

**“SO DON'T PUNISH ME FOR NOT BEING A MAN”:
DISCOURSES OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN THE
LYRICS OF ANCIENT DREAMS IN A MODERN LAND
BY MARINA**

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Tiivistelmä– Abstract Laulujen sanoitukset heijastavat yhteiskunnan tilannetta, ja niiden kantaaottavat muodot voidaan nähdä jopa yhteiskunnallisena aktivismina. Sukupuolten välisen tasa-arvon sekä muiden poliittisten ja sosiaalisten teemojen nostaminen osaksi populaarikulttuuria on ilmiö, joka on yleistynyt huomattavasti viimeisen kymmenen vuoden aikana. Erityisesti naisartistit ovat tuoneet yhteiskunnallisia teemoja esille musiikissaan, korostaen feministisen näkökulman tärkeyttä sekä voimaantumisen kokemusta naisena. Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan naisten voimaantumista ja feministisiä aatteita sisältäviä diskursseja poplaulaja Marinan kappaleissa kriittistä diskurssianalyysiä sekä feminististä diskurssianalyysiä hyödyntäen. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu neljästä kappaleesta vuonna 2022 ilmestyneeltä albumilta <i>Ancient Dreams in a Modern Land</i> (Deluxe version). Metodina diskursseja tutkiessa hyödynnettiin Fairclough'n kolmiulotteista mallia, jossa tekstiä analysoidaan esimerkiksi kielellisten keinojen sekä sosiaalisten ulottuvuuksien kautta. Analyysissa löytyneet diskurssit jaettiin viiteen osa-alueeseen: positiivinen voimaantuminen, negatiivinen voimaantuminen, ekofeminismi, naisten toimijuus poliittisilla ja taloudellisilla sektoreilla sekä naisten esineellistäminen. Tutkimuksen tulokset kuvaavat Marinan kokemuksia naisena nyky-yhteiskunnassa, sekä kertovat naisten aseman ristiriitaisesta tilasta. Lisäksi analyysissa nousee esille vaihtoehtoisia ja vähemmän rajoittavia lähestymistapoja sukupuoli-identiteettien toteuttamiseen. Sanoituksista löytyneet ideologiat myös havainnollistavat, että yhteiskunnallinen keskustelu naisten asemasta on yhä relevanttia.	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Feminism has gone through several waves in the past century (Akinro & Dean, 2022, pp. 109-111), and even though the world has moved closer to acquiring the equality of genders, women are still facing inequality and unfairness in their everyday life. Women have often been represented in a very passive and one-dimensional manner in media, especially music videos and song lyrics. Over the past few years, however, a trend of empowerment has emerged in many female artists' productions and the commentation of the societal and political situation has become more frequent in pop music. Dean (2023) suggests that recent years have introduced a shift in contemporary popular culture, where artists incorporate political discourses – especially those of popular left politics such as feminism, anti-capitalism, and anti-racism – in their works. Whereas still ten years ago most mainstream artists avoided making political statements, embracing societal themes is now becoming increasingly common.

According to Gallée (2016, p. 22), song lyrics can portray social realities such as gender norms, as they are a reflection of the time they were written in. Expressing societal issues through music and lyrics is an effective way to raise awareness on such matters, and studying the discourses in today's popular music can help us learn more about the current situation. Previous research has found that popular music lyrics frequently include misogynistic discourses, especially in the genres of rap and hip hop. According to Weitzer and Kubrin (2009, p. 4), derogatory and highly stereotyped presentations of women have been very common in popular music. However, positive changes can be seen and lyrical presentations of women have become more complex (Weitzer & Kubrin 2009, p. 4). In recent years, themes of being independent and claiming one's own worth, for example, have become prominent in many pop songs sung by women. Trier-Bieniek (2015, p. xiv) states that pop culture's contradictory tendency to both emphasise the importance of feminism and gender equality and reject it makes it worthwhile to further explore the topic.

In this thesis, I conduct a critical discourse analysis on four of Marina's songs from the album *Ancient Dreams in a Modern Land* (Deluxe Edition), published in 2022. Marina (formerly known as Marina and the Diamonds) is a Welsh singer and songwriter, known especially for the committed and loyal fanbase she has gained over

her career. Marina's songs have reached millions of streams, and she has over 10 million monthly listeners on Spotify (Spotify, 2024). Previously, the discourses of left politics in relation to neoliberalism in Marina's music have been analysed by Dean (2023). The study found that while several popular left politics discourses are evident in Marina's lyrics, they are not entirely opposite to the neoliberal discourses, and that the distinction between "a 'bad', co-opted, neoliberal feminist/left politics and a 'good', radical, anti-neoliberal feminist/left politics is increasingly difficult to sustain" (Dean, 2023, p. 103). While feminism and female empowerment are recurring themes in Marina's songs, they have not been analysed in previous research. The aim of the current study is therefore to fill this gap in research. This is done by examining the various discourses of womanhood and the manifestation of female empowerment in the lyrics of Marina's selected songs. The findings add to our understanding of how contemporary female artists experience gender equality, and how popular music can be combined with societal messages.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Language and gender

