



Triangle of Sadness: Of Vulnerability and Michel Foucault's Subject-Power Concept

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Abstract: Foucault (1977a) analyzed the concept of power from a different perspective and defined power not only as a power relationship between people and states, but as a set of strategies that is omnipresent and comes to society from multiple domains. In the phenomenon of power constructed through discourses, each individual in interrelation continues their practices while getting influenced by the process. The concept of vulnerability refers to the inner impulse that guides the actions of individuals driven by the instinct for survival, as well as the sense of vulnerability that this impulse imposes on them. Dependence on others brings a sense of vulnerability also. In this study, which is based on Foucault's concepts of subject and power, the concept of vulnerability is studied in the context of Ruben Östlund's award-winning film *Triangle of Sadness*, focusing on themes of power, the transformation of authority, interpersonal relations in everyday life and vulnerability. As a result of the analysis, it was concluded that gender roles and social statuses are indicators of power, individuals may experience a sense of vulnerability due to various weaknesses, the relationships between power and authority are always in a state of transformation, societal gender roles can change when the dynamics of power shift and that discourses are influential in the formation of the subject. In the analysis of the film *Triangle of Sadness*, critical discourse analysis, one of the qualitative research approaches, has been employed. The concept of vulnerability and Foucault's notion of power were discussed prior to the film review.

Keywords: Foucault; power; vulnerability; dichotomy; *Triangle of Sadness*; Ruben Östlund



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Introduction

Power and authority relations manifest in every aspect of life. One of the philosophers who examines the relationship between these two concepts is Michel Foucault. Foucault's philosophy is shaped by questions such as “Who is the subject?”, “What is authority?”, and “What is the relationship between concepts like crime, madness, knowledge, and sexuality with power?”. Foucault tried to elucidate the concept of power through “dichotomies” that place one side in a superior and privileged position over the other side. Power owes its strength to discourses and it is possible to understand the dominant side of a dichotomy through discourses. In a dichotomy, one side gains power by getting along with authority and begins to shape the other side through discourses. For example, if we examine the issue through the “healthy and sick” dichotomy, questions such as “What is the difference that separates a healthy individual from a sick one?”, “What defines a sick individual?”, and “What does a sick individual look like?” form the framework of Foucault's perspective on the concept of authority.

In Ruben Östlund's 2022 film *Triangle of Sadness*, traces of everyday life and interpersonal relationships are depicted in a very natural way. In the main universe of the film, there are vulnerabilities of human and dichotomies such as male-female, rich-poor, beautiful- ugly, servant-master, land-sea. The film strongly reflects the phenomenon of authority that is “desired and constantly changing” through the places the film portrays, and the discourse created within those places. The film's narrative conveys the phenomenon of authority in a highly dominant manner through place and discourse. Foucault's authority is everywhere because it comes from everywhere” statement recurs throughout the film. The relationship between Yaya and Carl, the main characters of the film, and its transition from the city to a sea voyage; the conditions and environments under which the phenomenon of authority can change and transform; the notion that authority is something desired by all but can never be permanently held by a single entity; the events that occur when the transient nature of power falls into the hands of Abigail, a worker on the cruise ship who is never permitted to be the authority enables the film to be interpreted in the light of Foucault's concept of authority.

In this study, Foucault's concepts of the subject and authority will be addressed first. The power relations that we can't easily perceive in daily life and all exposed to in some way, the relationship between subject-authority, and the ability of power to constantly shift and permeate all areas of life form the conceptual framework of this study. Subsequently, the concept of

vulnerability will be explained and examples will be provided in order to make the concept more understandable. Finally, the film will be analyzed and interpreted based on the cycle between time, space, discourse, characters, dichotomies and vulnerability according to the flow of the film.

The Concept of Subject and Power for Foucault

Foucault, who critiqued topics such as sexuality, mental illness, prisons, and normative systems, seeks to explain how the concept of the 'subject' comes into existence as part of these critiques. Foucault who was exposed to the distinction between the healthy and the sick through his education and made significant contributions to the sociology and philosophy of medicine in line with his views about it, he asks himself the following questions that form the foundation of his intellectual world; is modern medicine there to serve patients, or do patients exist to serve modern medicine? What defines the difference between being sick and being healthy? This perspective can be said to form the foundation of Foucault's studies on the concepts of "subject, power and discourse" (Foucault, 1977a).

Life is a constant struggle-at times against nature, at other times to fulfill everyday needs. There are dynamics that explain the human- nature struggle and create the phenomenon of society. The concepts of "subject and power," which form the main focus of Foucault's work, illuminate the social sphere precisely at this point. Foucault argues that the subject is constructed through

discourses and that the theoretical foundations of these discourses must be examined; in other words, the subject is a discursive product.

