ask whether and how the emptiness is filled by a specific (white) articulation of femininity which, in turn, selectively excludes specific women and girls of color as spokespersons from the fight against patriarchal hegemony (2.). With Jacques Rancière, I would like to ask whether a distribution of the sensible is reproduced in this exclusionary practice within #MeToo, therefore whether this anti-patriarchal discourse is not intersecting with a hegemonic-white discourse (3.). Last but not least, I would just like to conclusively outline possible problems and consequences (4.)

1. The Empty Place of Power

The concept of hegemony – against the background of which I would like to consider the dynamics of the #MeToo movement – can be articulated in Laclau and Mouffe's works only on the basis of a fundamental premise: The assumption is that an unproblematic identity of "society" is no longer possible because the grounding of such a social context can no longer be considered as a given. "Society" becomes an "impossible object" (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 112). The starting point of my argumentation can be illustrated better



in this respect if one goes back to an important reference point of the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe: to Claude Lefort.

In light of precisely two analytical results, Lefort concludes the *non-groundability of the identity of society*. On the one hand, there is the “emptying of the place of power”: Lefort refers in several places in his work to the groundlessness of the social, explicating a figure from Kantorowicz’s “The King’s Two Bodies”.² This figure of thought reveals “the character of the monarchical system under the ancien régime” in the absolutist France of the 17th-18th century (Lefort 1990c: 292).³ It worked on the surface of a political theology that made the monarch a part of the social immanence and constituted him as the representative of God on earth at the same time. The king’s body was thought of as bisected: It is divided into a social *corpus naturale* and a celestial *corpus mysticum* (cf. Marchart 2010: 21). In the monarchical dispositive, power in the person of the sovereign remained incorporated in a doubled way, which firstly gave the ruler the function of acting as “a mediator between mankind and the gods” (Lefort 1990c: 292). Through this simultaneous affiliation with social immanence and the place of the transcendence of God, that “unconditional, extra-worldly pole” (Lefort 1990c: 292), the king’s body became a representation of the unity of the social (cf. Marchart 2009: 229).

Significantly, the irreversible rearticulation of this symbolic dispositive occurs at the moment of the birth of the democratic dispositive: in the symbolic act of decapitation of King Louis XVI during the French Revolution. The former mediation between social immanence and the external divine ground is interrupted precisely in that symbolic act. What happens here symbolically is the separation of *corpus mysticum* and *corpus naturale*, which cuts through “the bond between society and its transcendent foundation of legitimacy” (Marchart 2010: 26), which has devastating consequences: “The place of power becomes a void” (Lefort 1990c: 293).

On the other hand society, in the face of its now-absent ground, and thus the absence of a criterion of distinctness between true and false, is now coerced to articulate and stabilize its identity. However, such a *self-foundation of society* is characterized by its fundamental inability to give itself a universal reason that could ground the totality of the identity of society to the last. Laclau and Mouffe reject the concept of “society” as a totality, following Lefort’s argument, and speak only of the social. What emerges from the absence of any universal reason for the social is the opening up of this social as a space of politics that articulates itself as a space of antagonisms around the empty but unoccupiable place of power. This is the second crucial point Lefort makes: Despite its emptying, this place of

² This is indicated by Marchart (2010: 25). In the essays of Lefort/Gauchet this reference usually remains only implicit

³ For a secondary analysis and a wonderful view over central thoughts of Lefort I can refer on Flynn (2005), who is articulating Lefort’s perspective from a phenomenological point of view. See also for the topic of the disbodiment of politics cf. Mastnak 2000 or the non-groundability of the social cf. Steinmetz-Jenkins 2009.



power does not lose the function of constituting the social; it no longer unfolds its institutional force through a positive form of representation of a constitutive outside, but rather through the emergence of the “split between the social inside and outside” (Lefort 1990c: 293) in every failing articulation of identity; it unfolds its constitutive effects in the occurrence of the political as an irresolvable difference that permeates any identification of the social and its elements, and ultimately provokes nothing but renewed antagonisms about identity. That is what Lefort – and Laclau and Mouffe – call antagonism.

2. #MeToo and the 'Game of Hegemony'

Laclau and Mouffe denote with their concept of hegemony something that addresses precisely the difference between particular antagonisms about identity and that antagonism, which makes any universal foundation of the social impossible. With this term, they outline something that at least temporarily occupies the emptiness of the “empty place of power” (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 80) and intermittently sutures the gap that pervades the social. Herewith, hegemony is a matter of “type of political relation” and not a “topographical concept” (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 128) that makes certain modes of articulation of identity within the space of politics more rational, true, normal, etc. than others. The rhetorical moment in this relation is vital: “No hegemonic logic can account for the totality of the social and constitute its center” (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 142); it cannot produce a “suture” (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 142) that could restore the cut connection between *corpus mysticum* and *corpus naturale*. Rather, any hegemonic suture is condemned to be dissolved again, because it designates identities that are not totally acquired. If one takes a look at how hegemony appears if one focuses on the moments of its dissolving, it becomes quite clear how fragile that suture is that sews the gap in the social.

