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Exploring Gender and Representation in Politics in Croatia: A Case Study

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Signature..... *Ane K. L. Plosnić*.....

Date 15.05.2024.....

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Abstract

In political representation gender equality requires elected bodies that are representative both in terms of opinions and social composition. As women and men make up about half of the population, the equitable involvement of women in political life and equal distribution of power is essential for achieving a balance that more accurately mirrors the societal composition.

However, despite efforts to promote gender equality in politics, women continue to face systemic barriers to political participation and significant underrepresentation of women still persists globally due to prevailing social norms favoring men. In a historical and social context gender stereotypes have played a significant role in shaping the perception of women in politics in Croatia. Thus, understanding how gender norms and expectations shape Croatia's political arena provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of gender and representation in post-socialist societies.

Drawing on the theories of representation by Hanna Pitkin and the theory presence by Anne Phillips, the research seeks to analyze a specific speech from Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's and the media's reactions to it through a feminist perspective to understand how gender stereotypes are reproduced through political communication in politics in Croatia. Grabar-Kitarović's speech reveals a tension between societal expectations of female leaders and the reality of navigating these expectations.

The findings recognize the complex situation faced by women politicians in Croatia as they strive to adhere to societal expectations in the political landscape. By acknowledging the constraints imposed on women in leadership roles, we can work towards creating more inclusive and supportive political environments.

Keywords: *gender, representation, stereotypes, political communication, gender and politics, female representatives, Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, news media.*

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1. Introduction

Women's political representation has become a universal benchmark for measuring democracy, and citizens are expected to engage in political activities regardless of gender to participate as free and equal (Conway, 2001). Today, women occupy significant political roles and leadership positions, standing alongside men in politics. Having women in politics is essential for achieving gender equality, enriching political discourse, promoting diversity, and ensuring that the needs and perspectives of all citizens are represented in decision-making processes. Therefore, efforts to increase the representation of women in politics must be supported and prioritized to create more inclusive societies (United Nations Women, 2014).

After a quarter-century since gaining independence, Croatia reached a historic milestone by selecting its first female president, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, in 2015. This significant achievement signals a change in the country's political landscape, breaking the traditional gender normative beliefs and challenging the notion that the political arena has to be led by a male figure. As the first female president of Croatia, Grabar-Kitarović served as a prominent role model for women aspiring to enter politics and other traditionally male-dominated fields, demonstrating that women are fully capable of assuming positions of power and authority.

However, despite efforts to narrow the inequality gap, achieving full equality and equitable representation in the political arena remains an ongoing challenge (Council of Europe, 2018). Additionally, patriarchal structures continue to occupy the foundation of Croatian society, where traditionally masculine stereotypes are preferred and glorified in politics, while female characteristics are associated with the private sphere.

In contemporary discussions, it is debated whether disadvantaged groups need to have a visible presence in elected assemblies to be adequately represented. Drawing on Anne Phillip's theory of presence, which emphasizes the significance of visibility and recognition in shaping perceptions of leadership and representation within political spheres, this paper further explores this topic.

The study delves into the dynamic of gender equality and representation in politics in Croatia, using Kolinda-Grabar Kitarović and one of her pre-electoral speeches to examine this complex phenomenon. As the country's first female president, Grabar-Kitarović provides a unique subject for analyzing the challenges women face navigating traditional gender roles, while holding a position of power. In this thesis, I address the presence of women in Croatian politics and associated perceptions of leadership and gender.

This exploration serves as a small part of broader issues surrounding gender equality and representation in politics, shedding light on the larger systemic barriers women encounter in the political landscape. Ultimately, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how gender dynamics shape political discourse and policymaking, hoping to foster more inclusive and equitable political environments.

Croatia presents an intriguing case study for exploring the intersection of gender and politics, given its historical and cultural context of deeply entrenched patriarchal traditions and traditional social roles, juxtaposed with a woman's leadership at the forefront of the country.

The phenomenon is scrutinized through an analysis of Grabar-Kitarović's pre-electoral speech and the media's reactions to the speech. By applying a feminist perspective to the analysis, my goal is to critically examine gender roles within political representation. This perspective seeks to uncover and challenge patriarchal structures and norms that may influence the portrayed and perception of women in politics. Additionally, it explores themes that link representation with gendered experiences and identities. The aim is to deepen the understanding of the complexities surrounding women's political representation and contribute to broader discussions on gender equality and societal change.

The study reveals a complex interplay between gender representation and stereotypes, through the theory of presence proposed by Anne Phillips, presented through the analysis of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's pre-electoral speech and the media's reactions to it.

In the context of Grabar-Kitarović's representation, her visibility as a female political leader is significant in challenging traditional gender roles and expectations. However, despite her presence in political spheres, Grabar-Kitarović's portrayal in her pre-electoral speech and the media's reactions highlight the persistence of entrenched gender stereotypes. Furthermore, while she may present qualities typically associated with leadership, such as assertiveness and confidence, she also conforms to societal expectations of femininity through her attitude and language choices. This adherence to traditional gender roles reflects the complex dynamics of gender representation in politics, where women are often expected to navigate a delicate balance between displaying strength and adhering to feminine ideals. Moreover, despite her achievements and leadership qualities, the media tends to focus on negative critiques, evaluating not only her abilities and qualifications but also her adherence to gendered expectations.

This thesis addresses the dynamic of gender and representation in politics, with a specific focus on Kolinda-Grabar Kitarović's pre-electoral speech as a case study. The study aims to investigate how Grabar-Kitarović's portrayal in her speech reflects traditional gender stereotypes

within political communication. Through a comprehensive analysis of themes in the speech, I seek to understand the complex interplay between gender stereotypes and political representation. This research aims to uncover how political communication contributes to the reproduction of gender stereotypes regarding political representation in Croatia.

1.1. Research Question

Among the four dimensions assessed in the World Economic Forum's Gender Equality Index (economic opportunity and participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment) the dimension of political empowerment, which measures women's representation in political offices, presents the poorest performance. Importantly, while there is significant variation among countries, gender inequality in politics persists across all regions worldwide, including those nations considered socially and economically advanced (Free Network, s.a.).

Women's historical underrepresentation in politics can be attributed to the long-standing patriarchal structures embedded within societies, assigning women qualities like caretakers, insecure, weak, emotional, sensitive, empathetic, and dependent, contrasting with traits often associated with men.

Croatia presents an interesting example for studying political representation through the phenomena of gender and representation, with a particular focus on gender stereotypes, as Croatian society continues to deal with entrenched prejudices and gender-based discrimination. These persistent issues contribute to women encountering systemic challenges related to gender and political representation.

Therefore, studying Croatia allows for insights into examining aspects of gender equality and representation, highlighting the persistence of gender stereotypes and their impact on women's participation in politics. The study aims to investigate how Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's representation in her pre-electoral speech reflects traditional gender stereotypes through political communication. The problem statement is explored through the research question: How is political communication reproducing stereotypes on gender and political representation in Croatia?

1.2. Outline of the Thesis

The thesis focuses on the complex relationship between gender and representation in Croatian politics. Given the broad scope of the topic, it was necessary to narrow the focus, resulting in an exploration of gender and representation dynamics through the lens of the first female president and her political communication.

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović serves as the central subject of the study, with her pre-electoral speech and the media's reactions to it from December 2019, serving as the primary source for analysis.

The key concepts or conceptual framework of the thesis gender, stereotypes, and political representation, and the theoretical framework, are discussed in the second chapter. Drawing from scholarly literature on gender and representation, the thesis engages with theories such as Hanna Pitkin's (Dovi, 2018; Campbell et al., 2009) theory of representation and Anne Phillips' (Held, 1997) theory of presence to establish a theoretical framework for the deductive approach of the study. Combining the theoretical framework with the concept of traditional gender stereotypes enables the thesis to delve into a qualitative examination where the relation between political representation and traditional gender stereotypes is explored.

In the third chapter, the methodology chapter outlines the research approach, detailing the methods used and reflecting on the study's strengths and limitations. This chapter serves to provide transparency and clarity in the research process, enabling readers to understand how the study was conducted and the justification behind the chosen methods. By outlining the methodology in detail, I aim to provide insight into the internal validity of the study while also acknowledging any constraints or potential biases inherent in the research design.

The first part of the fourth chapter provides a historical context of gender and representation in Croatia and a background on Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović to provide an understanding of the subject and the environment where the study is situated. Furthermore, the analysis delved into Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's pre-electoral speech delivered in Osijek in 2019 which serves as a central point for analyzing gender and representation in Croatian politics.

The analysis is structured into two main sections. The first part of the analysis examines the video of the speech, while the second part analyzes the media reactions that followed the speech, seeking to understand how Grabar-Kitarović's representation was received and evaluated by the media.

The theories and conceptual frameworks discussed in the second chapter are used as a foundation for the analysis and interpretation of the data in the fourth chapter. The framework is used to draw connections between existing theory and the sources, by providing background

knowledge. Additionally, the research applies a feminist perspective, guiding the studies focus on women and viewing the issues through the lens of gender equality, with the aim of recognizing systemic inequalities based on gender, to foster a more just and equitable society for all genders.