The connection between language and gender has been widely researched, as these two notions are tightly intertwined. Researchers have considered the topic from both linguistic and gender studies' perspective, and more inclusive views have emerged in the field since the 1990's, challenging the traditional binary ideal. While the differences in language usage between genders have commonly been investigated, the more recent studies have shown interest towards how gender is constructed through language. Litosseliti (2006, p. 9) argues that language does not only reflect social reality but it also constructs it and shapes our views of the world and ourselves; in other words, we do not only use language in a certain way because of who we are, but who we are is to some extent shaped by our language usage. Language has the potential to establish power relations and social realities, of which gender roles and gendered stereotypes are good examples. How we choose to use language produces and maintains our identity, as well as communicates our values and contributes towards social change (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 9).

Judith Butler is well-known for publishing foundational work on the topic of gender identities and discourses. In their book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler describes gender as a performance, rather than a fixed attribute of a person. Femininity and masculinity are said to be constructed by cultural acts such as language use and how we dress ourselves. Litosseliti (2006, p. 61) points out that 'doing gender' is a continuous process that is never complete, and on the other hand one's gender identity also varies from one situation to another.

In the context of studying gender related topics, it is also important to note the definitions of the notions of gender and sex. Generally in the field of language and

gender studies these two are clearly distinct – the word sex is used to point to the physiological aspect, while gender is seen as a cultural and social construct (Litosseliti, 2006, pp. 10-11). Gender does not necessarily have to do with one's biological sex, but it refers to the attributes stereotypically assigned to a sex that can be expressed through various acts. Different gender related discourses guide the process of becoming gendered and create limits and expectations for how different genders can use language and act in certain situations.

2.2 Gender in popular music and lyrics

Popular culture's way of portraying women often "degrades and objectifies women, creating unrealistic social expectations which can hurt relationships between men and women, limit women's relationships with one another, and even distort women's relationships to their own bodies" (Householder, 2015, p. 19). Based on the study of Flynn and colleagues (2016), both men and women were found to be verbally objectified in song lyrics. Body objectification – as well as mentions of attractiveness and gaze – are commonly included in song lyrics, particularly in genres of rap and R&B music. However, women were found to be objectified more often by all music artists, as well as by themselves. Objectified and sexualised presentations of women can act as means of controlling and diminishing women's power (Flynn et al. 2016). In contrast, it has been claimed that objectifying oneself through lyrics can be an act of self-expression and even empowerment (Hatton & Trautner, 2013; Lerum & Dworki, 2009, as cited in Flynn et al., 2016).

Music is capable of influencing our identities, attitudes and behaviours (Tagg, 1999, p. 74), and therefore the song lyrics we hear in our everyday life can impact our thinking more than we think. In fact, a study by Greitemeyer and colleagues (2015) shows that listening to music with pro-equality lyrics can increase one's positive attitudes and even improve behaviour towards women. While popular music is known for presenting narrow gender roles and highly stereotyped representations of the sexes, it also acts as a tool for raising consciousness and expressing societal issues, such as gender inequality (Trier-Bieniek & Pullum, 2019). Akinro and Dean (2022) studied the sociocultural and sociopolitical messages in female artists' song lyrics from the 19th to 21st century. In their study, they utilised the characteristics of the four waves of feminism to identify the topics and challenges present in the song lyrics, as well as explored the ways in which patriarchy has been criticised by women throughout the years. Women's strength and power were described during each of the waves, but in different ways and highlighting different matters. While the lyrics of the first wave mostly concentrated on pay equality and the second wave on

women's body ownership, the third and fourth emphasised women's achievements and adequacy, as well as female empowerment. During the fourth wave (from 2012 onwards), lyrics of gender equality and self-love have become more prevalent (Akinro & Dean, 2022, p. 126).

Lady Gaga and Beyoncé are some of the best-known artists of the 21st century who have actively contributed to the feminist movement. Lady Gaga has constructed her artist identity around social action and openly supports the LGBTQ+ community through her music by raising awareness on intersectionality of gender and sexuality (Trier-Bieniek & Pullum, 2019, p. 89). Beyoncé, on the other hand, discusses themes of gender equality and female empowerment in her music, and speaks out about the status of women of colour – black women in particular. The most common critique towards the second wave of feminism is the lack of inclusion towards women of colour in the movement. Thus, Beyoncé's work contributes to the third wave of feminism, which is highly characterised by the inclusion of non-Western women (Trier-Bieniek, 2015, p. 17). These two examples perfectly demonstrate the interrelation of gender and popular music, as well as show examples of using one's status to bring attention to societal issues, educate, and encourage people to take an action in hopes of a better future.