Authority is not an individual who has majestic power; power is relation. The questions Foucault poses to himself and his readers in his works are this; What is the foundation of authority and what makes it legalized? The answer to this question can be said to lie within the triad of subject-discourse- power. For Foucault, the primary purpose of clarifying the concepts of subject and power is to demonstrate that “the subject is produced by power” (Touraine, 1995, p. 188). Power can acquire entirely new dimensions and forms; it is in motion and it’s highly flexible. The phenomenon of power has guided many thinkers. For Marx, power is defined as “something fought over, contested, shared by certain groups, and ultimately possessed or not possessed” (Marx and Engels, 1970). For Foucault, power is “not something that is possessed, but something that is implemented.”

Foucault was interested in the criteria that create dichotomies and explained this situation through the concept of “discourse.” Thoughts go through a certain process to take the form of discourse. Discourse consists of all the ways and manners in which “things” are presented and elucidated (Megill, 1985). First and foremost, discourse is social; the timing, who uses the words and meanings, where, and for what purposes emphasizes the social aspect of discourse. Another

characteristic of discourse is that opposing discourses give rise to each other. This characteristic, known as binary opposition, illustrates that everything is valued and exists in relation to its opposite. White is valued in relation to black, healthy is valued in relation to sickness, and beauty is valued in relation to ugly, and true is valued in relation to false. Discourses can be opposed to each other, and there can also be a hierarchical structure among discourses. As a result of this hierarchy, it can be said that discourse generates power, with power and discourse sometimes being defined in similar ways (Punch, 1998).

Foucault, who believed that a dichotomy should be understood and analyzed, frequently focused on the healthy-sick dichotomy. We can say that this focus stems from psychological training and, naturally, from experiences in hospitals. Foucault sought to articulate health and illness through the framework of the “social body” (Foucault, 1977, p. 78). Authority is such a miscellaneous and permeable concept that; it even exerts dominance over the individual's own body, applying an “abstract power” over it applying an “abstract power” over it. As Foucault emphasizes, “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power... he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault, 1995, p. 202). Foucault conceptualized this as “biopower”. Through the exploitation of the body, the productive individual is made to serve the capitalist system (Foucault, 1982, p. 143). As he later

elaborates, “biopower deals with the population, with the body as a machine: it seeks to optimize its capabilities, extract forces, increase its usefulness, and integrate it into efficient systems” (Foucault, 2003a, p. 242). Institutions and discourses are the primary supporters of biopower. As Foucault emphasizes, “it is not the gaze that sees, but the gaze that dominates” (Foucault, 2003b, p. 39). The clinical gaze does not merely perceive the body; it constructs power over it by rendering it visible, knowable, and governable (Foucault, 1978). As will be explained through the main character Yaya in the film, the norms imposed by biopower and its extension, the beauty and fashion industry, have enveloped a person's life in a pervasive and invisible manner.

The Concept of Vulnerability (Fencelessness, Exploitability, Fragility)

In recent years, the concept of vulnerability has been increasingly discussed, particularly in social, political, and corporeal domains. Although the term is commonly used to describe an individual or a community's exposure to potential harm, it actually carries a much deeper meaning. Judith Butler asserts that vulnerability is not merely a temporary condition resulting from external circumstances, but rather that all living beings are inherently fragile because their survival depends on conditions beyond their control. According to Butler, bodies are vulnerable not only because they struggle to access what they need, but also because those needs can never be fully secured (Butler, 2010).

At this point, the relationship between power and vulnerability becomes significant. Rose and Joronen end Rose (2020) explore this relationship through the concept of the “politics of wound,” defining politics as various responses to the ever-present open wound of life (Joronen, 2017; Rose, 2014). According to them, the function of political power is to continuously generate responses to this wound; however, it is never truly possible to heal it completely. Consequently, power remains perpetually insufficient and limited in the face of vulnerability. Checchi (2017, p. 929) describes this paradox-where power is as ineffective as it is effective-as a situation in which the attempt to resolve an irresolvable problem, that is, fragility, inevitably leads to its reproduction. In this sense, vulnerability points not only to the unprotectedness of the individual, but also to a foundational ground on which the subject's relationship with power is established. Therefore, vulnerability can be regarded not merely as a personal emotional state, but as a condition that shapes the functioning of the political order and enables the formation of subject-power relations.

The survival instinct is the most important driving force that governs the behavior not only of humans but of all living beings on Earth. Freud states that everyone has an instinct toward life and existence, that instincts are given to humans at creation, and that humans are born with two fundamental drives: “Eros and Thanatos”. Eros represents all basic human needs (such as living, survival, eating, drinking, shelter, pleasure, and sexuality), while thanatos represents drives like

fighting, harming others or things, aggression, destructiveness, killing, and masochism. The survival instincts have a fundamental purpose, which is to protect the human organism. There is always a conflict between eros and thanatos, that is, between the life instinct and the death instinct (Freud, 1930).