Utilizing both the video of the speech and the media's immediate reactions to it allows for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics surrounding gender and representation in Croatian politics through political communication. The aim is to provide a qualitative assessment of women's political representation in Croatia, explaining gender stereotypes and communication dynamics.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Considering Croatia's history as a patriarchal society where women are being marginalized compared to men, the election of a female president in 2015 was perceived as a significant turning point for women's engagement in the political landscape. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, as the first female president of Croatia, occupies a unique position in the country's political landscape, offering an opportunity to examine the dynamics of gender representation in a post-socialist, traditionally patriarchal society. Analyzing her political communication and the media's reaction to the speech, the goal is to gain insights into the complexities and challenges of female political leadership. Additionally, studying Grabar-Kitarović's presidency provides an example through which broader questions about gender equality can be explored.

Another reason why Grabar-Kitarović is interesting to research is connected to the extensive media coverage she received during her presidency. As a prominent figure in Croatian politics, her words and actions were and still are closely followed by the media, making her an important public figure through whom the public's opinion is influenced directly and indirectly.

Studying Kolinda Grabar Kitarović's pre-electoral speech is a valuable choice for several reasons. Firstly, her public appearance provides insight into gender dynamics in representation, presenting a firsthand example of gender and representation in Croatian politics. Secondly, her speech offers an opportunity to explore a woman's presence in traditionally male-dominated spaces, such as politics. By analyzing her speech through feminist perspectives and theories of gender and representation, the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how stereotypes are reflected through the first female president in Croatia, providing an answer to the research question.

Prior studies concerning the former president of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović are found in the fields of rhetorics and linguistics where verbal communication is analyzed to interpret public speaking and Grabar-Kitarović's vocabulary (Ljubić, et al., 2023; Lukšić, 2023; Odak Kراسić & Pavlović, 2021). Other research focuses on reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes, discrimination, and mocking the presidential figure (Čulig Suknaić, 2021; Grbeša, et al., 2024; Jambrešić Kirin, 2017). Although the aforementioned research is relevant for interpreting Grabar Kitarović as a presidential figure, none have an international relations (IR) approach including an aspect of feminism. As female representation in politics has been identified as a path to social and political progress and development toward equality, it makes the study on gender and representation significant both in the field of feminism, IR, and development (Šinko, 2007).

The study contributes to feminism by shedding light on the challenges women face in attaining and exercising political power. It contributes to feminist scholarship by exploring the persistence of patriarchal norms through gender stereotypes, acknowledging their existence to further contribute to greater gender equality in political leadership. In the realm of IR, the study offers insights into understanding the experiences of a female political leader on a national level, which can contribute to broader discussions on democracy, human rights, and governance in the international arena. Drawing connections to countries that have a similar historical, cultural, and social environment, Croatia can be used as an example for other former socialist countries with entrenched patriarchal structures. Furthermore, the study has implications in the field of development by emphasizing the importance of gender-inclusive policies and practices in promoting societal progress. Examining the role of women in politics and leadership, the research underscores the significance of gender equality in development initiatives. It highlights the need for policies that address gender disparities in political participation and decision-making to foster more equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

The next chapter introduces the importance of gender equality in political representation and the conceptual and theoretical framework of the thesis. Firstly, a brief introduction to the dynamics of gender and representation is provided to connect the phenomena to international relations. Then the focus shifts to the importance of having women in politics, supported by arguments in favor of female political representation. These arguments are followed by a discussion on conceptualizing gender, representation, and gender stereotypes, which are the main concepts of the paper. The final part of the chapter introduces the theories of representation and presence.

2. The Dynamic of Gender and Representation

During the 1990s, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of communism in Europe, and socialism in Croatia, the issue of women's parliamentary representation got significant international and national attention (Sawer, 2000), leading to a significant shift in global politics (Woodward & Hubert, 2007; Haugsgjerd Allern, et al., 2019; Ackerly et al., 2006). The underrepresentation of women was linked with democracy and human rights, arguing that equal participation between women and men in decision-making is essential for achieving a balance that more accurately mirrors the societal composition (United Nations Women, 2014; Haugsgjerd Allern, et al., 2019).

Croatia's journey towards gender equality is closely intertwined with the country's political change, transitioning from a socialist state to a democratic republic (Leinert Novosel, 2007). One of the first steps toward gender equality for Croatia was signing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992, thereby becoming a part of the international agreement committed to take the required steps to eliminate discrimination against women and realize gender equality in political and public life (United Nations Women, s.a.). Another global organization prioritizing gender equality that Croatia is a part of, is the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2023). It aims to achieve equal participation of men and women in politics at national, regional, and international levels. However, despite the strategies adopted, data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2019) reveal that women continue to be underrepresented in the parliaments of nearly every country worldwide.

The lack of success to enhance gender equality despite the strategies adopted, makes it interesting to find out the underlying reasons for women underrepresented in politics. Considering Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's role as the first female president of Croatia, she is an example of the promotion of gender and representation on a national level in Croatia, while the analysis of her representation sheds light on the challenges women face in political representation, explaining women's low political involvement.

Following this, the importance of women's presence in politics is emphasized through the justice, resource, and interests argument, which are intertwined with the concepts of gender, representation, and gender stereotypes, providing the conceptual framework for the research.

After the discussion of the concepts, the theoretical framework of gender and representation is presented through Hanna Pitkin's theory of representation and Anne Phillips'

theory of presence. These theories provide an overarching structure for the analysis of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović with the concepts in the basis.

2.1. Why is it Important to Have Women in Politics?

Following, the justice, resources, and interest arguments for equal representation will guide the exploration of why is it important to have women in politics. These arguments underscore the importance of women's equal representation in politics, each offering distinct perspectives and concerns (Siim & Borchorst, 2005). Exploring these arguments aims to deepen the understanding of the complexities surrounding the need for equal representation.

Having female representatives in politics is crucial for several reasons, ranging from promoting gender equality to enriching political discourse with diverse viewpoints and experiences (United Nations Women, 2014; Munyama, 2018; Council of Europe, 2018). The most straightforward argument for equal opportunity to participate in politics is grounded in the principle of justice between genders (Jožanc, 2011; Sawer, et al., 2006; Rapport, 1991), emphasizing that equal political gender representation would increase respect for women in general, serve as role models for other women, and offer new perspectives (Šinko, 2007; Sawer, et al., 2006).

Justice is concerned with fairness in ensuring representation for every social group, recognizing and accurately reflecting the population's composition through equal opportunities (Haugsgjerd Allern & Narud, 2019; Šinko, 2007). Hence, as women make up roughly half of the global population it is crucial to incorporate them in political decision-making in equal terms. By ensuring women's equal opportunities to participate in politics, societies can move closer to achieving gender equality and eradicate established gender biases and stereotypes (Haugsgjerd Allern & Narud, 2019; Pološki Vokić & Bulat, 2013).

Furthermore, formal representation, which focuses on legal institutions to advance equality in the political sphere, is an aspect of both the justice and resource argument. It is argued that excluding gender from political institutions undermines the legitimacy of the government, potentially leading to political mobilization based on gender identity and undermining citizens' trust in institutions (Šinko, 2007). Justice is used as a tool to reflect inclusive values in the interest of deconstructing existing inequalities and power structures and providing credibility to political institutions (Carpenter, 2008; Arnesen & Peters, 2018). Increasing the public representation of diverse gender performances in politics expands cultural options, increases the

credibility of political institutions, challenges traditional gender norms (Sawer, et al., 2006), and increases the possibility of women's damaged legitimacy being restored (Šinko, 2007). By promoting gender equality in political institutions, equal representation contributes to a more democratic and equitable society, where all individuals have the chance to contribute to shaping their future. The aim is to use justice as a tool to reflect inclusive values and responsibility to society in the interest of deconstructing existing inequalities and power structures (Carpenter, 2008).

The resource argument focuses on providing women with equal access to resources through campaign funding, political networks, and educational opportunities to enable their full participation in politics (USAID, s.a.). Hence, the resource argument advocates for changes in the formal structures, promoting strategies, frameworks, and gender quotas, to ensure that women have equal opportunities to compete for political positions and equal access to resources (Wängnerud, 2009; Held, 1997; Rosenblum, 1997).

Another aspect of the resource argument is viewing female representatives as role models. Through the resource argument, women's representatives are presented as a tool for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. When women see other women holding political office and participating in politics, it sends a powerful message that their voices are valued and that they too can aspire to political participation. This representation inspires future generations of women to engage in politics and pursue leadership positions, thereby perpetuating a cycle of increased female political participation and representation (Held, 1997; Sawer, et al., 2006). Research suggests that increased representation of women in politics positively influences young girls' aspirations and political participation. The same research has documented that role models have increased female political participation despite structural barriers (USAID, s.a.).

The resource and interest arguments for bringing more women to politics argue that the presence of women will ensure that a diversity of backgrounds and experiences is brought to the political and public arena. It is founded on notions that women through different skills, experiences, interests, and resources than men, can contribute to political development (Sawer, 2000). Assuming that women's presence will promote a better reflection of the complex society compared to the homogeneous groups composed entirely of men (Šinko, 2007), it becomes indispensable to ensure equality and diversity in politics. The perception is that women will bring a diverse range of perspectives which will broaden the collective point of view and develop new ways of interpreting societal perspectives (Dovi, 2018; Pološki Vokić & Bulat, 2013).