2.3 Activism in popular culture

Popular culture and its phenomena can reflect the state of society, and hence it can be used to scrutinise current social, political, and economical issues. According to Trier-Bieniek (2015, p. 20), the third wave of feminism, a feminist movement that began in the 1990s, is characterised by the blend of popular culture and feminism, because it has allowed new generations of feminists to express themselves in diverse ways, but with a political awareness (see Subsection 2.4). Popular culture's role in third wave feminism is significant, and the use of activism through pop culture was especially apparent in the music of the early 1990s (Richards & Baumgardner, 2000, as cited in Trier-Bieniek, 2015, p. xx). A well-known example of activism performed through music is the Riot Grrrl feminist punk movement, a music scene consisting of bands in the Washington D.C. area in the early 1990s. The movement allowed young women to get involved in the punk rock scene, which is traditionally dominated by men (Trier-Bieniek, 2013, in Trier-Bieniek, 2015, p. xx).

Music has always helped disclose, challenge and change unequal positions in the society by being vocal about its problems (Trier-Bieniek, 2019, p. 93), and the rise of popular culture and social media has made it possible for more people to speak out about current issues, such as gender inequality and the climate crisis. According to

Weston and colleagues (2021), music and activism have an important role in climate action, and their interaction is visible for example in manifestations of eco-warrior culture in song lyrics. Environmental messages have been found frequently in metal and punk music, but it is increasingly common to see contemporary popular music artists advocating for environmental agendas. Artists such as Björk, Radiohead and Sting have all found a way to incorporate environmental themes in their music. The messages of environmental activism act as a musical voice of various twenty-first century movements promoting social justice and environmentalism (Weston et al., 2021).

First introduced by Françoise D'Eaubonne in 1974, ecofeminism is a social movement combining ideas of feminism and ecology (Puleo, 2017). In criticising the western capitalist ideology, the movement articulates the connection between patriarchal violence against women (as well as other people and nature) and the destruction of the environment. The main agenda of ecofeminism is to preserve life on this planet, and it believes that women cannot be liberated in isolation, but only as a part of a larger attempt of nature conservation (Mies & Shiva, 2014, p. 16). Ecofeminism does not claim that being a woman means being inherently more connected to nature. According to the statistics, however, most of the people in environmental movements are women (Puleo, 2017, p. 27). Nurturing others and maintaining domestic material infrastructure is traditionally connected to womanhood, and as suggested by Puleo (2017), these characteristics combined with a critical approach and appropriate information might awaken women's interest to defend nature and other living beings. United Nations world conferences and reports by numerous non-governmental organisations also prove that while women are actively involved with environmental activism, they are also the first victims of environmental deterioration, which might for its part motivate women to take an active role in defending nature.

2.4 Critical discourse analysis in studying gender

Discourses both construct and challenge different viewpoints and positions of power and powerlessness for social groups (Litosseliti, 2006, pp. 49-50). Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, p. 71) describe discourses as practises of meaning-making constructed from a certain perspective, that systematically modify the subjects they address. Discourses determine what can and cannot be said about certain topics, and hence are connected to notions of social power and resistance. While there are different ways of defining discourse, I mainly draw from the work of Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019) in my thesis.

Critical Discourse Analysis is a form of social analysis that demonstrates how discourses are related to other social elements such as power, ideologies and institutions (Fairclough 2017, p. 13), as well as offers a way to critique social reality through discourses. According to Le and Short (2009, p. 4), the main purpose of CDA is to examine social injustices and be critical towards social abuse, discrimination, racism and social prejudice against people with less power. Underlying gender stereotypes and biases can be found everywhere in media, texts, and even everyday interactions. Therefore, utilising discourse analysis is an effective way of studying the inequality of genders and examining the social arrangements and consequences they cause for different genders. CDA is openly taking a political stance over the societal issues maintained by language use and committed to achieving a fair social order (Lazar, 2005, p. 5). Some of the topics that have been covered in gender studies applying CDA include stereotypical gender representations in political media discourse (see Sriwimon & Zilli, 2007) and the interaction of gender and power in the workplace (see Holmes, 2005).

While discourse analysis scrutinises text and talk as a product, it is ultimately interested in the language in context, and how different socio-cultural practices are sustained through language use (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 1). De-constructing the discursive structures of a text can reveal complex and nuanced ways in which power and powerlessness are both produced and challenged (Lazar, 2005, p. 2), and help understand the subtle mechanisms through which possibly harmful gender stereotypes are maintained. While single word choices and tones as such have the capacity to convey a powerful message, the distribution and context of the text are things that must be considered in order to understand its implicit message. Some examples of the cultural and institutional contexts where texts for research can be found include the news, social media, advertisements, workplaces, educational institutions, and governments.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) combines ideas from both critical discourse analysis and feminist theory. It aims to understand the diverse power imbalances and structural inequalities between genders and takes a more political perspective when analysing gender ideologies (Lazar, 2017, p. 372). FCDA is committed to breaking the patriarchal ideologies and achieving equality between genders, and its starting point for the mission is demonstrating that while social practices associated with gender might seem like 'common sense' in certain situations, these practices are far from neutral. One of FCDA's fundamental features includes criticising discourses that privilege men through their underlying patriarchal ideologies (Lazar, 2005, p. 5).