Instincts are triggered by needs. These needs and the processes of fulfilling them, in a way, keep humans alive, but at the same time, make them dependent on one another and their environment (Dancus, Hyvönen, & Karlsson, 2020, p. 1). The feeling of being dependent on or reliant upon another can be explained through the concept of “vulnerability”. The important concept of “vulnerability” can be used in various contexts. To clarify the concept, various examples can be given: the beautiful face and body of an attractive woman, a warm home for a person who has lost their house, a baby for a mother, reputation for a businessperson, a bank manager ensuring the safety of the bank and its clients by using reliable and secure software, fear of migration and displacement, human vulnerability to natural disasters, and a woman who overlooks her partner's violence due to the fear of being homeless with her child. As seen in the examples, vulnerability does not necessarily express a negative situation. The fears of losing something, the desires to continue possessing what one has, and the drives and possessions directed by “eros and thanatos” can all be explained through the concept of vulnerability.

Grønstad (2020, pp. 20-21) discusses the existence of studies examining the feelings of vulnerability that a person experiences in disaster situations for which they were not previously prepared, the underlying reasons for feeling vulnerable, and the characteristics of vulnerability. However, he also emphasizes that not every feeling of vulnerability is rooted in “excess”. Excess does not necessarily have to be related to disasters like tsunamis, floods, or earthquakes. Vulnerability does not necessarily have to be linked to political, socioeconomic factors, or disasters such as floods or earthquakes. Vulnerability; It can also be related to political, socioeconomic, or environmental forces. Even the possibility of individuals losing their privileged status is enough to create a sense of vulnerability in them. Additionally, individuals who witness the vulnerability experienced by others who were deprived of certain possessions in the past may develop a sense of vulnerability themselves, leading to certain actions or behaviors.

There are various perspectives on whether vulnerability is a condition perceived by the subject or if it is imposed by a power or authority that leaves the individual vulnerable. Referring to the subject-related aspect of the concept, Sirman (2016, p. 192) poses the question: “Who or what is vulnerable, or is vulnerability always the subject's issue?” This question leads us to question the relationship between the state of vulnerability and the power that causes it. Starting from the fact that humans live together with others in a social order, we can say that power

imbalances and authority relationships shape human life. There is a strong relationship between power and vulnerability. While power grants certain privileges, it also brings the other side under its influence. Sartori describes the possession of power as “the exercise of authority” and divides power into three categories. The first category includes those who hold authority, the second includes those who use authority, and the third refers to others (1987, p. 30). To elaborate on the topic, we can provide the example of the relationship between money and authority; this connection between authority and money can clarify the concept of vulnerability. Those who hold authority sometimes exert coercive influence over others through instrumental ownership, such as “money”. At this point, the discourse of the rich-poor dichotomy comes into play. For example, the wealthy wish to hold the power that money brings and to fulfill the desire for pleasure found in Freud’s eros drive; the poor may also seek to establish good relationships with power to acquire money or various privileges. In short, it can be said that the concept of vulnerability expresses an individual’s weaknesses.

Implementation Purpose and Method

This study is a qualitative study that examines the film *Triangle of Sadness*, directed by Ruben Östlund and awarded the Palme d'Or, through the lens of the concept of “vulnerability” and Michel Foucault’s notions of “subject” and “power.” The research employs critical discourse

analysis (CDA), one of the prominent qualitative research approaches. Themes such as power, ideology, domination, authority, class, hegemony, and gender can be defined as central areas of inquiry in critical discourse analysis. CDA particularly focuses on social problems and emphasizes the role of discourse in the exercise of power, the reproduction of dominance, and the legitimization of inequality (van Dijk, 2001, p. 96). Critical discourse analysis is commonly applied in fields such as media studies, ideological critique, and literature, aiming to reveal how meaning is shaped within linguistic and textual contexts.

This study is grounded in Norman Fairclough's approach to CDA. Fairclough argues that CDA is not merely a methodological tool, but rather a theoretical framework based on the view that discourse is an essential component of social life. According to Fairclough, discourse is a space where social relations, identities, and power structures are both represented and constructed. Therefore, CDA investigates discourse through its dialectical relationship with social practices, with a particular focus on how it relates to power and ideology. Fairclough asserts that every discourse is produced within a specific social context and is shaped by the power relations inherent to that context. He also emphasizes that discourse has the potential to reproduce or transform existing social structures (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122). In line with this perspective, the film *Triangle of Sadness* is analyzed in this study through the concept of vulnerability and Foucault's notions of

subject and power, with particular attention to how discourse in the film reflects and interacts with broader social structures. The language employed by the characters, shifts in power relations, and the discursive construction of class positions are analyzed in accordance with Fairclough's emphasis on both the structural and functional dimensions of discourse. This approach regards discourse not only as a representational tool, but also as a means of constructing social reality (Fairclough, 2001, p. 130). Accordingly, this study explores how linguistic and visual elements in the film are embedded in and connected to wider social practices.

It is possible to analyze a film through multiple theories and various perspectives. This research will be examined along three main concepts: vulnerability, subject, and power. Throughout the film, only the sequences in which the identified concepts are present have been included in the research.