Thereby enriching perspectives, advocating for inclusivity, and addressing the multidimensional societal needs.

Furthermore, the interests argument assumes that women bring empathy and compassion to politics, drawing from the traditional stereotypes presenting them as caregivers and helpers. Empathy is viewed as a tool that enables women to understand society's challenges and advocate for policies that support well-being. Additionally, the perception that women politicians embrace collaborative characteristics and adopt a less confrontational approach, results in a more inclusive and sustainable outcome, as it prioritizes cooperation over confrontation (Sawer, et al., 2006).

A feminist critique of the idea of essentializing women's interests, notes that women, like men, hold a wide range of perspectives and priorities that cannot be easily categorized based on gender. They argue that focusing solely on women's interests risks reinforcing stereotypes and overlooking the diversity of experiences within the female population (Celis, et al., 2009). Thus, highlighting the importance of considering how gender is connected with other social identities, such as race, class, sexuality, and disability, in efforts to achieve equitable representation and address the diverse needs of all women (Arnesen & Peters, 2018).

Through the interests and resources arguments, it is assumed that women view politics through a gender lens, recognizing the complexity of identities and experiences, considering identity, race, sexuality, and class with gender (Held, 1997; Rosenblum, 1997). When studying gender, the relationship between men and women in society and the existing differences between them, need to be taken into account. Also, the focus on gender acknowledges the complex relations and underscores the importance of promoting equality and diversity in politics to create a more responsive and inclusive political landscape (Šinko, 2007; Sawer, et al., 2006).

Including diverse group members, promoting inclusion, and equal worth of all individuals, ensures that marginalized and underrepresented voices are heard and represented (USAID, s.a.; Held, 1997; Rosenblum, 1997). Diversity enriches the political discourse and leads to more comprehensive and inclusive policymaking that addresses the needs and concerns of the whole community (Dovi, 2018; Pološki Vokić & Bulat, 2013). Moreover, representatives from diverse backgrounds are more inclined to apply and consider diverse perspectives, share information, and address representatives' requirements more effectively (Arnesen & Peters, 2018; Campbell et al., 2009).

A balanced legislature may enable a broader articulation of ideas, a different style of politics, and potentially different outcomes (Arnesen & Peters, 2018). Gender diversity in

politics helps combat discrimination and societal biases while promoting social justice. Women in politics can advocate for policies that address gender-based discrimination, violence against women, and other issues that disproportionately affect women and girls. Hence, female presence in political institutions is sought to ensure these issues receive the attention and action they deserve (Munyama, 2018).

Although there is a shared commitment to achieving gender equality in politics, feminists differ in their approaches and priorities regarding power structures and social inequalities. Some feminists argue for proportional representation, advocating for equal numerical representation of men and women in political institutions to address historical discrimination and systemic inequalities (Rapport, 1991), while others emphasize the importance of highlighting women's distinct interests and perspectives, arguing that increasing women's representation in politics can lead to greater attention to issues hindering equality (Held, 1997).

In summary, the diverse resources and interests of women politicians enrich the political landscape and make it more responsive, inclusive, and reasonable for all members of society. The promotion of gender equality communicates a powerful message to the entire population, highlighting that equality is not an exception but an integral aspect of today's European society (Council of Europe, 2018). Embracing a more inclusive political environment not only reflects the evolving nature of contemporary Europe (Council of Europe, 2018) but also serves as a measure against societal biases and prejudices.

Through exploring the justice, resource, and interest arguments, distinct perspectives on gender equality in political representation are uncovered. The justice argument, grounded in principles of fairness, highlights the need for women's equal participation to eradicate entrenched biases. Meanwhile, the resource argument underscores the necessity of structural changes to provide women with equal opportunities and access to resources, thereby overcoming systemic barriers to their political engagement.

Lastly, the interest argument highlights the diverse perspectives and experiences that women bring to the political arena, enriching political discourse and ensuring the representation of marginalized voices. All three arguments are intertwined, emphasizing the importance of using specific aspects and female characteristics to enrich the political arena, combat discrimination, promote social justice, and foster inclusive policymaking.

Having established the significance of gender equality through justice, resources, and interest arguments outlined, the upcoming section delves into a comprehensive exploration of the concept of representation, gender, and gender stereotypes.

2.2. The Connection Between Gender and Representation

Political representation is closely linked to political communication and encompasses the exchange of information and ideas among political actors and the public. Just like representation, it goes beyond just spreading information and also involves advocating for the constituency. While political representation focuses on the relationship between representatives and the constituents they represent, political communication refers to the exchange of information and ideas among political actors and the public (Serapşah & Sevgihan, 2023).

Hanna Pitkin (Dovi, 2018) provides a simple definition, interpreting political representation as making voices, opinions, and perspectives present in the political arena. In other words, political representation occurs when politicians speak, act, and advocate for others (Dovi, 2018). Representation is viewed as one of the main concepts when studying the practice of politics, answering questions about who represents what and how it is represented (Galligan, 2007).

Focusing on gender and representation, it is interesting that the concept of representation has evolved, with a growing acknowledgment of the societal significance associated with the engagement of women in decision-making and positions of influence across various levels. This encompasses intergovernmental, governmental, and non-governmental sectors (United Nations Women, 2014).

Political theorists argue that historically marginalized groups possess a unique viewpoint that is challenging to express where group members are not present. The shared perspective stems from mutual experiences and social positioning formed by political struggles, and through these a collective narrative is developed by group members (Jožanc, 2011). Additionally, societal perspectives are constructed, and formed by political struggles making marginalized group members alienated from the rest of society through challenges and concerns that others may not encounter (Weldon, 2002). Often different or conflicting with the perspectives of dominant groups, representation for marginalized groups should also acknowledge and include the diversity within the group, avoiding the assumption of false homogeneity in interests or identities (Weldon, 2002; Celis, et al, 2009; Dovi, 2018).

Group perspectives are akin to puzzle pieces, with each member holding a fragment. Diversity enriches the picture, allowing a comprehensive view, and as members compare pieces, the collective picture emerges, each contributing a fragment. This interactive process deepens

understanding, where individuals offer insights, but group dynamics shape the collective viewpoint (Weldon, 2002). Therefore, a comprehensive perspective on political representation entails involving individuals in the fundamental decisions of society, by including representatives from all segments of society, encompassing women from diverse backgrounds (wealthy, impoverished, heterosexual, homosexual, with children, childless, young, elderly, with educational qualifications, without formal education, with disabilities, and without), to ensure that all voices are heard (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2020; Campbell et al., 2009).

The diversity in representation includes the importance of presenting gender in politics and incorporating it into the field of politics. Moreover, as one of the fundamental aspects of every individual, gender is an inevitable part of every aspect of society, including the political sphere (Tickner, 2001; Hoogensen & Stuvøy, 2006).

Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics and roles societies ascribe to individuals based on their perceived sex (March et al., 1999; Tickner, 2001; Siukola & Onwena Huma, 2017). It encompasses a spectrum of identities, behaviors, and expectations shaped by cultural norms and expectations rather than only by biological differences (March et al., 1999). Characteristics such as power, rationality, activity, and autonomy are stereotypes associated with men, while opposites like weakness, emotionality, passivity, and dependence are assigned to women (Tickner, 2001).

Traditional gender stereotypes or gender normative beliefs are socially constructed ideas according to which women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their gender (Council of Europe, 2018). They extend beyond mere biological distinctions, as they are shaped by societal interpretations of how individuals should behave (OHCHR, 2023). These roles are deeply rooted in society, reinforcing societal norms and expectations surrounding gender.

This social structure has limited the role of women primarily to the private sphere, encompassing domestic duties and caregiving responsibilities, while their participation in politics has been restricted. As a result, women have often been marginalized in political decision-making processes and faced systematic barriers when accessing positions of power. This patriarchal system has perpetuated gender inequalities and reinforced traditional gender roles, making it challenging for women to assert themselves in the political arena (Leinert Novosel, 1994; Glogoški, 2022).

The significance of traditional gender stereotypes and their impact on gender equality is underscored by the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 (Council of Europe,

2018). The strategy highlights that gender stereotypes pose a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and foster gender-based discrimination (Council of Europe, 2018). Stereotypes can be useful to structure the environment around us and get an uncomplicated picture of it. However, while stereotypes serve to simplify our perception of the world, they can also be destructive when they impose upon human rights and essential freedoms. Stereotypes do not only impact beliefs, they also influence how information is processed and understood, which can support the existing gender inequalities (Coffman, et al., 2021; Gerdeman, 2019), constraining the potential of both women and men to develop their inherent qualities and professional competencies and to make independent decisions about their lives and aspirations (Tomić-Koludrović & Petrić, 2004). Consequently, stereotypes can hinder the development of talents and individual capabilities, influencing their educational and professional choices and experiences, as well as their overall life opportunities (Council of Europe, 2018). In this sense, stereotypes are viewed as harmful (Stewart et al., 2021), perpetuating ongoing gender disparities in societies that uphold traditional gender norms.

The concern behind incorporating gender in politics stems from the prevailing perception of politics as a man's world, creating challenges for women who seek to be a part of and influence the political sphere (Tickner, 1992). An example of challenges that women meet in politics stems from the dual demands and responsibilities they face in both private and public spheres. Additionally, women either find themselves marginalized from the political arena or must gain the approval of others upon entering (Banić, 2020).