While CDA shares the critical view of social inequalities and gender related issues have long been an important research topic in the field, it has been necessary to

establish Feminist CDA as a separate means of analysis. CDA studies focusing on gender ultimately utilise feminist views of gender relations and aim to transform the unequal conditions. Hence, they can be considered to have a feminist perspective (Lazar, 2005, p. 3), of which the term 'feminist' in FCDA is a clarification of. Moreover, FCDA research is less general than gender related CDA research, and it is associated with second and third wave feminism (Lazar, 2017, p. 373). The second wave of feminism is associated with critiquing structural inequalities such as different opportunities in working life, whereas the third wave developed a contextualised understanding of gender politics originating from queer theory and postcolonial and intersectional themes, all of which are areas of interest in FCDA research.

3 PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Research aim and questions

The aim of this study is to explore the ways in which womanhood and female empowerment are presented in Marina's music by critically examining the lyrical content of her songs. By identifying and analysing the feminist discourses present in the lyrics, I intend to see what societal issues are brought up and how they are discussed in relation to themes of gender equality. I am interested in finding out how gender equality is experienced by Marina, and whether she feels empowered or discouraged about initiating change as a woman. The research questions of this thesis are following:

1. What kind of feminist discourses can be found in Marina's songs?
2. How does female empowerment and critique towards the patriarchy manifest in her lyrics?

By finding answers to these research questions, it is possible to obtain a better understanding of how female artists of the 21st century experience gender equality and empowerment. This study also contributes to the research field of feminist studies and CDA, especially through its analysis of positive and negative female empowerment, as well as ecofeminism, women's agency in political and financial sectors, and objectification of women.

3.2 Data and methodology

In the present study, the data consist of the song lyrics of four songs from Marina’s album *Ancient Dreams in a Modern Land* (Deluxe Edition), published in 2022. Feminism and female empowerment are frequent topics in Marina’s songs, in addition to other societal themes such as human rights, mental health and environmental issues. This makes the lyrics an interesting subject for researching gender ideologies. Though the above-mentioned themes have been occurring on Marina’s previous albums as well, *Ancient Dreams in a Modern Land* takes an explicitly political stance in comparison to the more subtle consideration of themes such as gender and femininity in Marina’s earlier works. Choosing to study the latest album also allows me to examine the most recent perception of the topics in question. The songs were chosen on the basis of having lyrics that contain relevant themes regarding this study, such as commentary on womanhood, feminism, patriarchy and gender equality. While I have studied all the lyrics and considered the songs as whole, I have concentrated on certain parts of the lyrics where feminism and other relevant themes to my study are addressed. The songs chosen for the analysis are “Venus Fly Trap”, “Man’s World”, “Purge the Poison” and “Free Woman”. The following table presents each song included in the set of data, and briefly explains the general contents of the lyrics.

TABLE 1 Songs and their main topics

Song title	Main topics
Venus Fly Trap	-Celebration of self-ownership, being confident in who you are without necessarily following society’s norms -Marina’s own experience in becoming an empowered woman -Unfair expectations and limited gender ideologies of the patriarchal society
Man’s World	-Description of womanhood and the ways in which women and minority groups have been oppressed throughout history -Frustration towards the patriarchal society -Fragile position of the LGBTQ+ community
Purge the Poison	-Critical reflection of today’s society and its problems; themes of racism and misogyny as well as climate change and capitalism
Free Woman	-Empowerment and womanhood; resilience, freedom, and finding one’s own worth -Topics such as appearance, ageing, and critique towards the objectification of women

To analyse the discourses, I have utilised Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (as described in Blommaert, 2005, pp. 28-31). The framework approaches discourse analysis from three different perspectives: discourse as text, discourse as discursive practice and discourse as social practice. First, I examined the concrete linguistic features of the lyrics that create meanings, such as word choices, metaphors, and different aspects of grammar. Next, I moved to analyse the lyrics as part of a larger social context, and how the discourses are "produced, circulated, distributed and consumed in society" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 30). When analysing discourse as discursive practice, aspects such as intertextuality should be considered in order to learn how the given text relates to its wider social context. The third dimension I explored was discourse as social practice, meaning that the power relations and ideologies created, maintained, and challenged by discourses were observed and addressed. In addition to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, I benefited from applying aspects of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. Aspects of FCDA were especially applicable in studying the lyrics through the third dimension, as it relates directly to social and political ideologies around aspects such as gender, which this study is heavily focused on. This allows me to gain more diverse results from the analysis, as well as emphasise the feminist standpoint of the study.