Part 1: The power dynamics between “Carl and Yaya”

The film's opening sequence begins with Carl, taking the audience into the world of fashion and models. Carl is a male model who has participated in a new audition. The dialogues between the male models waiting for their turn in the dressing room and a journalist conducting interviews gradually warm the audience up to making inferences about the film. A candid conversation begins between the journalist and a model, discussing topics such as whether the model's family supports

him, the father's reaction to having a son who is a male model, the fact that male models earn less than female models, and the pressure to constantly protect himself from gay men who might want to be with him in this industry. Laughter ensues after the journalist's mention of "gay". The heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy is at the core of Foucault's studies on sexuality and sexual orientations. As exemplified in Foucault's healthy-sick dichotomy, questions such as what distinguishes these two, what is considered sick and what is considered healthy, can be interpreted through the phenomenon of power (Foucault, 1977b, p. 34). Another question posed by the journalist is about the reaction of the male model's "father" to his choice of becoming a model. In the woman-man dichotomy, the representation of patriarchy is embodied in the male; the father is the authority of the household, and his opinions directly influence the family's decisions. Additionally, the discourse that female models earn more than male models reflects that the power in the fashion industry lies with "female models".

Subsequently, a seemingly cheerful yet thought-provoking conversation begins between the journalist and Carl. The journalist asks Carl whether the auditions are for a "serious brand or a smiling brand". The somewhat playful and cheerful journalist explains, "Brands that models smile for are usually cheaper; as a brand becomes more expensive, you start looking down on the customer and stop smiling." The journalist, laughing, gives examples of two brands, one expensive

and the other cheap: H&M and Balenciaga. The models first strike a cold and expressionless Balenciaga look with a cheerful demeanor, followed by a cheerful expression for the H&M look. This cheap-expensive dichotomy between the two brands has rendered one valuable and the other worthless within the fashion industry. Money buys power, and what emerges is the power of brands. Individuals identify themselves based on the material value of the products they purchase and use, and they play their roles according to these identities.

Carl is in front of the jury. The jury asks Carl to walk “quickly, without smiling, and continuously”. Then a jury member asks Carl, “Can you relax the Triangle of Sadness? Right between your eyebrows...” The “Triangle of Sadness” refers to a type of expression we describe in Turkish as “frowning brows.” The film’s director, Ruben Östlund, mentioned in an interview with *Vanity Fair* that the title of the film actually comes from the wrinkle in the middle of the forehead, which is referred to as the “problem wrinkle” in Swedish. This “triangle of sadness” wrinkle in the middle of the forehead is fundamentally a term used in relation to “cosmetic surgery” (*Vanity Fair*, 2022). By the end of the scene, it becomes clear that the model auditions did not go well and that Carl was unsuccessful.

The sequence begins with a few elegantly dressed individuals who have taken their seats to watch a fashion show being instructed to rise from their chairs by a woman who appears to be

in charge of the event. Most of the front-row audience members are removed, and other guests take their places. Carl is also among the audience. The stage lights come on, and the phrase “Everyone’s Equal” appears on the stage screen. In this scene, the “contrast between image and movement” is observed. In this scene, the distinction between those in power and those who are not is clearly illustrated. Then, a sentence appears on the screen that reads, “Cynicism Masquerading as Optimism.” (Cynicism: a desire to distance oneself from feelings such as power, wealth, and fame; sarcasm). Yaya (who is later revealed to be Carl’s girlfriend) walks the runway in a dress made up of only black and white colors. The audience and fans shout Yaya’s name, indicating that she is a famous model. The phrase “Ladies First” appears on the screen. Just moments ago, the phrase “Everyone's Equal” was projected, and now “Ladies First” is displayed. The type of equality that the equality discourse refers to is debatable. Perspectives such as under what circumstances women are equal to men and in what situations they have precedence over men refer to both gender roles and the concept of vulnerability. The discourse that women are vulnerable or have equal rights with men may vary depending on the context of power relations. This might be the point the sequence intends for the audience to reflect upon. Indeed, in the subsequent narrative, the power-subject and vulnerability dichotomy in the relationship between women and men is more clearly depicted.

The sequence begins with Yaya and Carl dining in a restaurant, where it is shown that they are eating their meals and the waiter brings the bill. At that moment, Yaya is touching up her makeup, seemingly covering her face with a makeup mirror, and ignoring the bill. Carl is annoyed; although he tries to hide it, his facial expression reveals that something is wrong.

Yaya notices the situation and asks Carl about it. Carl expresses that he is uncomfortable with Yaya ignoring the bill, especially after she had mentioned that she would pay for their meal today. When the bill arrived at the table, Yaya first ignored it and then thanked Carl, effectively forcing him to pay and leaving him no room to voice his opinion. When the bill arrived at the table, Yaya initially ignored it and then thanked Carl, essentially forcing him to pay the bill and leaving him no opportunity to voice his opinion. Yaya accuses Carl of fighting over money. Yaya's card is declined when she tries to pay the bill, so the bill remains unpaid. She takes out cash from her bag, but it isn't enough. The task of paying the bill falls to Carl. Yaya puts the cash she took out back into her wallet. They leave the restaurant and get into a taxi. Just at that moment in the taxi, there is a noise from an unknown source. It can be said that in the director's other films, there are also disturbing sounds like a baby crying, creaking, and noise. The atmosphere is tense. Yaya says that talking about money doesn't sit well with her. People do not like to talk about their weaknesses; indeed, Yaya insists that she does not enjoy discussing money. Carl adds that Yaya behaves according to gender roles and assigns the role of paying the bill to the man, expressing his

desire for equality. Here, Carl clearly thinks that Yaya is trapped by gender roles and emphasizes that women have weaknesses regarding money. The relationship between weaknesses and power is also evident in this scene. Although Yaya is financially better off than Carl, she hesitates to pay. The source of weaknesses also lies in societal norms; the material power assigned to men in the male-female relationship imposes a passive role on women in social relationships. In today's capitalist world, money is a metaphor for power. Those who possess material power hold authority, and those who have authority also possess material power; there is a dialectic between them. Yaya's weakness regarding money has caused power to shift to Carl.