Consequently, women assuming leadership roles or entering politics often feel the need to prove that they are worthy of the position by displaying qualities that are traditionally attributed to men, like assertiveness, leadership skills, and independence. However, when women adopt these qualities they are often viewed as overly dominant leading to unintended consequences, including negative perception of their leadership abilities, resistance from colleagues, and challenges in building collaborative relationships. The societal expectation that women should adhere to more communal and nurturing roles can make it difficult for them to navigate leadership roles characterized by assertiveness or authority (Banić, 2020).

These entrenched attitudes, values, norms, and prejudices serve to perpetuate historical power imbalances in which men hold power over women, reinforcing sexist attitudes that impede progress toward gender equality (Gerdeman, 2019). These deeply integrated stereotypical perceptions prove resistant to change and are challenging to eradicate, especially when integrated into the foundation and root of society (Council of Europe, 2018).

In societies like Croatia, gender normative beliefs continue to have a significant influence on society's perception of women in politics, making gender stereotypes an important part of understanding gender and representation in politics. Questioning gender stereotypes further advanced to questions of the men's biased system and the exclusion of women from the political sphere (Leaković, 2016; Lascuarín Fernández & Villafuerte Valdés, 2016).

The connection between gender and representation emphasizes the importance of gender equality and gender diversity in politics. Gender and representation are discussed in the context of gender stereotypes, highlighting the obstacles encountered by women when entering and participating in politics.

In the following section I provide the theoretical framework of the paper, through a discussion of Hanna Pitkin's (Dovi, 2018) typology of representation and Anne Phillips' (Held, 1997) theory of presence provide a comprehensive framework for understanding representation in politics.

2.3. Theorizing Political Representation

This chapter begins with a deeper elaboration of the concept of representation through Hanna Pitkin's typology. This typology introduces the dimensions of representation that form the foundation for understanding the theories presented.

From the typology of representation, Hanna Pitkin further developed the theory of ideas, which is explained to provide background for the development of the theory of presence by Anne Phillips (Held, 1997). The theory of presence offers an understanding of the importance of increasing women's representation in politics and the challenges they face. The chapter aims to demonstrate the theory used as the basis for the analysis of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and her speech.

The multiple dimensions of political representation are concerned with the different aspects of how politicians represent society (United Nations Women, 2014). Hanna Pitkin (Dovi, 2018) has developed one of the most comprehensive discussions of the concept of political representation, where she argues that to understand the concept, one must consider different ways the term is used. Presenting different perspectives, interpretations, and understandings of how representation can be reached, Pitkin introduces four conceptual dimensions of representation (Dovi, 2018).

Hanna Pitkin's (Dovi, 2018) typology, also known as the concept of representation distinguishes between formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005; Campbell et al., 2009; Dovi, 2018; Celis et al., 2009; Akiyode-Afolabi, 2020). The typology provides a framework for understanding the various ways in which individuals or groups can be represented in political institutions. In addition, all four aim to address issues of underrepresentation, but differ in their focus and approach (Dovi, 2018).

Formal or formalistic representation, which has been touched upon through the justice and resources arguments, refers to the institutional regulations and processes by which representatives are selected (Campbell, et al., 2009; Akiyode-Afolabi, 2020; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005; Celis, et al., 2009). Examples of formal representation are the implementation of affirmative and positive action policies, such as quota systems or voluntary agreements, and measurable goals and targets in achieving equal gender representation in politics (Carpenter, 2008). Additionally, there are developed training programs for women's leadership, along with measures aimed at balancing family and work responsibilities for both women and men. Formal representation is concerned with the promotion of equal political representation through the establishment of national mechanisms and structures for the advancement of women, as well as national and international networks involving women politicians (United Nations Women, 2014).

Next, symbolic and descriptive representation both focus on representing certain groups within society by promoting perspectives, interests, and concerns of the particular group (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005). The distinction between them is that symbolic representation involves representing groups based on shared identities or characteristics, such as race, gender, ethnicity, or religion (Dovi, 2018; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005), while descriptive representation refers to the idea of representatives mirroring the demographic characteristics of the constituents they represent (Dovi, 2018). This means having a proportional number of women, ethnic minorities, or other groups in political office to accurately reflect the population's diversity (Campbell et al., 2009; Rosenblum, 1997; Arnesen & Peters, 2018).

In other words, symbolic representation focuses on the symbolic significance of having individuals from certain groups in positions of power, while descriptive representation emphasizes the importance of diversity in decision-making bodies to ensure that all voices are heard and considered (Dovi, 2018).

Scholars (Dovi, 2018; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005) have highlighted how descriptive representation strengthens the connection between representatives and their constituents, leading to greater trust and confidence in the political process. Additionally,

research (Campbell et al., 2009; Rosenblum, 1997; Arnesen & Peters, 2018) underscores the significance of representatives reflecting the diverse backgrounds and identities of the population they serve, ensuring that a broad range of perspectives and interests are represented in decision-making processes.

The fourth dimension of representation, substantive representation, refers to the active advocacy and pursuit of the interests, concerns, and needs of a particular group by their elected representatives (Diaz, 2005; Wängnerud, 2009; Weldon, 2002). Unlike descriptive representation, which focuses on the demographic characteristics of representatives mirroring those of their constituents, substantive representation emphasizes the actions and policies undertaken by representatives on behalf of their constituents (Dovi, 2018). Substantive representation is assumed to offer higher validity and effectivity than formal and descriptive forms and show a positive impact beyond numbers, fostering inclusive policies and empowering women from diverse backgrounds (Weldon, 2002).

The typology of representation has further been used for the conceptualization of representation in the theory of ideas (Held, 1997). Both the typology of representation and the theory of ideas were developed by Hanna Pitkin and are interconnected, but they serve different purposes. The typology provides a classification of different forms of representation, while the theory of ideas delves into the theoretical conceptualization of representation.

The theory of ideas, also known as the theory of representation, provides a framework for understanding how political actors communicate and express the interests and values of their constituents. The theory does not focus on who represents the constituents, but rather on what is represented. Consequently, in the politics of ideas, the identity of individuals representing a particular constituency is not relevant as long as they advocate effectively (Held, 1997; Arnesen & Peters, 2018; Campbell et al., 2009; Diaz, 2005).

In theory, ideas can be divorced from bodies, allowing men to represent policies addressing issues that affect women, such as gender equality, reproductive rights, childcare, and violence against women (Diaz, 2005; Wängnerud, 2009). However, empirical evidence indicates that ideas articulated by women and women's organizations have struggled to find a way into male-dominated legislatures. Men may theoretically represent women's diverse interests, but historical trends suggest they often fail to do so, particularly for oppressed and disadvantaged groups. Although a representative should not be seen as a substitute for those they represent, there is still an expectation that the representative advocates for certain principles or values important for the specific societal group he or she is a part of (Rosenblum, 1997).

Studies of systematically underrepresented groups emphasize that not just anyone can effectively represent all citizens (Diaz, 2005). As discussed in the conceptual framework, representatives from a certain group have a deeper understanding and knowledge of that specific group due to their unique viewpoint based on their position in society and collective experiences. Consequently, it is challenging for any individual to effectively represent those groups they are not a part of (Jožanc, 2011).

Recognizing the challenges inherent in expecting a homogeneous group to adequately represent the multidimensional diversity within society exposes the shortcomings of the theory of ideas. Additionally, marginalized voices demand not just effective representation of their interests in policies, but also representatives who belong to the groups they advocate for (Held, 1997; Dovi, 2018). This addresses the need for female representatives to make sure women's interests are represented and to empower women to advocate for themselves rather than being represented by others (Brechenmacher, 2018).

Arguments promoting increased women's representation in politics go beyond merely advocating for equal representation based on demographics. Instead, they highlight the importance of considering whether women representatives actively advocate and prioritize issues that are relevant to women's interests and concerns (Celis, et al., 2009). In essence, it questions whether having more women in positions of power leads to policies and decisions that better address the needs and rights of women (Sawer, et al., 2006).

Helga Stene (Haugsgjerd Allern & Narud, 2019) argues that women must bring new perspectives to the arena of politics for their representation to be meaningful. She argues women should add new perspectives and ideas that differ from those expressed by men if there is to be any purpose in getting more women involved in politics. In other words, if women have nothing new to offer, there is no need for them in the political landscape. But if they have new and original ideas, it is a societal need to get them involved (Haugsgjerd Allern & Narud, 2019).

In response to the limitation of the theory of ideas, Anne Phillips (Held, 1997) developed the theory of presence. The theory is meant to complement the theory of ideas by including the aspect of marginalized individuals in the complexity of political representation (Rosenblum, 1997). Anne Phillips (Held, 1997; Rosenblum, 1997; Dovi, 2018) focuses on the visibility of women in politics, underscoring how the presence of women in political institutions can lead to better representation of women's interests and perspectives. The theory emphasizes that the increased presence of women in politics will automatically lead to substantive changes, thereby

challenging existing gender structures, promoting equality, and ensuring that policies reflect the diverse needs of society (Held, 1997; Campbell et al., 2009).