Different frameworks of discourse analysis highly value self-reflectivity in analysing the meanings in a text (Litosseliti, 2006, pp. 54-55). It is important to keep in mind that CDA can never be absolutely objective, and the researchers' own biases and experiences will affect the analysis to some extent. For example, I might have been able to recognise certain discourses easier, because I have identified the discourse in question in the media or in occurrences of my own life. As Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, pp. 249-250) state, reflecting on one's own position and biases is an important part of carrying out a credible discourse analysis study. I have minimised my bias by carefully going through the data and taking time to reflect throughout the analysis process. I also show concrete manifestations of the discourses that can be traced back to the lyrics, as well as use sources to back up my findings.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following analysis presents the discourses found in the lyrics by utilising Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. The contents of the songs have been divided into five themes in order to facilitate and clarify the analysis of the lyrics. The themes of analysis are positive empowerment, negative empowerment, ecofeminism, women's agency in political and financial sectors, and objectification of women. Next, the themes are discussed in detail in their respective subsections.

4.1 Positive empowerment

Positive empowerment is a theme that is becoming increasingly apparent in female artist's song lyrics in the 21st century (Akinro & Dean, 2022, p. 126), and so is the case in the songs analysed in this study. Discourses of positive female empowerment are found in all four songs included in the data, and it manifests itself in mentions of being free and independent, taking space, general acceptance of oneself as well as celebration of womanhood.

A clear manifestation of positive empowerment is found in the song "Free Woman", where Marina declares that women will persistently hold onto their right to be free from society's expectations and subjugation.

Example 1: Free Woman

We'll never let go / Of our freedom and our hope / You'll never extinguish me / 'Cause
I'm a free woman

Marina refers to women's solidarity by singing "our freedom" and using the pronoun "we". The lyrics imply that women will stay resilient no matter what happens, and they can "never" be extinguished due to their collective strength and resilience. The

word *free* is used in total 43 times in the song lyrics, emphasising the importance of freedom for women. Repetition is a rhetorical means commonly used to highlight the importance of a certain word or a concept (Jokinen et al., 2016, p. 366). The ideas of independence, freedom and being in control are repeated in several parts of the lyrics analysed.

Another important concept concerning positive empowerment is taking space. The line in the beginning of the song “Venus Fly Trap” (See Example 2 below) well summarises the message of the whole album track; it encourages women to be wild and free, and above all to be boldly themselves. While it is not directly stated that this line is intended for other women, it can be interpreted from the fact that Marina herself identifies as a woman, as well as from the metaphors utilised in the lyrics. Wallflower generally refers to a shy person, especially a girl or a woman, who avoids attracting a lot of attention, while the plant Venus Flytrap symbolises persistence and empowerment. The planet Venus can be associated with love, beauty, femininity and harmony – all of which are attributes traditionally associated with womanhood – implying that the lyrics address female empowerment.

Example 2: Venus Fly Trap

Why be a wallflower when you can be a Venus fly trap?

Traditionally, women are expected to fit a certain role in society – and often that role is constructed in relevance to other people, especially men. The feminist movement, however, has encouraged women to pursue their dreams outside of the domestic roles of caregiver and homemaker, instead of automatically submitting to the stereotypical gender roles. In “Venus Fly Trap”, Marina presents the idea that women should be able to actively operate in society and accomplish their dreams, whatever that means for them. A similar message can be found in Example 3 below, where Marina demonstrates that she is empowered and confident in who she is. The lyrics tell the listener not to underestimate her: she knows her worth and feels secure in herself, thus rejecting society’s pressure to fit in and please others.

Example 3: Venus Fly Trap

I did it my way, baby / Nothing in this world could change me / Don't underestimate me
/ 'Cause one day you're gonna see you're in a losing battle / Babe, you'll never stop me
being me

The song continues with a line “I got the beauty, got the brains / Got the power, hold the reins”, which can be interpreted as rejecting the common idea that women are one-dimensional – either smart or beautiful. Stereotypically female characters especially in movies have been portrayed either as attractive and naive or intellectual yet

unattractive. In these lyrics Marina implies that women can thrive in several aspects of life by stating that she is beautiful, smart, successful and in control of her life.

4.2 Negative empowerment

In addition to the positive empowerment and celebration of womanhood, female empowerment is also manifested through frustration, critique and even anger towards the patriarchy. In “Man’s World” Marina approaches the topic of gender inequality with a desperate tone, hoping to pass on the message about women’s distress concerning inequality.

Example 4: Man’s World

If you have a mother, daughter or a friend / Maybe it is time, time you comprehend / The world that you live in ain't the same one as them / So don't punish me for not being a man

Marina sings directly to the imagined listener, a man, and tries to appeal to their feelings; if men cannot see the unjust position women still find themselves in, perhaps they can try to find sympathy through their loved ones. Everyone has a mother, daughter, or perhaps a friend, who might be suffering from the subtle ways misogyny still manifests in today’s society. The microaggressions women encounter in their everyday lives might be difficult to detect as someone who has not experienced them. Nevertheless, in order to get rid of these structures, it is essential for everyone to be aware of them and understand that social practices are gendered. This includes men admitting their superior status in patriarchal society, and actively trying to support women. Of course, many women themselves have also internalised misogyny, and maintain toxic ideologies with their behaviour and beliefs. This is something that is left out when discussing misogyny, which could be a sign that Marina and women around her have a healthy relationship to femininity and other women.