Laclau raises the question of the fragility of this suture through the reflection on the ambiguity of the word “social demand”: A demand can be called both as a request and as a claim. To explain the difference, Laclau uses the example of a slum settlement on the outskirts of a city, which can form when more and more rural people move into the city. Over time, housing problems will develop: housing will not suffice, rents will increase “and the group of people affected by them requests some kind of solution from the local authorities.” (Laclau 2007: 73) This kind of demand would be outlined by Laclau as a request. If this demand is not gratified, there is a chance that “people can start to perceive that their neighbors have other, equally unsatisfied demands” (Laclau 2007: 73). However, the question arises how requests transform into claims. It is precisely this problem of the transformation of requests into demands that leads us straight to the heart of the dynamics of crowd producing social movements such as that of #MeToo.

The #MeToo movement has become known mainly through the reaction of the actress Alyssa Milano on the revelation of the scandal of the sexual harassment of women by the



producer Harvey Weinstein. By a simple question, she addressed the problem of sexual molestation of women; she wrote: "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." That was on October 15th, 2017. Tens of thousands responded to this call within a very short time, expressed their solidarity, and shared their experiences with sexual violence with each other. On October 30th, the hitherto only virtual protests reached the streets in France (cf. Bergey, Favennec and Vogler 2017), the US, and Germany. On March 3th 2018, the movement reached its climax with the worldwide emergence of the protests (cf. Povoledo, Minder and Joseph 2018).

Interestingly, the hashtag #MeToo was articulated firstly by activist Tarana Burke twelve years ago in a slightly different context: In 2006, she launched that hashtag (back then still) on Myspace to help girls of color who had experienced sexual violence by constituting a space to break the taboo over those traumatic events (cf. Phipps 2019: 1). Burke explicitly wanted to be able to address that issue as a particular problem of "women and girls of color in underprivileged communities, where rape crisis centers and sexual assault workers were not going" (Hill 2017: 1). For her, it is a special case of racist violence against people of color. Accordingly, in 2017 she reacted ambivalently to the growing of her hashtag #MeToo. So she commented on this in a tweet: "I had to ring the alarm, one before my work is erased, and two because if I can support people, I have to do that." (Ohlheiser 2017: 1) What Burke sees as endangered here is her work on a particular problem that notably affects people of color. What she realizes is the danger posed by the fact that her #MeToo hashtag has universalized a problem that – as Laclau (2007: 71) would say – as a "common denominator" now threatens to erase the particularity of her commitment. How is such a particular commitment universalized to a 'common denominator' (or an 'empty signifier' as Laclau would denote it in another way) and how is it moved through such a common denominator until it appears threatened in its particularity? If one follows Laclau, this can only be narrowed by considering the equivalence between Burke's and Milano's #MeToo hashtag against the background from which they differentiate themselves.

Laclau and Mouffe assume that the problem posed by the presence of the antagonism is moving to a tier of equivalence and difference logics (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 127-128). They suppose that identity can no longer be represented as positivity; it can only be constituted by the delimitation from a point of exclusion. Precisely because heterogeneous positions exclude within the discursive space a certain mode of articulation of an object collectively, they come into an equivalential relation to each other. They connect in this equivalence to each other, but only so far as the differences which exist between the parts of that chain of equivalence, "cancel one other out insofar as they are used to express something identical underlying them all" (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 113). Fundamentally, however, the connection of the links of these chains of equivalence is always fragile: their links can break out of a chain and be integrated into other chains – the coherence of the



chains depends on the point to which the chain is attached through an operation of exclusion. It produces an outside that first constitutes it as immanence. But just this reference to a constitutive outside remarks the central problem in the constitution of hegemony. Or in other words: There are spoken briefly (at least) two different demands (Burke's and Milano's articulation) in the #MeToo movement (it is a heterogeneous ensemble of different demands). But the question is, how does such a movement gain a unified voice?

It is precisely because of this problem that I would like to call the term crowd into question with the term equivalence chain. Social movements and struggles for hegemony produce crowds. If you follow Canetti, for example, the term *crowds* is a mystery but it initially emphasizes two things: the dynamic unpredictability on the one hand, but also – and that seems to be fascinating for Canetti – the moment of unity:

Suddenly everywhere is black with people and more come streaming from all sides as though streets had only one direction. Most of them do not know what has happened and, if questioned, have no answer; but they hurry to be there where most other people are. There is a determination in their movement which is quite different from the expression of ordinary curiosity. It seems as though the movement of some of them transmits itself to the others. (Canetti 1984: 16)

For Canetti, the flashing point about the crowd is that the “fear of being touched” changes in the crowd: “There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown” (1984: 15). It is precisely the moment of equality that the crowd creates in which the individual, in other words: the particularity of the mass, unifies: “distinctions are thrown off and all feel equal. [...] It is for the sake of the blessed moment when no-one is greater or better than another, that people become a crowd.” (Canetti 1984: 18). In particular, it is Canetti's “crowds symbols” that give imaginary and archaic unity to the particularity of individual beings (1984: 75–90.). And of course, you could analyze now #MeToo with Canetti's terms of open mass, closed mass, discharge, eruption, etc. But that's not the point. I shorten it here very much, because here, in contrast to the crowd, the concept of the chain of equivalence underlines the objection of the particular to the moment of universalization. Chains of equivalence do not form an archaic unity (like Canetti emphasizes with the term *crowd*), but rather an aesthetic but differential unity, which at the same time has an exclusive effect and which, in my opinion, can better grasp dynamic social movements like #MeToo.