A study (Arnesen & Peters, 2018) from Norway revealed a positive example of how the increased presence of women in political institutions led to advocating for women's interests. A higher number of female presence led to improved childcare provisions and policies addressing violence against women, gender equality, women's education, and other policies concerning women. Arnesen & Peters (2018) demonstrate how proportional gender representation positively influences policymaking, emphasizing the significance of diverse representation in addressing the varied needs in a society. This is a perfect example of the theory of presence, confirming the expectation that increasing the number of female representatives will lead to increasing substantive representation and empowering disadvantaged groups (Campbell et al., 2009).

It is noteworthy that not all examples are as straightforward as the one above, and that challenges are met on the way from descriptive to substantive representation. The presumption that women representatives who desire to advocate for women can do so straightforwardly, oversimplifies the complex reality of the contexts in which women representatives operate (Campbell et al., 2009). Additionally, even after establishing women representatives' stances on the substantive representation of women, assertions that actions in advocating for women will inherently reshape politics are uncertain (Diaz, 2005).

Phillips (Held, 1997; Rosenblum, 1997), in the theory of presence, demonstrates that even if electing more women resulted in policy changes, it remains essential to acknowledge the past exclusions of women from the political sphere and publicly recognize the equal worth of all individuals. The argument posits that for the system to be genuinely fair and representative of diversity, it is crucial to incorporate and acknowledge differences (Diaz, 2005). The aim is to reflect inclusive values and responsibility in society to deconstruct existing inequalities and power structures (Carpenter, 2008).

Feminist groups face challenges in transforming the male-dominated political arena to be gender aware, making it hard to advocate for women's issues (Brechenmacher, 2018). The established environment dominated by masculine norms and values typically prioritizes qualities such as rationality, autonomy, and power, which align with traditional gender stereotypes assigned to men. As a result, women often feel pressured to demonstrate their ability to compete on equal footing with male politicians, while also emphasizing their potential to bring about meaningful change if elected. This dual challenge highlights the need for women in politics to

navigate existing gender dynamics while striving to assert their own identities and agendas within these male-dominated spaces (Ackerly, et al., 2006).

Additionally, societal expectations often pressure women in politics to adopt a leadership style that is less confrontational and more in line with traditional gender roles (Sawer, et al., 2006). The feminine leadership style aligned with traditional gender stereotypes is characterized by traits such as being democratic, emotional, soft, and interactive, in contrast to the more direct, task-oriented, and authoritative style typically associated with masculinity. As a result, women may feel forced to navigate a balance between demonstrating confidence and authority while also satisfying the expectations of showing warmth and empathy in their leadership approach (Pološki Vokić & Bulat, 2013; Sawer, et al., 2006).

The challenges presented demonstrate how deeply rooted gender structures contribute to the ongoing underrepresentation of women in politics despite the advancements in political representation. Even when women are given opportunities to represent and advocate for gender-related issues, existing structures often hinder their efforts. To be able to make changes, gender stereotypes need to be challenged and a broader understanding of the complexity of political representation needs to be attained (Wängnerud, 2009).

Anne Phillips' theory of presence posits that the mere presence of women in positions of power can challenge existing gender norms and promote gender equality. Therefore, examining Grabar-Kitarović's representation through traditional gender stereotypes allows to analyze how social norms and expectations shape perceptions of female leadership. It highlights the challenges faced by women in positions of power as they negotiate between challenging gender norms and conforming to societal expectations. Ultimately, this exploration sheds light on the complex dynamics of gender representation and leadership in politics. Additionally, applying a feminist perspective to the complex understanding of gender and representation guides the research toward a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the phenomena (Ackerly & True, 2008).

Having established the theoretical underpinnings of gender and representation in Croatian politics, the study now shifts its focus towards the methodological approach employed to investigate these dynamics. Building upon the concept of gender, representation, and gender stereotypes and the theory of presence, the methodology chapter outlines the approaches, methods, and analytical frameworks used to explore the relationship between Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's representation and traditional gender stereotypes. This chapter serves as a

bridge between theory and practice, demonstrating how the conceptual framework is translated into empirical research.

3. Methodology

Methodology refers to the intellectual framework shaped through the interplay between epistemological assumptions, ontological perspectives, ethical considerations, and methodological decisions (Ackerly et al., 2006). Epistemology refers to the understanding of knowledge, ontology to the understanding of the world, and ethical and methodological decisions are based on choices made throughout the research (Ackerly et al., 2006). The methodology involves the overall approach to studying the speech, including the methods used in the analysis.

In this chapter, I outline the methodological decisions, which encompass specific choices made in conducting the research, including the selection of research methods, data collection, analytical framework, and strategies for analyzing data analysis. These methods are presented to offer insight into how gender and representation are conceptualized, studied, and analyzed within the context of the speech, media reactions, and theoretical framework (Ackerly et al., 2006; Bryman, 2016).

Firstly I explain choosing women as the focus of the paper and discuss the feminist perspective that guides the research. Following this, I elaborate on the case study and justify the selection of the case and sources used for the data analysis. The third section of the methodology chapter outlines the approach to the data analysis. Lastly, I address biases, ethical considerations, and the validity of the study.

The reason for focusing on women is twofold. Firstly, on a personal level, I aim to contribute to feminist research in Croatia and shed light on the issue of gender stereotypes that affect all levels of society. Moreover, women serve as a prominent and easily identifiable group often perceived to share certain common "women's interests." Additionally, despite notable improvements in recent years, women continue to be underrepresented in most countries according to various definitions and measures (Gjermeni, 2021; Conway, 2001).

Applying a feminist perspective to the traditional social science framework guides my analysis by questioning how gender structures influence perspectives about women in politics. Applying a feminist perspective to the case of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's representation makes it possible to explore the gendered structures and traditional assumptions by observing how these perceptions shape the political arena (Sawer, et al., 2006; Jožanc, 2011; Ackerly & True, 2008).

The analysis connects the conceptual and theoretical framework with the case, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing gender structures in gender and representation in the political arena (Lascuarín Fernández & Villafuerte Valdés, 2016).

A feminist perspective enriches and deepens the understanding of the phenomena of gender and representation and strengthens the research. With feminist perspectives as a guide to the research, it is possible to delve into questions surrounding socially constructed gender hierarchies and generate knowledge based on women's experiences providing a deeper understanding of socially constructed realities (Ackerly et al., 2006; Tickner 2005; March et al., 1999). Thereby, generating knowledge based on Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's experience.

To integrate gender perspectives into research, gender analysis is employed. Unique to the feminist perspective on gender analysis is a dedication to feminist research and the generation of knowledge from women's experiences, highlighting the relationship between men and women which is believed to have broader transformative implications for existing knowledge structures (Tickner 2005; March et. al., 1999). An underlying premise of feminist research is the significance attributed to women's experiences, which feminist researchers use as resources for hypotheses and for formulating new research (Tickner 2005; Ackerly et al., 2006).

Gender analysis stems from feminist skepticism and criticism toward universal knowledge claims, predominantly based on men's experiences and traditional male dichotomies, aiming to transform existing frameworks and the knowledge they generate (Leaković, 2016; Lascuarín Fernández & Villafuerte Valdés, 2016; Ackerly et al., 2006).

Gender analysis identifies gender differences and inequalities (Tickner 2005; Ackerly & True, 2008; Ackerly et al., 2006), which is done in the research by examining how gender stereotypes manifest in the representation of political communication, through the case study of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. By analyzing Grabar-Kitarović's pre-electoral speech and the media responses to it, the study explores how traditional gender stereotypes influence perceptions of women's roles in politics. This analysis allows for the identification of stereotypes, the expectations stereotypical beliefs place on women, and the challenges women face in political participation. Gender analysis helps uncover systemic barriers that contribute to women's underrepresentation in politics and highlights areas where gender equality initiatives may be needed to address these inequalities.

I have chosen a deductive approach, aiming to connect the theory of presence with the analysis of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's speech (Ackerly & True, 2008; Tickner, 2005). Given the broad scope of the gender and representation phenomena, the deductive approach helped me

narrow the study's focus and delineate the specific aspects to be examined. Using a deductive approach provides clarity and precision, building on existing knowledge to refine understanding and offer new perspectives on complex phenomena (Bryman, 2016).

I aim to elucidate the prevailing gender structures through an analysis of Grabar Kitarović's speech. These structures, rooted in traditional gender normative beliefs, are examined within the context of gender and representation, guided by the theory of presence (Tickner 2005; March et al., 1999). To gain a deeper understanding of socially constructed realities and address the research questions, I employ a qualitative research design to the case study of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and political communication. In this approach, data collection prioritizes capturing meaning and understanding. Utilizing a qualitative case study offers a broader perspective by integrating everyday practices with academic disciplines (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gerring, 2004).

3.1. Case Study and Data Selection

A case study involves a detailed exploration of a specific case, involving an in-depth analysis (Bryman, 2016; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gerring, 2004). In this study, the main focus is on Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović as the primary unit of the case, while the video of the pre-electoral speech (HDZ, 2019), along with the transcript and the media's responses to it, serve as sources to gain insight into gender and representation in politics in Croatia. Analysing Grabar-Kitarović's representation allows for an examination of the relationship between gender stereotypes and political representation, shedding light on how gender stereotypes are perpetuated through her communication.