Furthermore, the line “So don't punish me for not being a man” also includes the idea that since men traditionally hold the highest position and most rights in society, anyone but a man is inferior. This means that along with women, people that are non-binary, transgender, or simply unable to fit society's heteronormative standards frequently face discrimination. Presenting abundant femininity is generally looked down on, no matter the gender of the presenter. The lyric states that just because someone is not a man, (or what society stereotypically sees as a man) does not mean that they deserve to be treated with any less respect.

Another example of expressing the frustration towards society's harmful ideologies can be found in "Purge the Poison", where the lyrics clearly state that we need to strive towards a more just world.

Example 5: Purge the Poison

Need to purge the poison, show us our humanity / All the bad and good, racism and misogyny

In this line, Marina implies here that our society is "poisoned" and calls humans for action to eliminate the toxic element by showing benevolence. The poison refers to harmful beliefs such as racism and misogyny, which prevent humankind from achieving an equal and safe society for everyone.

A powerful lyric criticising misogyny can be found in the song "Man's World" (see Example 6). Here Marina discusses the continuation of women's oppression throughout history by making a reference to witchery and persecution of witches in the past centuries. The line makes a witty observation about how the negative attitudes towards women have remained; although superstition is not as common anymore and women do not get burned at the stake accused of being witches, the negative beliefs persist. Derogatory name calling, for example, is still common, especially if a woman somehow stands out from the norm.

Example 6: Man's World

Burnt me at the stake, you thought I was a witch / Centuries ago, now you just call me a bitch

Using the word *me*, Marina refers to women in general, while placing herself in their position and identifying with the women of history who had to endure more severe consequences of hatred towards women. The rhyme between words *witch* and *bitch* makes an effective rhetorical means of attracting attention to this word pairing, as well as describing the shift in attitudes towards women, which nevertheless remain unfavourable.

The significance of the witch hunts in the beginning of the modern era can also be connected to ecofeminism and spiritualism (Mies & Shiva, 2014, pp. 16-17). Women who were labelled as witches often had a close relationship to nature, and as they were murdered, valuable knowledge about nature was lost simultaneously. This provoked an ambition to regenerate the lost wisdom as means of liberating women and nature from oppressive patriarchal ideologies. Themes of ecofeminism are discussed in more detail in the next subsection of the analysis.

4.3 Ecofeminism

Another discourse identified in the lyrics is one of ecofeminism, which Marina introduces through comparing women to mother nature and highlighting the healing power of being connected to nature. The lyrics in “Purge the Poison” bring up the importance of nature protection and environmental activism (see Example 7). Marina establishes that ecological acts and protecting the planet is important for her and her female friends and that the connection to nature also helps them heal their own “damage”, which could be a reference to mental health or overall trauma resulting from the toxic ideologies or harmful treatment women have encountered.

Example 7: Purge The Poison

All my friends are witches and we live in Hollywood / Mystical bitches making our own
sisterhood / While society is falling, we are quietly reforming / Protecting the planet,
healing our own damage

It is worth mentioning that while using words witch and bitch is seen as a negative way to describe women in “Man’s World” (see Example 6), in “Purge the Poison” Marina uses these same terms about herself and her friends in an ironic and even empowering tone. In doing so, she neutralises the words in a way that they lose their negative connotations. On the contrary, being a “witch” is being connected to positive action and good values, in this case ecofeminism and nature protection.

Womanhood is generally associated with nature, and the lyrics utilise nature’s phenomena as a metaphor for describing appearance and female beauty, such as in the lyric “Stars in my hair running like a waterfall / Clouds in the whites of our eyes, we saw it all”. Flowers are used as a metaphor for women both in “Venus Fly Trap” as well as “Man’s World”, where women are compared to violets. This can be interpreted in a way that just like in nature, women bloom when the time is right – the bloom acting as a metaphor for women stepping into the light and becoming empowered (see Example 8 below). The lyrics also mention the making of life, referring to women’s essential role in reproduction. This suggests that since mother nature is in control of many things such as the seasons as well as flora and fauna, women should also have a more essential role in society. The last line possibly refers to the Covid-19 pandemic, implying that mother nature needed to take a break from its everyday strains. This topic is also briefly mentioned in “Purge the Poison”.

Example 8: Man’s World

Spring appears when the time is right / Women are violets coming to light / Don't
underestimate the making of life / The planet has a funny way of stopping a fight

The theme of mother nature is also visible in the song “Purge the Poison”, which is emphasised by several lyrics written from nature’s perspective. Examples of these lyrics include the lines “Quarantined all alone, Mother Nature's on the phone / "What have you been doing? Don't forget I am your home” and “But your home is now your prison / You forgot that, without me, you won't go far, far”. These lyrics imply that nature protection requires more attention, and mother nature herself had to remind people about the gravity of the situation. The ominous tone in the lyrics implies that since humans are dependent on nature, they should respect it more. Covid-19 is mentioned briefly in these lyrics as well, implying that the time spent in quarantine gave Marina time to reflect on topics of environmentalism. Marina’s own attitude towards the matter also becomes apparent in the example 9, where she expresses her worry and despair for mother nature.