Laclau addresses the problem of how identity can be thought of as difference in his essay “Identity and Hegemony”: For him, the “hegemonic relation” is related to the “unevenness of power [...]” (Laclau 2000a: 54). A hegemonic articulation can only be constituted when a field of “antagonistic forces” develops around a certain problem whose frontiers are not stable (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 136). Since, however, neither an even- nor an unevenness of power can be pre-existent to the articulations within the political, one



must assume that this even- resp. unevenness of power *is produced articulately* by the constituted equivalence constituted thereby. It is articulated immanently.

And this can be transferred to #MeToo. What is at stake at #MeToo, firstly *must be articulated as relevant*. On a banner at a demonstration in France, it is at least suggested how this unevenness is produced in the case of #MeToo; it reads: "le patriarcat nique son père" (cf. Bergey, Favennec and Vogler 2017). The engagement of this movement is aimed initially at the demarcation of patriarchal hegemony and the discussion about the state of equality between men and women. What is articulated here is a relation between the articulation of an oppressed inside *on the one hand*: sexually abused and molested women, women subjected to male hegemony concerning a social hierarchy, but also men who have been sexually abused and harassed, who may also be subjected to the patriarchy for their sexual orientation – the frontiers of this inside articulate themselves as completely blurred. And *on the other hand*, however, the limits of a repressive patriarchal exterior articulated in this context are also indistinct. Against this background, it can be said that every subject position articulated within #MeToo differentiates itself from a repressive patriarchal regime (and thereby emerges as similar among others). At the same time, they cannot be fixed because this oppressive outside is articulated in a completely different way through every subject position within the movement.

Nevertheless, the movement needs to unite its voice, to enter the emancipatory struggle against the patriarchal regime, which suggests that within the movement a hegemonic order reproduces (it must be set what can and cannot be said by the movement). Following how Milano and Burke's #MeToo hashtags were used differently by the #MeToo movement, it can reasonably be assumed that (also) in this movement – in the struggle against a hegemonic patriarchal order – a hegemonic-white order is reproduced. So Phipps concludes: "However, except for Burke, most key figures in the movement were Western, white and privileged [...], reflecting the dominance of occidental feminisms that position themselves as both universal and neutral [...], and the dominance of white bourgeois women within these." (2019: 2) I would like to refer to two systematic threads concerning this argument, in which the dissolving and suturing of the gap within the social through such a movement like #MeToo takes place within the political space. To pursue my question whether the fight against patriarchal hegemony produces #MeToo as a powerful construct, which in turn excludes subject positions of women and girls of color, I want to take a closer look at a) how these chains of equivalence are constituted within such a dynamics of hegemony and b) how they articulate as something unstable – and therefore exclusive and excluding.

a) This outside is rhetorically articulated by the #MeToo movement as being "the notorious crime of the whole of society" so that the emancipation from this must appear as the emancipation of the entire social (Laclau 2000a: 55). This is an attempt to articulate a



“general crime” that “borrows” its name “from the particularity of the oppressive regime” (Laclau 2000a: 55; cf. also Laclau 2000b). This can be well understood in the #MeToo debate: An important aspect in the articulation of Milano’s #MeToo tweet was the Weinstein scandal. On October 5th the *New York Times* published an article in which an open secret of Hollywood was articulated through the testimonies of victims: Over a span of 30 years Weinstein had demanded sexual acts from young actresses and employees as a return for the promotion of their career (cf. Kantor and Twohey 2017). The articulation of Milano refers to the revelation of the scandal in this context while using Burke’s #MeToo term. Regarding this, she said in an interview with the AP: “The most important thing that it did was to shift the conversation away from the predator and to the victim” (cf. Chen 2017). In this context, Weinstein becomes now a form of representation of that ‘general crime’: He is articulated as demonized (cf. Laclau 2007: 70) outside of pure “negativity” (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 129). The particularity of his case becomes “partially universalized” because “there is no concept [...] which would correspond to that fullness and, as a result, no concept corresponding to a universal object blocking it” (Laclau 2000a: 55). But the particularity of Weinstein’s case becomes a reference to a universal problem. Weinstein is produced as a form of representation as an immanent outside (cf. Thompson 2007) against which the equivalence of the #MeToo debate emerges.

b) This outside, however, is not a pure outside, but rather an over-determined one, which in many places can hardly be clearly distinguished from the inside.⁴ Laclau argues that this articulation of a “general crime” is accompanied (dialectically) by an articulation of a “general victim” (Laclau 2000a: 55). The emergence of such an outside as an articulation of the ‘general crime’ allows the constitution of a chain of equivalence of moments that seem to be related to that ‘general crime’. Thus, as part of the Weinstein scandal

⁴ Cf. Lefort 1990c, Marchart 1998. Nowadays you can observe attempts of the enactment of ultimate justifications that can be observed especially in many places in the world in different contexts. The German right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) distinguishes itself through assumptions which aim at the restoration of obsolete states of the social order. For example they are arguing against contemporary gender pedagogy. In their so called “Declaration of Magdeburg” they are defining family as a community of man and woman, from which children emerge. They are positioning themselves clearly against any definition of family as a community of same-sex partners. In such articulations right wing fractions try to produce performatively a resurrection of a traditional sex ratio. They deny the existence of a socially produced gender and assume instead a clear chromosomal difference of sex. What they assume is ultimate justification given by nature. Cf. AfD 2016. Interestingly they are supported by some scientists like Ulrich Kutschera. Cf. Kutschera 2016. He serves with his publication “Das Gender-Paradoxon” (The gender paradox) as a legitimation of exactly this assertion. He propels it so far to say that the gender discourse is a kind of ‘society cancer’ (Kutschera 2016b), which promotes a government-funded paedophilia (cf. Kutschera 2017). What is evident here is the possibility of discursive alliances between a right wing populist political rhetoric and meanwhile admittedly marginalized but for the legitimation of a specific right wing position advantageous scientific positions. Against this backdrop it seems possible to widen this discussion about symbolic bodies. It takes a sovereign founding act (the institution of vote, the kings beheading, etc.) to think such a logic of the political as Lefort calls. This is why Foucault writes that in political thinking and political analysis, the King’s head “still hasn’t been cut off” (1980: 121).