What distinguishes a case study from other research designs, is the focus on the unique features of a particular case (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gerring, 2004). After considering a wide range of cases, I ultimately selected Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović as my focus due to her significant impact during her tenure, alignment with the target group of interest, and potential to offer valuable insights into gender and representation, given her role as a president. Being the first female president of Croatia, Grabar-Kitarović stands out as a prominent example of a female representative in politics in Croatia. Her appearance, communication style, and advocacy contribute to understanding how she, as a woman, represents women in the political arena and examine how her political communication demonstrates gender stereotypical traits.

Additionally, during her mandate Grabar-Kitarović gathered considerable media coverage, elevating her to a prominent position within the political sphere. The amplification of media influence becomes even more pronounced, given its significant role in shaping public opinion both directly and indirectly (Tomić-Koludrović & Petrić, 2004). This further underscores her importance as a public figure and her symbolic impact.

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's pre-election speech was held on December 15, 2019, before her supporters in a sports hall in Osijek, Croatia. Osijek is the fourth-largest city in Croatia and is located in the East of the country. Throughout the Croatian War from 1991 to 1995, the city experienced significant damage profoundly impacting the city to this day. Today, Osijek is the largest city in East Croatia and stands as the economic center for the region. The choice to hold a pre-electoral speech in Osijek may be strategic, aiming to connect with the people of this region known for its patriotism and resilience (Osijek, s.a.).

This speech stands out as a significant moment in Grabar Kitarović's political journey, marking the end of her presidency and serving as a part of Grabar Kitarović's presidential re-election campaign, during the last month of her five-year presidential mandate. Notably different from others given by Grabar-Kitarović during her mandate and campaign, this speech stands out. Its uniqueness is a key factor in selecting it for analysis, as it differs in several aspects, including the president's manner of speaking, the content of her words, and her body language.

The samples or sources include Grabar-Kitarović's pre-electoral speech and the immediate media responses to it. All sources stem from December 2019, specifically between the 15th and 19th of December. The speech lasted 30 minutes and served as the concluding segment in the two-hour-long rally in Osijek, which was broadcast live on the YouTube channel of the political party to which Grabar Kitarović belongs.

The only documentation of the speech is found on the YouTube channel of the conservative Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica (HDZ)) where the whole rally is available in video format (HDZ, 2019). After thorough research, the absence of an available transcript led me to personally transcribe the speech.

Both the speech and media responses originate from Croatia and are written and spoken in Croatian, meaning the continuous translation of the sources is a fundamental aspect of the research process. Given my Croatian heritage, upbringing, and educational background within Croatia, I possess fluency in the language and consider myself culturally competent to understand references and rhetorics in the speech to be able to analyze a deeper understanding.

The media sources analyzed are from the three most-read news portals in Croatia 24sat, Index.hr, and Dnevnik.hr (Peruško, 2023). Media reactions analyzed are from December 15th to December 19th. Two of the responses are from the same speech that was given on December 15th, seven from the day after on December 16th, and one from December 17th and 19th .

When searching for the media's responses to the speech, I searched for relevant articles on all three platforms. However, all three lack comprehensive browsing features, making it harder to collect relevant data. The only option to search for articles is through keywords, which limits the possibility of finding all relevant articles. The keywords I used include "Kolinda", "Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović", "Kolinda Osijek", "Predizborni skup 2019", "Kolinda predizborni skup", "za hrvatsku". Additionally, I searched for keywords related to her speech, such as "Lukica", "8000 tisuća eura", "Osijek nikada neće biti Oček", "Ivan Antunovic i Kolinda". In addition to searching for keywords, I scrolled through the history to identify relevant sources based on the publishing date.

In total, I found eleven articles related to Grabar-Kitarović and her pre-electoral speech from December 15th, 2019. Six on Dnevnik.hr, three on 24sata, and two on Index.hr. Five of the articles provide commentary and explanation of the speech content and actions, whereas six articles provide context and meaning to the statements and Grabar Kitarović's performance.

Next, I provide a brief background of the media outlets used in the study to provide a context and understanding of the type of media used.

Firstly, 24 sata.hr (s.a.) is an online news media outlet in Croatia that provides coverage of various topics including news, sports, entertainment, lifestyle, and more. It can be classified as a tabloid newspaper due to its emphasis on gossip, and entertainment news. While it covers current events and news, it presents them more interestingly compared to traditional newsrooms. However, it also provides coverage of serious news topics and events, so it is not strictly a tabloid in the traditional sense. Known for its digital platform, 24sata often offers concise and accessible news articles, reaching out to a broad audience (24sata, s.a.).

Index.hr (s.a.), similar to 24sata, is recognized for its comprehensive coverage of various topics, ranging from politics and current affairs to entertainment and lifestyle. Moreover, it frequently publishes articles from well-known journalists, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives on important issues (Index.hr, s.a.).

Lastly, Dnevnik.hr (s.a.) is an online news portal that primarily focuses on providing news coverage of current events, both domestic and international. Offering a wide range of news categories, Dnevnik.hr is one of the leading news platforms in Croatia, aiming to deliver timely

information to its readers. Dnevnik.hr serves as a comprehensive source of news and information for individuals seeking to stay informed about developments in Croatia and globally (Dnevnik.hr, s.a.).

The media has a pivotal role in shaping public perception through the way it presents reality. The way the media covers events can influence public opinion, reinforcing existing beliefs and biases by offering its analysis and explanation of the situation (Lubina & Brkić Klimpak, 2014; Đulabić, 2020). With their wide reach and influence, these three media outlets play a significant role in shaping public opinion in Croatia, making them important sources when analyzing how they relate to gender stereotypes in the context of gender and representation.

Now I provide a discussion on the Dnevnik.hr, Index.hr, and 24sata.hr and their influence on readers' perceptions of power. According to research, online media stands out as the primary source of news in Croatia (Grbeša & Volarević, 2021), emphasizing the significance of Dnevnik.hr, Index.hr, and 24sata.hr in shaping public opinion, influencing political narratives, and reflecting societal norms and values, playing a significant role in the media landscape of Croatia.

In contemporary political communication, digital media platforms hold a significant role, particularly in shaping public opinion and distributing information, especially among younger audiences who increasingly rely on digital sources for news and updates. These platforms offer a more accessible and convenient way for individuals to engage with political content, often reaching audiences that traditional media outlets may not effectively reach (Serapşah & Sevgihan, 2023; Grbeša & Volarević, 2021).

However, alongside their benefits, there are also drawbacks associated with online news consumption. Studies have revealed that people frequently end up in a bubble where algorithms only show them information that matches what they already believe. This can create a space where people only hear opinions that agree with theirs, which limits the range of ideas and makes it harder to have meaningful discussions (Serapşah & Sevgihan, 2023).

24sata and Index.hr face criticism for prioritizing catchy headlines, celebrity gossip, and entertainment over in-depth political reporting (Ivanuš, 2020). This leads to broader misinformation, which poses a significant challenge in the digital media landscape. With the rapid spread of false or misleading content online, it can easily shape public opinion and distort the narrative on critical political matters. Thus, addressing this problem is essential for nurturing an informed public and upholding the integrity of the public discourse in the digital era (Grbeša & Volarević, 2021).

The media landscape is used to promote political communication and contributes to the public political discourse (Serapşah & Sevgihan, 2023). Through this discussion, it is possible to draw connections to how Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović serves as a valuable source for understanding how female politicians are portrayed and perceived in Croatian society through news media. Firstly, Grabar-Kitarović's coverage on these platforms had a significant impact on public perceptions of female politicians, given her publicity and popularity. Additionally, the prioritization of catchy headlines and entertainment may have contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypes. Therefore, by analyzing the portrayal of Grabar-Kitarović in news portals, it is possible to gain insight into how gender stereotypes influence the perception of female political leaders and contribute to challenges in achieving gender parity in Croatian politics.

I will now explain the details of how the data from the speech and media responses were analyzed and systemized through thematic analysis, aligning with the theory to provide an answer to the research question.

3.2. Data Analysis

Data analysis involves a systematic process of reviewing, cleansing, transforming, and interpreting data to extract useful information and draw conclusions based on the findings (Bryman, 2016). This process can take various forms, and for this study, codes are generated using thematic analysis.

Having a deductive approach to the speech involves identifying codes and patterns allowing for an interpretation rooted in the theoretical framework (Bryman, 2016). Given that my topic is gender and representation, where substantive and descriptive representation is being researched, I looked for codes in the text that correspond with these dimensions of representation, later dividing them into themes related to gender stereotypical traits.

To begin with, I wrote a transcript of the speech for better clarity and accuracy during the coding process (the transcript of the speech is not added as an appendix since it is in Croatia, under the assumption that I am the only one who speaks the language). The transcript, as a written record of the spoken words, enabled detailed examination and a better overview of the structure, themes, and content of the speech. Writing the transcript made it possible to read through the speech repeatedly, get an overview of the data, write a summary, and make copies for the coding process. Having the speech in writing made it easier to connect it to the media's responses as well.