Example 9: Man’s World

Mother Nature's dying / Nobody's keeping score / I don't wanna live in a man's world anymore

The last line expresses that Marina does not want to live in a “man’s world”, however, it is not specified whether the lyric refers to men as human beings or to men as a gender. Lyrics criticising men’s behaviour and patriarchal ideologies are included in the same song (see Example 4). However, since neglecting nature is one of the reasons Marina seems to be frustrated with the world, it could be interpreted that Marina is referring to humans in general. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent that Marina is not satisfied with the attempts to preserve nature. As discussed in section 2.3, the ecofeminist movement has articulated a connection between harmful patriarchal ideologies and environmental degradation.

4.4 Women’s agency in political and financial sectors

One of the aspects of feminism is demanding equal pay and financial stability for women. Marina considers the financial aspect of gender equality by bringing up the stereotype of men traditionally being the breadwinners and more financially successful than women, as seen in Example 10.

Example 10: Venus Fly Trap

I know that money ain't important / And it don't mean you're the best / But I earned it all myself and I'm a millionairess

This lyric implies that while money isn't the most important thing for her, Marina is proud having become financially successful with her own hard work. The word *millionaire* makes the message especially powerful, as the suffix “-ess” signifies that the word in question is a feminine agent noun. It emphasises the fact that she is a female millionaire, while most of the richest people in the world are men. Being financially successful allows one to be independent and free from depending on anyone else's funds, which can then help one feeling empowered and secure.

Historically, women have not been able to take part in politics, and are still participating in politics less than men. The share of women in the cabinet in the United Kingdom in 2024 is 26.1% (Clark, 2024), and the same number in the United States Congress in 2023 was 27.9% (Statista Research Department, 2024). While the proportion of women in the United States Congress has been rising significantly from the 6% in 1991, it is clear that women are still under-represented in politics. In “Purge the Poison”, Marina brings this matter up by stating that women should be more involved.

Example 11: Purge The Poison

I just want a world where I can see the feminine / We only make up one-quarter of the government

Another connection to politics is found in “Venus Fly Trap”, where Marina sings “[They'll] Take away your rights, pacify you with their lies”, which can be interpreted as a reference to men making significant political decisions that have an impact on women's life. An example of this kind of decision would be the abortion laws, which in recent years have been a controversial topic especially in the USA. It is also a prime example of women not having autonomy over their own bodies and being subjugated by men. In political contexts, femininity is often associated with emotionality and sensitivity, which is seen as something weak and irrational, and not a suitable approach to politics. Marina's lyrics suggest that femininity is something that belongs to the different aspects of society, and instead of trying to hide feminine qualities, they should be equally benefited, also in governments' decision-making processes. The lyrics in “Purge the Poison” comprehend that the idea of men being more capable and entitled to making political decisions is old-fashioned and gratuitous.

4.5 Objectification of women

The last theme of analysis is objectification of women, including sexualising and belittling behaviour towards women. A central idea arising from the lyrics is that

society places an extensive amount of emphasis on women's physical appearance, which ultimately leads to seeing women as sexual objects. As established by Heflick and Goldenberg (2014), directing focus towards one's physical rather than mental qualities essentially denies women their basic sense of humanness. The lyrics in "Free Woman" express frustration towards the fact that women's bodies are not seen simply as the vessels they live in, but as something people other than women themselves can take ownership of.

Example 12: Free Woman

May my body be of service / May my beauty be of use / As a vessel that I live in / Not an object to abuse

Seeing women as objects can at its extreme lead to sexual harassment and even abuse. The song "Purge the Poison" briefly mentions #MeToo, the survivor-led social movement fighting against sexual abuse (see Example 13). The lyrics narrate how famous film producer Harvey Weinstein was found guilty of rape and several sexual assaults and was consequently sentenced to prison (BBC News, 2023). Weinstein's allegations brought enormous attention to the #MeToo movement, which then gave victims of sexual assault a platform to share their experiences and demand for justice. The lyrics imply that #MeToo revealed the hidden truth about sexual harassment that women have experienced.

Example 13: Purge the Poison

Harvey Weinstein, gone to jail / Me Too went on to unveil / Truth and all its glory / The ending of a story

The #MeToo movement reflects the complex issues of gendered violence and fights against everyday sexism as well as harmful gender ideologies (Alcalde & Villa, 2022, p. 4), all of which are themes characterised by the fourth wave of feminism (Akinro & Dean, 2022). While anyone can be a victim of gender and sexual based aggressions, the movement has especially helped women around the world to empower by speaking their truth.