Weinstein's wife, Georgina Chapman, and their fashion label Marchesa got a special position in the context of the articulation of that outside: Milano was, for example, criticized for still supporting the label, although she was vital in kicking off the #MeToo debate. Chapman, Marchesa, and their clothing became links of that chain of equivalence connected to that articulation of general crime. About that articulating chain of equivalence of a general crime, however, a chain of moments opens up which can be assigned to the sphere of the 'general victim'. As a result, "two camps" (Laclau and Mouffe 2014: 129), two opposing chains of equivalences within the political space are articulated, each struggling to define a central problem of identity. The links of those opposing chains become the stake of strategic struggles⁵: The frontier between these chains becomes itself the issue. Laclau calls this first level of dissolving and suturing of the gap pervading the social the "play of difference" (Laclau 2007: 69) and the object of this antagonistic game seems to be precisely that frontier between outside and inside.

This is exactly where a fundamental problem arises for the heterogeneity of the different demands that are articulated within #MeToo: Hegemony will become possible "if the dichotomy universality/particularity is superseded" (Laclau 2000a: 56). But this only works if a particular point of commitment can be universalized, because "universality exists only incarnated in [...] particularity" (Laclau 2000a: 56). For Laclau, this is conceivable only as a "passage through particularity" (2000a: 56). The problem then is precisely that a particular demand of the #MeToo movement *prevails as the demand that the entire movement seems to represent*. In the case investigated, Milano's claim seems to have prevailed over Burke's. So: On the one hand the chain of equivalence continues to expand (cf. Laclau 2000a: 69). For example, the hashtag #MeToo no longer refers only to particular women and girls of color in underprivileged communities who have experienced sexual violence, but *to anyone* who is articulated as being affected by a hegemonic regime of a patriarchal rule that acts violently against those who are articulating themselves resistively. But, on the other hand, #MeToo – understood as a chain of equivalence – can just articulate engagements against hegemony by paying the price of constituting a new hegemonic order, which marginalizes particular positions (like Burke's #MeToo articulation and with her positions on girls and women of color within the movement).

The problem that I have encountered, however, lies in the character of Laclau's equivalence chains wiping out the internal differences. Burke's #MeToo articulation made it possible to form a crowd of people protesting. They are struggling for the occupation of the 'empty place of power'. But is such an occupation only possible if particular operations such as Burke's are made to disappear? Can Burke's #MeToo articulation only become

⁵ At the Met Gala 2018, for example, Scarlett Johansson was criticized for wearing a dress from Marchesa. She was accused of hypocrisy because she is a supporter of the #TimesUp movement, which was the result of the #MeToo debate.



public through hegemonic sublimation, namely that a certain articulation of what constitutes #MeToo, who represents the movement and what it is about, has prevailed over others? Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler would criticize Laclau for this in a Hegelian phrase: "The ultimate question is not which particular content hegemonizes the empty universality (and thus, in the struggle for hegemony, excludes other particular contents); the ultimate question is: which specific content has to be excluded so that the very empty form of universality emerges as the 'battlefield' for hegemony?" (Žižek 2000: 110; also cf. Butler 2000: 137). Is this criticism justified and to what extent is such an exclusion produced?

3. Drowning – 'Partage du sensible'

According to Laclau the game of hegemony⁶ is an attempt to occupy the 'empty place of power' temporarily in the context of which chains of equivalence constitute. But this attempt, we have seen this in Butlers and Žižek's objection, needs to exclude something to be able to constitute an emancipatory discourse: A particular articulation, such as Burke's use of #MeToo, is engendered as something, that should/could unite all the heterogeneous positions which emerge in this contemporary struggle against patriarchal hegemony in the context of #MeToo. But precisely this assumption is the problem: Are all involved participants concerned, firstly, with this fight against patriarchal hegemony itself? Secondly, do all subjects articulate this fight as the same thing? In both questions, it can be assumed that the universalization of these particularisms, this attempt of representation, has a decisive influence on the dynamics of such a movement. And thirdly (and this question will concern me below): Has every participant of the social movement the same voice to speak and the same chance to be heard? I assume that here within this movement a differentiation is made between a way of a legitimate speaking and an illegitimate, unheard speaking. *The attempt of representing a heterogeneous chain of equivalence thus articulates a hegemonic space of #MeToo itself, in which specific forms of articulation are seen and heard but others are not.* The universalization of particular content (Milano's demand #MeToo) marginalizes specific particular engagements like Burke's #MeToo. This attempt of articulating a counter-hegemony thereby is itself traversed by relations of power, which Rancière would sketch as distribution of the sensible. In the following, it is precisely about these practices, which within #MeToo exclude primarily those practices of people of color and thus always generate a 'partage du sensible'. But first of all, that term of Jacques Rancière should be clarified in a nutshell.