The dichotomy of rich-poor, beautiful-ugly, and successful-unsuccessful can be intensely observed in this section. After Carl's unsuccessful modeling audition, his weakness for Yaya and his fear of losing her are quite evident in this scene. In this section, dichotomies related to gender roles are prominent. The traditional male-female relationships that exist in patriarchal societies are depicted alongside power and vulnerabilities. The woman's weakness regarding money, the man's weakness for the woman, and the shifting roles of power and subjectivity are evident in this section.

Chapter 2: "The yacht" and hierarchical power relations

Carl and Yaya are seen lounging side by side on a sunbed on the deck. Yaya is likely sharing the photos taken by Carl with her followers, while Carl is seen lounging with a book. The

name of the book is Ulysses. The buzzing sound is heard again. This book is not a randomly chosen one. The title Ulysses is derived from the Latin name of Odysseus, the hero of the Odyssey, and the contradictions found in its eighteen chapters are akin to those in Homer's work, with the chapter titles being the same. We can interpret the connection between Ulysses and our film from the following perspective. In Greek mythology, there are sea creatures called Sirens, known for their beautiful voices and enchanting songs. The Sirens, with their enchanting voices, lure sailors towards them, causing ships to crash into the shore and leading to the sailor's deaths. In the Odyssey, to avoid falling under the spell of the Siren's enchanting voices, Odysseus orders his crew to cover their ears with beeswax, while he has himself tied to the mast of the ship to protect himself from their song (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972, pp. 22-28). The Sirens, by their role, are bound to kill; the rowers, by their role, are obligated to keep the ship moving; and those at the top are compelled to do whatever it takes to stay in power. Everyone is a prisoner of the role they play. This situation can also be described as being a prisoner of one's own power. Everyone is a prisoner of their own power and is doomed to exhibit the behaviors demanded by their role.

While Carl and Yaya are sunbathing, several male crew members are seen working on repairs and maintenance on the deck. Yaya gazes at one of them for a long time, says hello, and smiles, at that point, the buzzing sound is heard again. Carl notices the situation; it is clear that he is uncomfortable with it, and he has made his jealousy towards Yaya apparent. The buzzing

continues. Carl goes to the yacht and complains to the chief about the crew member whom Yaya greeted and smiled at, stating that he is “bare-chested” and smoking. Here, Carl is actually jealous of the crew member, and his weakness and vulnerability towards Yaya have led him to complain about the crew. Authority can take on many forms. According to Carl, the crew member he is complaining about is more attractive than him, and this has disturbed Carl in relation to Foucault’s conceptualization of biopower, particularly the dichotomy of attractive versus unattractive in terms of physical appearance. In the following scenes, it is seen that the attractive male crew member who was complained about is dismissed from his job. When power perceives a force or individual that could undermine its authority, it seeks to distance itself from them.

In the following minutes of the film, a dining table is shown with two women (the younger and well-groomed Ludmilla and the other, Vera) and an older man (Dimitry). It can be inferred that Vera is the wife of the older man, while Ludmilla is his girlfriend. Carl and Yaya are also seated at the same table. Carl takes photos of Yaya for her to share on Instagram. A conversation begins between them and Dimitry. They mention that Yaya is an Instagram influencer, and the older man asks Yaya whether she earns a lot of money from her fame. Carl says that they get most things for free because of Yaya's influencer status. The man replies, “How nice! She has paid her ticket price with her beauty.” “Östlund” states in an interview that in this film, the phenomenon of

beauty should be seen as an interchangeable “currency” (Q with Tom Power, 2022). Yaya has gained certain advantages with all her “femininity,” while Dimitry, right across from her, holds an advantage over his young girlfriend with his money. The relationship between power and the subject is constantly in flux according to social roles.

In the final scene of the sequence, Dimitry and Ludmilla are not visible on screen. Dimitry may have felt discomfort from Jorma constantly saying, “I am very wealthy,” implying a rival authority to his own, and he could have taken his girlfriend and left as a result. Afterward, Jorma starts dancing with Yaya; it is evident from Carl’s expression that he is quite uncomfortable with this situation, as he, like Dimitry, fears Jorma's wealth and his ability to influence Yaya with his money.