Marina describes both her own experiences as well as introduces examples of known female figures that have been objectified and belittled. She mentions Marilyn Monroe (See Example 14), the world's most famous female sex symbol, in the lyrics of "Man's World". The lyrics state that "men made her legend", implying that Monroe's talent was not the primary reason she became an icon – men made her famous by admiring her beauty and ultimately seeing her as an object. Monroe is primarily remembered from her beautiful face and curvy body, rather than her hard work as a

singer and actress, proving the point that women are recognised more for their appearances than achievements.

Example 14: Man's World

Marilyn's bungalow, it's number seven / In the pink palace where men made her legend

Another aspect of objectification of women found in the lyrics is the stigma around ageing; whereas men tend to “age like fine wine”, women lose their worth and relevance as they age. In sociocultural context, a woman's young age may be associated with a lack of authority, making it easier to control and objectify the person (Kellie et al. 2019). From a biological point of view, young women are more fertile, and thus perceptions of fertility may explain the objectification of young and attractive women. In Example 15 Marina describes how society is trying to tell women to look younger: hide their wrinkles, grey hairs and any signs of ageing. She then continues by stating that she is confident in who she is and has learned to embrace ageing, which can be interpreted as rejecting the idea that women should feel bad about ageing.

Example 15: Free Woman

In 20 years, my face will be a shadow of my youth / They'll try erase my wrinkles, yeah,
they'll try erase my truth / But I've been here before / And that shit don't do anything to
me anymore

Maintaining youthful appearance is not the only unrealistic standard society sets for women; as a result of objectification and emphasising the importance of appearance and fitting the stereotypical ideal, women are under pressure to have a certain body type, for which the ideal changes over time. Marina brings this up in the lyrics by referring to the beauty standards of the early 2000's – “size zero” refers to the ideal that women had to be as skinny as possible, even unhealthily so. The lyrics then continue by narrating events of 2007, when singer Britney Spears famously had her mental breakdown. Marina accuses people – including herself – of not taking Spears' situation seriously and trying to offer her the help that she clearly needed.

Example 16: Purge the Poison

2007 when size zero was the rage / Britney shaved her head and / All we did was call her
crazed

The example also acknowledges the fact that Spears shaved her head in 2007, which is something that is generally not considered feminine and therefore not acceptable behaviour for a woman in most discourses surrounding appearance. While mental health problems as such were highly stigmatised still in the early 2000s, not acting and

looking like the “ideal” woman might have further encouraged the negative reactions towards Spears’ situation in 2007.

This subsection has discussed the various ways in which Marina demonstrates the ways how women are being objectified, sharing both her own and other women’s experiences. The lyrics indicate that women face objectification and negative attitudes whether they fit the society’s standards or not, showing how problematic and persistent these discourses are.

5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to study the presentations of womanhood and manifestations of female empowerment through the various feminist discourses present in Marina's song lyrics. The focus was on identifying the key issues concerning gender equality and women's position and examining whether women felt encouraged or discouraged about initiating change. The data of this study consist of four songs from the album *Ancient Dreams in a Modern Land* (Deluxe Edition), and they were chosen on the basis of containing themes related to discussion on gender and womanhood. The findings show that female empowerment is apparent in all four of the songs included in the set of the data, and it manifests in both positive and negative ways. The lyrics articulated the contradictory situation of gender equality and the ways in which female empowerment is experienced by Marina; while she seems to feel confident, free, and encouraged, there are also moments of feeling frustrated, angry and powerless due to society's current state. The feminist discourses present in the lyrics addressed themes such as women's agency in political and financial sectors, objectification of women, ageing, ecofeminism, frustration towards patriarchal norms and celebration of self. Moreover, the underlying ideologies behind these discourses demonstrate that the discussion about women's status is still relevant.

Popular music songs show us the reality and state of societal issues and help us construct identity through which we can explore them. Song lyrics can inspire us by demonstrating how we live or potentially could live, and thus evoke activity towards a better state of issues such as gender inequality (Middleton, 1999, p. 231). The lyrics scrutinised in this study reveal power relations that diminish women's possibilities in society and other negative experiences regarding womanhood. On the other hand, several discourses of positive empowerment and agency were found. These ideas can inspire women to take up space in a world where men continue to be privileged. The findings also encourage new, less restrictive approaches to womanhood and alternative implementations of gender identities. This can encourage women to

question gendered social practises that maintain patriarchal ideologies, and eventually be liberated from them.

While the study contributes towards obtaining a better understanding of the current situation of gender equality from a feminine point of view, it is not without its limitations. The study is based on a very limited set of data, which must be taken into consideration when looking at the findings. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic, a broader set of data should be introduced. The lyrics could also be compared to the ones on Marina's previous albums, especially *Electra Heart*, a concept album released in 2012 that ironically commentates on various female archetypes. Further studies could also be conducted on how other contemporary female artists explore similar themes in their music. Female empowerment through ecofeminism is a theme that would be especially interesting to look at more closely, as it has not been widely researched before. These future studies could explain the reasons behind women becoming empowered in more detail, as well as reveal the ways in which female empowerment affects women's behaviour and what impact that might have on society. As gender equality remains a topical issue in today's society, there is still demand for further studies regarding this theme.

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