I made several copies of the transcript for easier access to data. By having copies of the transcript, it becomes easier to generate codes and refine them continuously. I made several attempts at coding before I managed to generate codes relevant to the study. Additionally, I used the same codes and themes both in the interpretation of the speech and the media's reaction to facilitate concluding the data analysis and maintain focus on the paper's topic.

First, I divided the speech into descriptive and substantive codes of representation. The descriptive codes are further split into themes fitting characteristics, experiences, and outward appearances, while substantive representation is into interests, wishes, concerns, opinions, and actions. These themes are further used to identify traditional gender stereotypical traits, categorized by male and female characteristics. Lastly, the themes were reviewed and redefined to give a better summary of the findings (Smith, 2017; Jason & Glenwick, 2015).

The systematic approach to data through thematic analysis focuses on generating descriptive data, placing minimal emphasis on numerical quantification (Jason & Glenwick, 2015; Bryman, 2016). Thematic analysis is used to understand experiences, thoughts, and behaviors (Jason & Glenwick, 2015) by identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data. By doing this it offers a systematic and flexible approach trying to provide an understanding of the relations and complexity of the topic.

Initially, I attempted to offer a segmented analysis, delineating between descriptive and substantive themes. However, while analyzing, it became evident that these themes are intricately intertwined. The interconnectedness underscores the idea that various forms of representation are inherently linked and cannot be easily separated (Dovi, 2018).

This approach is used in the research of Grabar-Kitarović to simplify the complexity of qualitative data and identify key themes to help in answering the research question. Additionally, the interpretation of the data focuses on the relationships between the identified themes, exploring how they interact and contribute to the understanding of political communication and gender stereotypes.

After presenting the research method, data collection, analytical techniques, and the strategy for data analysis, I reflect on the study. Here, I elaborate on my connection to Croatia and my prior knowledge of the speech. I also reflect on biases, ethical considerations, and the weaknesses of the research.

3.3. Reflecting on the Study

My reason for choosing a topic of gender and representation through a feminist perspective is to support feminism in Croatia, which I perceive as undervalued and misunderstood. Moreover, no previous research or analysis of the speech has been found. Therefore, I aim to offer new insights into the realm of gender and politics in Croatia by shedding light on the gender aspect.

My connection to Croatia can be viewed as both positive and negative when conducting research. Dunn and Neumann (2016) note that cultural competence is essential to understanding society and hidden meanings. However, overly focusing on cultural competence can sometimes obscure specific societal structures. In other words, while cultural sensitivity is crucial for grasping diverse perspectives, it should not overshadow the recognition of broader societal dynamics and power structures.

The feminist perspective on cultural competence and personal experiences within the researched society underscores the importance of recognizing biases and using the awareness of biases as a strength when conducting research. Additionally, feminist research points out how the research can never be fully neutral (Ackerly & True, 2008). The idea is to acknowledge and be aware of biases and use them to contribute to the research (Tickner 2005; Ackerly et al., 2006).

The choice of sources emerged due to my prior knowledge of this specific speech. The mockery and negative remarks surrounding both Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and the speech caught my attention. Following extensive research, I concluded that this speech would serve as a fitting source for the analysis central to my study.

From the beginning of the research, I had a negative connotation and expectations toward the study and Grabar-Kitarović. These are not only shaped by the prior knowledge about her as a political figure but also by broader societal attitudes towards feminism and gender in Croatia.

These negative expectations and societal attitudes formed the basis for my research question and shaped the research design. Acknowledging these biases is essential, as they potentially skew interpretations and conclusions drawn from the analysis. Additionally, they impacted my choice of the case study and may have left me blind to other, potentially better sources of analysis.

Without prior knowledge of the topic or the speech, the course of the research might have gone in a different direction, leading to the exploration of different aspects within the same subject matter.

As a researcher, I have ethical responsibilities toward the study participants, other scientists, text authors, the general public, and the environment. It is crucial to uphold academic

integrity by citing and acknowledging the work of text authors, avoiding plagiarism, and contributing to the advancement of knowledge through honest and transparent research practices. While the ethical responsibility I have as a researcher towards the general public, is to publish the findings in an accessible and understandable manner, ensuring that the information shared is based on personal findings, interpretation, and analysis (Bryman, 2016).

I also bear ethical responsibilities towards the environment, including minimizing my ecological footprint by reducing waste, conserving resources, and adopting sustainable research practices wherever possible (Bryman, 2016).

By accurately presenting the findings of the research and ensuring that the study is reliable I aim towards internal validity. Internal validity is achieved through accuracy in data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2016). Accuracy in data collection is achieved by using a systematic approach to identify categories, codes, and themes. Additionally, addressing potential biases and limitations in the research is essential for strengthening internal validity.

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the quality of the conducted research. It is an essential aspect to ensuring validity and reliability of a study, encompassing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings. Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is crucial due to the subjective interpretation and analysis (Bryman, 2016).

The trustworthiness of this study is compromised for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the uniqueness of the sources makes it challenging to apply or generalize the findings to other studies referencing Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović or political communication. Secondly, biases or preconceived beliefs may have impacted the data collection and analysis, thus compromising the confirmability of the study. On the other hand, by demonstrating transparency in the research process, the study's dependability and credibility can be strengthened. Being transparent about the process enables others to replicate the steps of the study, thus enhancing credibility.

In the subsequent section, the limitations and weaknesses of the research design are addressed. I reflect on the amount of data analyzed, the challenge of connecting the theoretical framework to the case study, and the challenge of connecting the theoretical framework to the case study.

3.3.1. Limitations

In this section, I address the limitations of the study to underscore transparency in the research process. By doing so, I aim to demonstrate my awareness of the constraints inherent in the research design, data collection, and analysis. Moreover, I provide context to explain why I

chose the particular topic and sources, thereby aiding the reader's comprehension of the rationale behind specific choices and decisions made throughout the study.

One of the primary limitations of this study lies in the scarcity of data for analysis. Examining only the speech and its immediate reactions, the dataset lacks the breadth and depth necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This shortage of data restricts the richness and detail of the explanations that can be derived from the analysis, constraining the study's scope and depth. For providing qualitative, rich, and detailed analysis I could have added more content, like for example opinion pieces or social media comments. Alternatively, I could have a comparative analysis, comparing this speech to another from a different period, considering that this speech is noticeably different from any other speeches delivered by Grabar-Kitarović.

Another weakness of the research is its tendency to focus only on aspects that confirm gender stereotypes. This narrow approach overlooks opportunities for meaningful discussion. Rather than engaging in an examination where I explore all different aspects, the analysis becomes a superficial exercise in attributing various traits to Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović without delving into deeper analysis. The biases previously explained underlie this weakness.

This weakness could have been avoided by adopting a more comprehensive approach to the analysis. Rather than only focusing on aspects that confirm gender stereotypes, the research could have incorporated a broader range of perspectives and considerations. Engaging in a more thorough examination of various aspects, including those that challenge or diverge from gender stereotypes, would have enriched the analysis and facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, being mindful of the biases outlined earlier and actively working to mitigate their influence could have helped prevent the analysis from becoming overly superficial and limited.

Lastly, the challenges of adopting a deductive approach are discussed.

The selection of theory before the case study has limited the research scope and possibility of testing the theory more in-depth. An alternative case study could have been chosen to better test the theory of presence. For instance, employing a quantitative approach to assess changes in legislatures concerning women's representation, such as an examination of the proportion of women representatives over time, would have been more in line with the theory of presence. Also, it would provide an exploration of how changes for women's representation in politics develop in post-socialist society.

Moreover, an inductive approach to the analysis, where theory emerges from the findings, could have been more beneficial. Initially choosing a deductive analysis, which applies existing theory to the data, may have constrained the exploration of gender and representation phenomena.

These weaknesses underscore the importance of methodological flexibility and critical reflection in research design, emphasizing the need to adapt approaches to suit the specific research context and objectives.

The next chapter outlines the analysis of the thesis. It starts with the historical context of gender and representation in Croatia, transitioning to Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović as the subject of the case and the central figure of female representatives in Croatian politics in new history.

After the presentation of Grabar-Kitarović, I move over to the analysis of the speech, and the media's responses to the speech are presented. They are guided by the feminist perspective and the theoretical framework of the theory of presence. Lastly, an answer to the research question is provided based on the findings.

4. Analysing Gender and Political Representation in Croatia

In the countries of former Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Croatia), there was a sudden growth in the economic development of the country between 1952 and 1965. This led to the opening of new jobs, schools, and colleges for women's advancement, resulting in a significant increase in women's participation in political activities, illustrated by the number of women in parliament being as high as 24,1% in 1963 (Leinert Novosel, 1994).

However, as economic growth stalled in 1965, the traditional understanding of women was reestablished. Women were prohibited from political involvement and relegated to familial duties segregating men and women based on gender normative beliefs (Podnar, 2017; Sawyer, 2000). This regression led to a drastic decline in the number of women in the parliament dropping to 7,9% in 1969, marking the the lowest participation of women in politics in the former political system (Leinert Novosel, 1994). Yugoslavia had an average of 20% women representatives in the parliament from 1974 until the end of Yugoslavia and the socialist system in the 1990s (Leinert Novosel, 1994; Glogoški, 2022). After its independence, Croatia strived to reach this percentage for a significant time.