The sequence begins with Yaya and Carl, who is taking photos of her. The passengers are sunbathing on the deck. While Vera enjoys champagne in the jacuzzi, she is also chatting with the yacht hostess. She tells her that she was born rich, that her wealth is “not her fault,” that hard-working people die with regrets, and that life is unfair. Vera views her wealth as a crime; this may be due to the power of the authority she imposes on “others” while playing the role of the rich, and she adds, “We are all equal.” She then asks the hostess if she has any wishes for life and if she has gone swimming during the day. The hostess replies that it is forbidden during working hours.

However, Vera seems uncomfortable with this answer and has pressured the staff member quite a bit to say yes. This scene is somewhat similar to the initial fashion show scene; in both scenes, power is imposed forcibly, making the other party do things without their consent. Vera loudly demands that all the crew members on the yacht go swimming. Vera makes a new request to the hostess: “Let’s switch roles.” “Come on! Just for a moment, take my place. Please.” Although the hostess is not eager, Vera insists, saying, “I command you to enjoy the moment.” The hostess girl says no, but the wealthy woman asserts her authority because she has been told no, leaving the hostess with no option but to say yes. Vera’s power has positioned the hostess as a subject. In the following minutes of the film, the head of the crew calls the kitchen and informs the chef that all the staff will be going swimming. In the background, a march is playing, and a large octopus is visible on the kitchen counter. The playing march is the Russian National Anthem. Notably, it is striking that this anthem is playing in the kitchen of a yacht with wealthy clients precisely at the moment when all the staff are granted the right to swim by a Russian national. The anthem here is actually a metonym for equality and socialism; the right to swim granted to everyone on the yacht eliminates the class differences on board, and everyone gains equal access to the sea. It is possible to say that the director chose the Russian National Anthem to reference this equality. The octopus, with its harmonious and unified movement of tentacles serving a single purpose, symbolizes a

similar notion. Foucault's statement that “power is everywhere because it comes from everywhere” can be interpreted through the octopus and the power of authority. In the next section (Island), the first live octopus captured by Abigail, who seizes power with her abilities, serves as a metaphor for authority.

The sequence begins with the yacht constantly swaying. The staff and guests enter the dining room in a very elegant manner. The guests start to feel nauseous and begin to vomit from the food they consumed. This combination of events emphasizes the chaos and discomfort unfolding in the dining experience, creating a stark contrast between the luxurious setting and the unpleasant reality the guests are facing. The guests, embodying the roles granted by their wealth, begin to indulge in their extremely exotic meals. However, immediately after eating, everyone starts to vomit. This situation underscores the absurdity of their excess, contrasting their privileged facade with the grotesque reality of indulgence. Everyone pretends to enjoy their meal. Here, a reference can be made to Goffman's dramaturgical role. The self that individuals carry is essentially the “image” they try to convey to others, portraying a certain character within the context of everyday life. The image allows for an identity to be attributed to a person; however, this identity arises not from the individual who possesses it but from the totality of that person's actions (Goffman, 2014, p. 234). Everyone has a role in everyday life. The wealthy and those in positions of power must also act accordingly.

The yacht begins to shake violently due to the storm. While all the guests are served elegantly named and presented dishes, the captain is served “hamburger and fries.” This menu can be interpreted through the lens of capitalism. After all the guests have vomited and left the restaurant, only two remain: the captain and the wealthy elderly man. A conversation begins between the two about communism, anti-communism, socialism, capitalism, freedom, and ideologies. The duo appears quite cheerful. While all the guests are getting increasingly worse, the only ones who seem joyful are Dimitry and the captain. The captain is not at the helm; the yacht is being tossed about by the storm on its own.

In the continuing scene, two books are visible on the table: the first is Noam Chomsky's *How the World Works*. The book generally explains how the world operates for the benefit of a small group of wealthy elites who act without regard for others, seeking profit even at the expense of harm to those outside their circles. The second book is *Imperialism and War* by V.I. Lenin and Nikolai Bukharin.

In the following scenes, the captain reads a text into the microphone, discussing power dynamics, wars, those who profit from conflicts, and how throughout history, all good and honest leaders have been killed. He points out that while wars make the wealthy even richer, those who fight and suffer are from the working class. At that moment, pirates approach the yacht and throw

a grenade onto the deck. An explosive land on the deck of the yacht. The pirates shoot up the yacht, and it slowly sinks. The sinking yacht symbolizes a collapsing system. With the yacht's destruction, the existing power dynamics and vulnerabilities are reshaped in the third chapter.

Chapter 3: "The island" and the reconfiguration of power relations

The survivors gradually become visible. Meanwhile, a small argument begins between a black staff member (Nelson) and Dimitry. Dimitry claims he doesn't know Nelson and has never seen him before. Nelson responds by saying to Dimitry, "You're accusing me of being a pirate because I'm black." Here, there is biopower. The power of one race over another is evident. The fly reappears on the screen and begins to buzz again.