What can be outlined here for #MeToo is a struggle for the "existence of a common stage" (Rancière 1999: 23). But this political struggle is at the same time an aesthetic struggle (and this makes a difference to Laclau and Mouffe's perspective); It is not just a

⁶ I provide a more detailed analysis of this argumentation elsewhere; cf. Wittig 2018.



struggle to be heard but more generally to be perceived (cf. Rancière 1999: 22). The problem that Rancière has just encountered with the introduction of the 'partage du sensible' as a police arrangement of the "symbolic distribution of bodies" is that this distribution of subject positions results in a specific dichotomy: It divides this order into "those that one sees and those that one does not see; those who have a logos – memorial speech, an account to be kept up – and those who have no logos" (1999: 22). With the term *police*, this logos is articulated as a process of distributing bodies which ultimately produces an "order of bodies" that makes certain bodies into perceptible subject positions, while others are disappearing, because they are articulated as something that only makes "noise" and therefore it should not be brought up to speech (Rancière 1999: 29). Just think of the Marxian "lumpenproletariat".⁷ But how is Burke's #MeToo in a similar position?

This "partage du sensible" is a "system of sensual evidence" in which, on the one hand, "a common" is produced by being aesthetically "shared" by the various subject-positions (Rancière 2006: 25). This means that this order constitutes itself as something common because different subject positions perceive themselves as part of this order. On the other hand, however, this participation in that order has just "produced parts" that "remain exclusive" (Rancière 2006: 25). This is the doubled meaning of the French word *partage*. Concerning #MeToo, women and girls of color seem to make up just this excluded part. In September 2019 Anna Foster reflected on the development of the #MeToo movement up until that point: "This #MeToo movement is no different than most historical feminist movements, which contain active racism, and have typically ignored the needs of non-white women even though women of color are more likely to be targets of sexual harassment." (Foster 2020: 1) The only way in which the concerns of women and girls of color related to the subjection to patriarchal hegemony and a male logos could be discussed were white subject positions, as Foster points out: "Racism is real, still alive today, and institutionalized, which contributes to why no one was paying attention to a hashtag or a slogan from a young black woman named Tarana from the Bronx." (2020: 1) It needed Ashley Judd, Alyssa Milano, Scarlett Johansson etc. to give Tarana Burke a voice. It needed white people to drag the marginalized people of color into the logos, even into the logos of the #MeToo-movement, which was originally founded by a woman of color.

Marina Martínez Mateo (2019) brings up the issue I am encountering here at #MeToo by examining Jane Mansbridge's (1999: 629) postulate ("representatives are in their own persons and lives in some sense typical of the larger class of persons whom they repre-

⁷ Interesting here is the difference in the call of the *lumpenproletariat* both in the "18th Brumaire" and in the *Communist Manifesto* as that part of the proletariat which sides with the bourgeoisie, subverting the proletarian revolution (cf. Marx 1960: 121sq., 154 and 160sq). "The lumpenproletariat" is the "passive decay of the lowest layers of the old society" and therefore, despite being part of the proletarian class, it must be marginalized (Marx and Engels in Marx 1960: 472).



sent.”): White female subjects claim to *enact* a “collective identity” of “women” (cf. Martínez Mateo 2019: 333). So they presume to be able to represent black female subjects because they are also women. The problem is that this kind of representation defines what the markers of femininity are. They are articulating and filling the ‘empty signifier’ of femininity with white content in the attempt to oppose patriarchal hegemony. So Martínez Mateo notes: “Offenbar gelten nur die Erfahrungen *bestimmter* Frauen als ‘typisch’, die politisch privilegierter und deshalb sichtbarer sind und dadurch überhaupt zur bestimmenden Norm von Weiblichkeit werden können.” (2019: 335)⁸ Although such a descriptive representation is proposed as a counter-strategy it leads implicitly to new exclusions, which are – according to Martínez Mateo – inevitable, if an articulated “collective identity of ‘woman’” tries to represent *every particular subject* counted in that category (2019: 334). The articulation of a general position (which is potentially filled by white contents) “führt dazu, dass unter der Hand ein Ausschluss vorgenommen wird, insofern nicht jede Erfahrung gleichermaßen das Privileg genießt, abstrahiert werden zu können.” (Martínez Mateo 2019: 336)⁹ It is Milano’s #MeToo-tweet that goes viral, not Burke’s #MeToo-post in 2006. You can see the consequence in the following: “Indem die eigene privilegierte Erfahrung zur allgemeinen Norm erklärt wird, werden alle Erfahrungen, die damit nicht übereinstimmen, aus dem Kollektiv der Frauen ausgeschlossen.” (Martínez Mateo 2019: 336)¹⁰ The problem of the #MeToo-movement is: White women *declare* what you can call femininity; so women and girls of color, and that is the cynical turn of this story, are subjected to white hegemony again, while they are fighting against (white) patriarchal hegemony.

Spivak (1994) is the one who specifically bundles the problem we encountered with #MeToo in her post-colonial approach in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. She comes across this issue by criticizing Gilles Deleuze’s benevolent reference to Michel Foucault’s commitment for prison inmates: “Foucault articulates another corollary of the disavowal of the role of ideology in reproducing the social relations of production: an unquestioned valorization of the oppressed as subject, the ‘object being’, as Deleuze admiringly remarks, ‘to establish conditions where the prisoners themselves would be able to speak’” (Spivak 1994: 69). Do we need intellectuals, or in other words: representatives of the logos (such as Foucault or maybe even Alyssa Milano, Ashley Judd etc.) to make these subject positions audible to others which are otherwise not heard/seen? Marina Martínez Mateo sums up: “Immer dann, wenn überhaupt jemand für jemanden zu sprechen beansprucht, werden Ausschlüsse produziert, weil es immer jemanden gibt, die womöglich ganz andere

⁸ “[o]bviously, only the experiences of certain women, who are politically privileged and therefore more visible, are considered ‘typical’. Thus they can become the determining norm of femininity.” (translation S.W.).