Everyone is running towards a lifeboat. Suddenly, a Filipino crew member, Abigail, appears inside the lifeboat. There is some water and food in the lifeboat. The head of the yacht's crew, Paula, asks Abigail to take all the supplies out of the lifeboat and give them to her, as she distributes all the water and food to the yacht's guests. Even on a deserted island, it is not considered that Abigail, who is a member of the yacht's crew, is a human being and in need of something as basic as water. Here, even in a utopian scenario like being stranded on a deserted island, it is evident that those in power are always fortunate and prioritized compared to the

“others”. Abigail also puts a few pieces of food and a water bottle in her bag. If power does not provide opportunities for others to survive, they learn to create their own means in some way.

Perhaps the most striking part of the island segment begins here. While the rich eat the chips that come out of the lifeboat, Abigail dives into the sea and catches an octopus with her hands. To cook the octopus, it needs to be cleaned first and then a fire must be made, but no one other than Abigail knows how to do these things. The scene begins with Abigail starting a fire to cook the octopus. The octopus is now ready to be eaten. As Paula reaches out with her hands to take the octopus, Abigail covers it with her hands and does not allow her to take it.

After a sharing of “one for you, one for me”. Paula realizes that the portion Abigail has set aside for herself is larger. When Paula asks, “Is all of it yours?” and questions why Abigail has taken so much, Abigail responds that she caught the octopus herself, made the fire, and cooked it. She says, “I did all the work,” and adds that the rich are lazy and dependent on her.

Dimitry tells Abigail that he is very wealthy and that he can do something for her when they return. Here, Dimitry offers to use his wealth to grant himself privileges.

In the new order, Abigail holds the power, and she builds this power upon the vulnerabilities of others for survival. Before the yacht sank, there were discussions between the

captain and Dimitry regarding the world order. In these discussions, the captain expressed his support for a socialist system, which is a structure where classes are abolished, and power is shared among all classes. With the sinking of the ship, a new order has been established. In the previous order, Abigail was in the position of a worker (proletariat), but she has now seized power and, like the authorities of the previous order, has used it for her own benefit.

Abigail's power parallels the authority that the wealthy on the ship held through their money. On the ship, the wealthy are in power through money and can make the crew do whatever they desire. The workers' vulnerability to money leads them to submit to orders and do what is asked of them. On the island, Abigail is capable of survival and is at the top of the food chain. This situation brings her power, which she uses to dominate the other individuals on the island. For the others, the inability to hunt creates a vulnerability that affects their survival. For this reason, they submit to Abigail's power, whether willingly or unwillingly, just like the crew on the yacht who bowed to the wealthy's every request for money. In this section, Foucault's discourse on power and the subject becomes much clearer. The injustices in the system are not class-based, but rather pertain to who holds power and how it is wielded.

Abigail is aware that power has long since changed hands. She wants others to obey her. She asks everyone in turn, "Who am I?" and rewards those who answer "You are the captain" with

a piece of octopus. A frightening and disturbing sound is heard. Abigail tells the men to keep the fire going outside and that Paula and Yaya can sleep with her in the dinghy. Here, it is possible to see the vulnerability of women in the context of gender. Women are seen as more vulnerable than men in all societies. Dimitry and Jarmo offer Abigail their very expensive “Patek Philippe” and “Rolex” watches so they can sleep in the dinghy. It is seen that Abigail accepts this. Money and the commodities that signify it are always ready to be exchanged. Therefore, power and authority are commodities that can be traded for money.

The three people (Carl, Nelson, and Therese) who have no possessions or material privileges must sleep outside. Thus, money represents the power that is Abigail's weakness, while the woman represents vulnerability. Therese, who has a physical disability due to a stroke, has lost her husband and is alone on the island. The woman, who relies on others for assistance, is at a disadvantage according to biopower. She is not healthy and does not have the health necessary to sustain her own life.

Those who obey Abigail, who is in power, have earned the right to eat the fish she has caught. Abigail smiles at Carl (previously, she had called him “handsome boy”) and tells him that he can sleep with her in the dinghy. Carl will, so to speak, pay the fare for his “ticket” to sleep in the dinghy with his beauty. Power has changed hands; the right to choose has been granted to

Abigail. Or has Abigail earned the right to choose for herself? On land, men are vulnerable to women, and women to money, but on the island, things have turned upside down; women have begun to be vulnerable to men, and men to women in order to survive.

Although Yaya is disturbed by this situation, she eats the crackers Carl gave her and turns a blind eye to him spending the night with another woman, hoping that he will “bring her food.” The survival of the others depends on the fish Abigail catches for them and the fire she lights. Abigail gives Carl a package of crackers in exchange for “every night” he spends with her.

Carl shares the crackers with Yaya. The crackers are a metaphor for money. Just as men pay women for companionship, Abigail is paying Carl with crackers when she sleeps with him.

Daily life on the island flows just like in the city; power relations, defenders of power, and the fear of opposing authority exist here as well. Nelson is seen talking to Therese; he asks her if she had to be with a man in her past life to get a job. The woman laughs and says yes. Whether male or female, human vulnerability and weaknesses are always present.