⁹ “leads to the fact that under the hand an exclusion is made, insofar as not every experience equally enjoys the privilege to be abstracted” (translation S.W.).

¹⁰ “By declaring one’s own privileged experience as the general norm, all the experiences that do not agree with it are excluded from the collective of women.” (translation S.W.).



Dinge zu sagen hätte und dennoch nicht spricht oder gehört wird." (2019: 336)¹¹ In the case of #MeToo this relation of power, this reproduction of a *racial* hegemony within a fight against (white) patriarchal hegemony is constituted through the hegemonic occupation of the 'empty signifier' feminity by 'white' articulations.

According to Phipps "Western feminist movement around sexual violence is dominated by bourgeois white women" (2019: 6) and you can take a closer look at how this white hegemony (within the fight against white patriarchal hegemony as an intersection between race and gender) is reproduced in the way of representing 'feminity' – also in #MeToo. She places #MeToo in the history of the women's movement and comes to the following critical conclusion:

Like Tarana Burke, black women and other women of color have also often been the first to put issues on the agenda, and #MeToo is the most recent in a long list of high-profile movements in which white bourgeois women have co-opted this work. The activism of black women against rape in the US Civil Rights movement [...] was built upon, usually without acknowledgement [sic!], by second-wave white feminists [...]. Activism by women of color (and Professor Anita Hill in the US in particular) has been crucial in naming and fighting sexual harassment, but white academics and lawyers have tended to get the credit [...]. While the work of women of color is co-opted, white feminist outrage has tended to overlook them [...]. #MeToo was no different in this regard, with Anglo-American commentators noting a focus on the victimization of privileged white women in domestic contexts [...] and an inattention to others such as the black girls and women abused by R Kelly [...], or the Rohingya women raped in Myanmar [...]. (Phipps 2019a: 7)

#MeToo "can be interpreted as a conversation between white people" (Phipps 2019a: 7). This can be said against the background that primarily the particular experiences of whites are universalized and thus the "empty signifier" femininity is filled. (Phipps 2019a: 8). So Phipps concludes this argument: "in public feminisms around sexual violence, gendered oppression is articulated through a position of racialized and classed social and structural power" (2019a: 11). The practices with which racial exclusions are made refer to a concept of "political whiteness" by implicitly producing a "partage du sensible": the statements of white speakers are heard, they are part of the logos, while the positions of women and girls of color are not heard. While Tarana Burke as the founder of #MeToo was often mentioned publicly and implicitly served the movement as a form of 'critical awareness', other women and girls of color also fulfilled this function, but they were not publicly perceived. For example, they used alternative and ironic hashtags to #MeToo such as #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen. There they demanded greater attention to the victimization of women and girls of color. Against this background, it can be shown that the 'political grammar' is articulated by white bourgeoisie female speaker positions (cf. Phipps

¹¹ "Whenever anyone claims to speak for someone, exclusions are produced because there is always someone who may have very different things to say and yet is not spoken or heard" (translation S.W.).



2019b: 1). They make use of a special model of segregation that does not actively exclude, but rather excludes precisely by assuming a spokeswoman position that starts from the premise that they *can speak apparently for all concerned*. Phipps got to the heart of that issue by writing: "White people are used to being seen as 'everything'. Our views are objective, and our experiences can represent those of everyone else. We expect to be centred, even in anti-racist movements" (2019b: 2). And even this is the problem of the white feminism articulated in the #MeToo movement: "It is nominally inclusive, but inclusion depends on white women being centred as those who grant it. We speak for other groups, rather than letting them speak for themselves." (Phipps 2019b: 2). Phipps showed this in a tweet sent by Milano on Women's Day 2019 to support #MeToo. She wrote: "My transgender sisters! I am celebrating YOU this #NationalWomensDay!". Shortly afterward a male user replied to the question: "Alyssa are you transgender?" and Milano responded in detail: "I'm trans. I'm a person of color. I'm an immigrant. I'm a lesbian. I'm a gay man. I'm the disabled. I'm everything. And so are you, Kirk." (Phipps 2019b: 2) The logos of a white bourgeois hegemony is therefore not only reproduced in the dynamic of the social movement #MeToo by actively ignoring particular positions; these positions are "drowned out" by the white speaks-women claiming to be able to speak for everyone and everything. And because it can be reasonably said that by prevailing Milano's #MeToo tweet against Burke's articulation, the "empty place of power" in the middle of the chain of equivalence of the #MeToo movement is occupied by a specifically "white" articulation of femininity.

4. Broken Representations – Disturbing Images

The problem encountered in the preceding could be summarized as follows: On the one hand, the logic of equivalence and difference, which was highlighted with Laclau and Mouffe, requires the universalization of a particular articulation (e.g. the tweet #MeToo). Only in this way a movement – articulating itself as a chain of equivalence – can demand something with 'one voice'. On the other hand, this attempt to make demands with 'one voice' results in the exclusion of particular positions and thus the reproduction of the hegemonic order by the act of universalizing the particular (e.g. Milano claims to speak for all women and beyond). Specifically using the example #MeToo, this was shown in such a way that in the fight against patriarchal hegemony a white bourgeois female hegemony is reproducing within the chain of equivalence formed. The question (especially for the future of the issue of 'crowds') is: Is there a way out? In conclusion, I would like to point out possible problematizations and implications of this question briefly. I will answer in two different ways.



a) *The reproduction of hegemony as the production of a political subject through a broken representation*: If one follows Martínez Mateo (2019: 339) again, representation always means two things: to figure and to form something ('abbilden' and 'formieren'). First of all, and this is what perhaps 'abbilden'/figure could mean, it is about to correspond as exactly as possible to something to be represented. E.g. the state tries to represent society, the spokeswomen for #MeToo try to represent the particular parts of the movement, femininity generally, etc. The first dimension of 'Abbildung' is about determining the relationship between what has to be represented and what is represented. According to Martínez Mateo, it can be assumed that there is a difference between these two sides of that relationship. This was already shown at #MeToo: Burke's demand does not match Milano's claim to be able to speak for all women. However, it cannot be assumed that an underlying identity that could be understood in an essentialist way is displayed in this relationship of representation (like *the* society or *the* #MeToo movement). Rather, it can be assumed that identity is only articulated in this relationship of representation. So: The second perspective highlighted by Martínez Mateo ('Formierung'/to form) is related in this context, Exactly in that necessary difference between what has to be represented and what is represented lies a productive moment. At first glance, this sounds cynical. The representation of something to be represented inevitably erases parts of its heterogeneity (Milano's tweet #MeToo drowns out Burke's tweet through the implied claim to speak for all women). But this representation needs a "Übersetzungs- und 'Filterungsleistung', die eine unbestimmte Heterogenität von Interessen politisch beziehungsweise staatlich organisiert. Es wird dabei immer etwas geben, was es nicht in die Politik 'schafft', und Perspektiven, die bei dieser Übersetzung verfremdet werden – und das ist nicht zufällig, sondern aus systematischen Gründen so." (Martínez Mateo 2019: 340)¹²

The articulation of identity of what has to be represented and what is represented appears as an impossibility. Up to this point, what has been said in relation to the issues discussed is cynical. But at that very moment of exclusion, in those subjects who 'do not make it into politics', an unrepresentable indefinite subject shows itself: a crowd or a constituent force (cf. Martínez Mateo 2019: 341). The speaking of Milano (Johansson, Judd, etc.) in the name of an apparent collective identity 'woman' fails necessarily if, for example, representatives of the black community insist legitimately that they are not included in this speech. Likewise, in this reference to the exclusion from that hegemonic-aesthetic order of being a 'woman', a different political subject articulates: the political subject of being a 'black woman'. Here, the articulation of such an indefinite political subjectivity opens up the ability to criticize and to connect with/to other discourses such as #blacklivematter, which must be examined in further analyzes especially against the background

¹² "What is needed (as already noted above) is a 'translation' and 'filtering' that organizes an indefinite heterogeneity of interests politically resp. by the state. There will always be something that does not 'make it into politics' and perspectives that are alienated in this translation – and this is not accidental, but has systematic reasons" (translation S.W.).



of the question what 'political subjectivity' could mean here (which cannot be elaborated here) (cf. Green et. al 2019). However, the reference to such a political subjectivity which articulates as negativity appears to be highly problematic, because innumerable discourses intersect in it. But maybe the disturbing potential lies in this overdetermination.

b) *Disturbing images*: Rancière's approach strikes sparks again here: If one follows his statements, another picture opens up on what representation can mean. It is about to disturb the space of representation, the perceptible and comprehensible, through images, which disrupt the modes of perception and understanding of the logos itself (cf. Hübel, Mattl and Robnik 2010), to irritate it as epistemic and aesthetic order. "Aisthesis denotes" for Rancière a "mode of experience" (Rancière 2013b: 12) which is capable of describing the "aesthetic senses, the aesthetic experience" of the subject as "a dissociation with the order, with the sense of order – the existing configuration of the sensible" (Rancière and Ensslin 2006: 14). Aesthetics, as such a mode of experience, seems to be capable to disturb the perspective on a "community of the sensible" (Rancière 2006: 71) as a spatio-temporal continuum. The aesthetics of an image or a scene seems to be able to subvert the "partage du sensible", which, according to Rancière, is the vanishing point of politics and aesthetics alike (cf. Sonderegger 2010): By articulating affiliations that usually do not belong together (e.g. proletarians write poems), by making subjects speak, to whom the meaningful language has been denied (e.g. Olympe de Gouge speaks at the French National Assembly as a woman), by subjecting seemingly determinate, as Menke emphasizes, to a process of "undetermining" (Menke 2008: 87) – exactly these are examples for how the (sensual) order could be undermined as an order, which distributes subject positions. In the words of Rancière: "This sensuous power, detached from its usual connections, is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, by the power of thought that has become alien to itself" (Rancière 2006: 39). In this respect, Rancière proposes with and against Marx a "new idea of revolution": a "sensual revolution" (Rancière 2006: 51).¹³ Perhaps the reference to a possible political subject of the 'black women' that appears in the exclusion can articulate such a disturbing image. If one follows Rancière's examples from *Disagreement*, the reference on a (maybe just assumed) political subjectivity can articulate such an image. He refers to the trial of the revolutionary Auguste Blanqui from 1832 and the implied double meaning of the word 'profession', which ultimately articulates such a disturbing picture in the term 'proletarian':

¹³ One possible disturbance of this "partage du sensible" is Rancière's reading of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. What Rancière tries to look at with Schiller is the possibility of transforming the division of the sensible by an "aesthetic revolution" (Rancière 2006: 45). At the same time, however, he thematizes what Schiller describes as education ("Bildung"). For Rancière, Schiller seems to negotiate the question of how hegemonic logics can be subverted in spite of the fact that forms of criticism always remain in an immanence, that is, they must fall back on the hegemonic logic in any attempt of subversion. For a closer look see Mayer, Schäfer and Wittig 2019.