Yaya comes to Abigail’s dinghy and asks to borrow Abigail’s backpack to look for something in the forest. Abigail tells Yaya that she wants her to accompany her, stating that it’s not safe for her to go alone. Here, the audience is led to think that Abigail will harm Yaya. Shortly after, Abigail begins to walk with herself in front and Yaya behind her. Yaya tells Abigail that she

is very impressed by what she has done on the island and that she has established a “patriarchal order”, saying that she “tames the alpha males”. (An alpha male is a strong, courageous male who holds the highest hierarchical rank in a community.) The walk continues, this time with Yaya in front and Abigail behind. Now, the thought arises that Abigail might harm Yaya. After a tiring walk, they reach the top of the mountain.

As they approach the end, Yaya calls out to Abigail with joyful shouts, saying that she has found an elevator and that this place is a luxury resort. The two embrace each other with joy, and Yaya cries out of happiness. This situation has been quite a sad coincidence for Abigail; as Yaya happily heads towards the elevator, the feelings of fear, anxiety, and shock are evident on Abigail’s face. Abigail sits down in shock and calls Yaya over to her. She throws her hat on the ground. This hat can be interpreted as a metaphor for power. At that moment, the elevator doors open; this door signifies two scenarios for the future, and both of them are thinking this at the same time. Abigail says she needs to go to the toilet, stands up, and walks behind Yaya, starting to think while looking at her. Meanwhile, Yaya is seen with her back to the audience while Abigail’s hat lies in front of her. Abigail picks up a stone and hides it behind her. The audience comes to the conclusion that the stone will be used to kill Yaya. Abigail slowly approaches Yaya, her face and hair appearing darker and more terrifying than usual. This signifies danger. Yaya calls out to her, perhaps having

noticed the deadly approach she is making towards her. Abigail looks at Yaya with the stone in her hand. Yaya, with her back turned to Abigail and the audience, offers a proposal to exchange power, saying, “I can help you; you can be my assistant.” In other words, she offers to regain power. As the scene comes to an end, Carl enters the frame, seen running quickly through the bushes, with his face and body scratched and bleeding. The scene leaves the answer to the audience as to whether Carl, who is running quickly through the trees with his shirt torn, is heading towards Yaya or fleeing from power.

Abigail demonstrates the reflexes that those in power may exhibit when faced with the loss of their authority. Those in power may adopt various roles and forms to avoid losing their authority. Abigail plans to kill Yaya to ensure that her power does not come to an end and to maintain order on the island. This scene beautifully illustrates what even an ordinary and seemingly docile person is capable of doing for power. Those who seize power become enslaved by their new roles and are willing to play these roles. Abigail comes from the working class, but once she seizes power, she becomes a prisoner of that role.

Conclusion

The film *The Triangle of Sadness* illustrates how susceptible the phenomenon of power is to shifting, even in the context of everyday life and extraordinary situations. In the film, the idea

that power can exist everywhere and at all times is presented through Foucault's argument on sovereignty. Power, subject, and discourse are intertwined concepts; space, on the other hand, is another foundation of power. Authority does not only describe the power relations between states and individuals; it is a whole of strategies that lead to an objective. It can be said that there is a phenomenon of power even among animals, humans, genders, and body appearances. Power strengthens by backing its claims with discourses; discourses, in turn, subjectivize individuals. The subject is someone who is formed as a result of discursive efforts and does not possess "their own will" in their actions. In the film, the three main locations-the city, the yacht, and the island-highlight distinct power practices, feelings of vulnerability, and weaknesses. In the city life of Yaya and Carl, the power of money, the authority of brand value among brands, Yaya's vulnerability to money, and Carl's weakness for his beautiful and successful girlfriend, Yaya, are all evident. Yaya experiences a fear of losing her money; in other words, money is Yaya's vulnerable aspect. Similarly, Carl fears losing Yaya; she is his vulnerable aspect. Power relations continue in yacht life; the wealthier passengers have power over the less wealthy, all guests have power over the captain, the captain has authority over the white-collar staff, and the white-collar staff exert power over the crew members at the lowest level of the yacht. Wealthy passengers subject the staff to their discourses because the staff have a vulnerability to money. When the yacht

sinks, power shifts sides to sustain its existence; Abigail, who was the restroom staff on the yacht, seizes power through her survival skills in nature and expects “the others” to obey her authority.

Vulnerabilities play a significant role in the power-subject dichotomy. The vulnerabilities that individuals exhibit in certain situations are directly proportional to their personal characteristics and social roles. In all three parts of the film, we encounter different vulnerabilities of the characters. These vulnerabilities sometimes stem from gender relationships (Carl and Yaya), sometimes from material relationships (the Yacht), and at other times from basic human needs like survival (the Island). In Ruben Östlund’s 2022 film *The Triangle of Sadness*, how people’s vulnerabilities emerge in the face of power in everyday life and how these vulnerabilities transform are portrayed through cinematic language. The film supports Foucault’s argument that “sovereignty is everywhere” by depicting the suddenly overturned hierarchy and the reversed roles. In the film, power-subject relationships transform and are reproduced across different roles and settings. The film is divided into three sections in terms of space and content, and in each section, the phenomenon of power and vulnerability that evolves in human relationships is effectively portrayed.

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