Asked by the magistrate to give his profession, Blanqui simply replies: 'proletarian:' The magistrate immediately objects to this response: "That is not a profession;" thereby setting himself up for copping the accused's immediate response: 'It is the profession of thirty million Frenchmen who live off their labor and who are deprived of political rights:' The judge then agrees to have the court clerk list proletarian as a new 'profession.' (Rancière 1999: 37)

The question that arises from this example in the context discussed here is how it has become possible to perceive the term 'proletarian' in this context not only as a form of labor or activity that puts a body in its specific place and its 'appropriate' function but also as a declaration of belonging to a collective that is denied access to political rights. So does the failure of the representation of women and girls of color show a political subjectivity that can irritate the hegemonic order?

This seems problematic for different reasons. If a political subjectivity is claimed as 'black women', problems arise in the context of a struggle against patriarchal hegemony concerning an apparent "collective sense of being" (Gómez and Gobin 2020: 3). This dilemma is highlighted by Gómez and Gobin: "Specifically, when Black females are sexually violated by Black males, they are faced with a formidable dilemma: (a) disclose the abuse and risk turning a Black man over to a law enforcement system that has historically mistreated Black men or (b) remain silent about the abuse and sacrifice their own mental well-being for the good of the cultural group." (Gómez and Gobin 2020: 3). Such a political subjectivity of 'black women', which emerges as negativity in this way, is articulated as torn: between an "an external locus of control", so to say: a possible attachment to chains of equivalence fighting against patriarchal hegemony, "and an internal locus of responsibility regarding their cultural group" (Gómez and Gobin 2020: 3). Both 'black' and 'women' appear as problematic (because overdetermined) terms. How one behaves in this dilemma seems to depend on which possible identification is problematized. If 'women' is problematized as a concept, 'black' can be maintained as a possible subject of a 'collective sense of being' (but this term remains still problematic, e.g. what does 'collective' mean here). At the same time, however, the term 'black' can be problematized against the background of strengthening the term 'women'. So one can argue like Saidya Hartman (2008) does in her essay *Venus in Two Acts* that even concerning anti-racist discourses which try to draw attention to the fate of people of color – as is now happening with the 'black lives matter' movement (cf. Greene et. al. 2019) – one thing is nevertheless excluded: Only the fate of boys and men is discussed, but not that of girls and women of color. The term 'black women' opens up a game between the two terms 'black' and 'women' in relation to a discourse around the struggle against patriarchal hegemony, whereby there is no criterion that could bring these two terms are in 'correct' relation to each other. And this "game of hegemony" is inscribing undecidability in every subject position, which is only involved in the slightest.



But perhaps this heavy implication of Hartman's essay, with which she opens up an aesthetic articulation of political subjectivity, could have the potential to call the distribution of the sensible into question. For Hartman, the term 'black women' is an object of narration as she introduces as follows. She repeats the problem discussed: There are countless, secret stories of 'black women' in history that have been banned into the archive in different ways. At the same time, however, exactly that archive of stories is the repetition of the violence carried out in the entanglement of these discourses (and thus, as previously stated, the reproduction of hegemony). She notes: "The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhoea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history." (Hartman 2008: 2). So she asks herself: "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?" (Hartman 2008: 4) to conclude that it only makes sense "to write a new story, one unfettered by the constraints of the legal documents and exceeding the restatement and transpositions, which comprised my strategy for disordering and transgressing the protocols of the archive and the authority of its statements and which enabled me to augment and intensify its fictions." (Hartman 2008: 9). To this end, she takes one of those stories of the 'black women' who have been banished to silence and rewrites it. It is about the death of two girls on a slave ship in 1792: "Two girls died on board the *Recovery*. The captain, John Kimber, was indicted for having, feloniously, wickedly and with malice aforethought, beaten and tortured a female slave, so as to cause her death: and he was again indicted for having caused the death of another female slave." (Hartman 2008: 7)

Although it was about the death of the two girls, only one sentence was said about both before the captain was acquitted: "There was another girl on board the recovery... whom they named Venus, and she too had the pox." (Hartman 2008: 8) So she fills the space of silence with a new narration – but in a mode of a "critical fabulation", which means, that she tells the story by refusing to tell the story of Venus. She only hints at it. She refers to the historical causality of the archive: Two girls died on a slave ship, there is one accused, the captain, who is said to have both whipped to death, but who was acquitted. Hartman refers to the empty space in the story, the empty space in the archive. But she still shows what could have happened. It is about referencing the difference between history and fiction "by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done. By throwing into crisis 'what happened when' and by exploiting the 'transparency of sources' as fictions of history, I wanted to make visible the production of disposable lives (in the Atlantic slave trade and, as well, in the discipline of history), to describe 'the resistance of the object'" (Hartman 2008: 11).





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