The replacement of a socialist system with a new, multi-party democratic system represented a setback for women in Croatia (Šinko, 2016; Leaković, 2016). The transition was accompanied by familiar phenomena such as job loss, insecurity, conflict over the new distribution of resources, the growing influence of the Catholic Church, and devastating consequences resulting from war (Krook & True, 2012; Leinert Novosel, 2009). Consequently, women's position deteriorated as these phenomena reinforced traditional gender stereotypes (Glogoški, 2022; Leinert Novosel, 1998). In 1993, with only 4,6% (Glogoški, 2022) of female members of parliament, Croatia found itself in a similar situation to Argentina, Botswana, Ivory Coast, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkmenistan (Leinert Novosel, 1994).

Globally, the beginning of the 1990s was a turning point where gender equality and the issue of women's parliamentary representation gained significant international and national attention. However, in Croatia, the new political system brought about a shift in values, causing the focus on women's issues and gender equality to retreat to the private sphere (Leinert Novosel, 1994). Patriarchal mentality and gender-normative beliefs significantly contributed to women's regression in the political sphere. Women were restricted to domestic duties, with society presuming household chores to be the primary women's responsibility. These cultural beliefs hindered the growth of feminist movements and organizations, limiting opportunities for women's voices to be heard and advocate for change. Traditional gender stereotypes portraying women as caregivers and homemakers perpetuated the notion that they lack the authority and competence required for active participation in politics. Additionally, a culture that prioritized the achievements of male politicians further marginalized women in the political landscape. This bias extended to favoring traditionally male-dominated professions, thereby elevating their status and reinforcing gender inequalities in political representation (Leinert Novosel, 1994; Leinert Novosel, 2011).

Consequently, the 1990s were characterized by a single-digit percentage of female representatives in the parliament, while the complete freedom of choice left women almost outside the realm of politics, resulting in a significantly lower number of representatives than during socialism (Glogoški, 2022; Šinko, 2016). However, a new turn followed in 2000 when women achieved the best result, reaching 21,9% which was not surpassed until 2013 (Glogoški, 2022; Podnar, 2017). Research (Šinko, 2016) suggests that the year 2000 marked a turning point, representing the end or at least temporary suppression of negative conditions stemming from various factors, including patriarchal norms, gender biases, and political structures such as the electoral and party systems. Left-leaning and progressive political parties emerged as influential

advocates for gender equality during this period, and there was a notable collaboration between these parties and activists from the women's movement, indicating a heightened commitment to advancing women's representation in politics (Šinko, 2016).

In 2003, Croatia passed the Gender Equality Act, which mandates a minimum representation of 40% for the underrepresented gender (women in Croatia) (Glogoški, 2022; European Parliament, 2017). Nevertheless, as reported by the Croatian Parliament in March 2024, this target has yet not been achieved (Hrvatski Sabor, 2024). Based on statistics, between 2007 and 2020 the number of female representatives in the Croatian parliament varied from 20% to 25% with a slight decrease in 2020 to 19% female representatives (Hrvatski Sabor, 2007; Hrvatski Sabor, 2011; Hrvatski Sabor, 2015; Hrvatski Sabor, 2016; Hrvatski Sabor, 2020).

Although there have been notable advancements in the number of female representatives in politics in Croatia, as of today women are still underrepresented in the political arena (Podnar, 2017). The historical aspect outlined demonstrates how women have systematically been undervalued in society, both in the private and public spheres (Šinko, 2016). Despite legislative efforts to promote gender equality, and increase the importance of equal involvement of gender in all aspects of life and society, women continue to face systematic barriers to political participation (Šinko, 2016).

Leinert Novosel's (2011) study from 1997 and 2009 highlights that the broader issue regarding underrepresentation in politics lies in the persistently low level of female engagement in political activities (Leinert Novosel, 2011), thus, raising questions about why women do not engage in politics.

The low level of engagement of women in politics in Croatia has been attributed to various factors, including family obligations, prejudices regarding women's role in politics, and the heavy workload associated with political engagement. Moreover, societal norms and opposition from men further hinder women's involvement in politics, creating barriers to their participation and representation in decision-making processes (Leinert Novosel, 2011; Đulabić, 2020).

Furthermore, there has been a lack of equal opportunities and resources for women who want to participate in politics. Access to political networks, financial resources, and support from political parties has often been unavailable or limited for women compared to men. These circumstances have posed greater challenges for women to establish themselves and progress in their political careers (Gjermeni, 2021).

Additionally, societal attitudes, cultural norms, and gender roles in Croatia have never been favorable to women and there is a stigma associated with feminism, which makes it harder to acknowledge and promote women's issues and concerns (Šinko, 2016). Even within the educational system, which should equally encourage girls and boys to pursue careers in various fields, there is a lack of motivation to guide girls toward political involvement (Leinert Novosel, 2011).

The mentioned factors all emerge from the long-standing patriarchal structures embedded within the society, where prejudices, gender-normative beliefs, and societal norms continue to discourage women to involve in politics in Croatia (Leinert Novosel, 2011), putting even more pressure on those few that decide to run for election and stand as leaders (Šinko, 2016).

Exploring the historical, political, and socio-cultural background of women in Croatian politics aims to contextualize the environment surrounding Grabar-Kitarović and the speech. The historical outline highlights the complex interplay between political and cultural factors in shaping women's political representation in Croatia, while the socio-political factors provide an understanding of the challenges women face to enter the political sphere today.

Hence, in the context of a patriarchal country, the introduction of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović serves as a symbol of progress towards gender equality in Croatia. Having a female president is a major step in challenging the patriarchal structures and traditional gender stereotypes embedded in society.

Next, I present Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. In the study, she is the subject connecting gender with representation in Croatia. Her appearance, the descriptive aspect of representation, and her substantive representation are analyzed through the traditional gender stereotypical traits that divide women from men.

The analysis establishes connections between traditional gender stereotypes, the theory of presence, and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's political communication. It aims to offer an understanding of the connection between the phenomenon to find out how political communication reproduces stereotypes on gender and political representation in Croatia.

4.1. The Female Representative

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, representing the conservative Croatian Democratic Union, achieved a historic milestone by becoming Croatia's first female president in 2015 (Predsjednik, s.a.; Grbeša et al., 2024; Peović, 2020). Before assuming the presidency, she had a distinguished

international career serving as a Counselor at the Croatian Embassy in Canada and later as Croatia's Ambassador to the United States of America. In NATO she was appointed as the first female Assistant Secretary-General, holding the highest-ranking woman position (Predsjednik, s.a.; Grbeša et al., 2024).

During Grabar-Kitarović's time in office, she was a highly visible and active president. Grabar-Kitarović focused on being a strong leader rather than emphasizing her femininity. She emphasized the characteristics of a strong leader by focusing on effectively guiding the country through national security, diplomatic engagement, economic development, and international recognition. Additionally, her leadership style was characterized by assertiveness, decisiveness, and a focus on action. She aimed to avoid emphasizing stereotypical female qualities and announced that focusing too much on feminine attributes could make her seem less serious as a political leader (Peović, 2020).

Despite Grabar-Kitarović's attempt to downplay her female characteristics and integrate into the masculine world, the media and public portrayed her through traditional gender stereotypes. When she announced her presidential candidacy, most of the media attention focused on her appearance and questioning her abilities, highlighting instances of sexism in media coverage and criticism from male opponents who resorted to name-calling and objectification. Media outlets often adopted a tabloid-like reporting style, prioritizing coverage of her interactions with celebrities and her choice of attire over presidential activities (Grbeša et al., 2024).

Moreover, she was frequently referred to simply as "Kolinda" as opposed to male politicians referred to by their title or last name. This form of referring, known as "patronizing familiarization" is used to undermine the authority of individuals who are not perceived as equals (Grbeša et al., 2024).

Grabar-Kitarović strategically employed the reference "Kolinda" as part of her campaign strategy (displayed on the screen behind her onstage). This deliberate choice to refer to herself by her first name reflects an attempt to establish a personal connection with the audience and convey a sense of approachability and familiarity. By opting for this informal address, Grabar-Kitarović sought to position herself as relatable and accessible, aiming to resonate with voters on a more personal level. This approach aligns with contemporary political communication strategies that prioritize creating a sense of intimacy and rapport with the electorate, ultimately contributing to her overall campaign messaging and branding.

With this introduction to Croatia's first female president and her relevance to the analysis, it is crucial to delve into the specifics of her representation. Therefore, transitioning from the broader context of her presidency, I now provide a detailed analysis of the speech delivered by Grabar-Kitarović in December 2019 in Osijek.

Subsequently, I conducted a thematic analysis of the speech, divided into two parts. The first is the analysis of the speech and the second is the analysis of the media's immediate reaction to the speech. Both segments are guided by the concepts of gender, representation, and gender stereotypes, drawing from the theory of presence.

In attempting to link Grabar-Kitarović's representation of women to traditional gender stereotypes, I illustrate the correlation between her portrayal as a female political leader and societal expectations rooted in traditional gender roles.

Moving forward, I analyze Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's communication by exploring themes delineated by her language, chosen topics, and her body language. Additionally, I seek to comprehend the relationships and implications within existing gender structures to discern the reproduction of gender stereotypes through political communication.

4.2. Women and Political Communication: Representing Gender

Having established the context of Grabar-Kitarović's pre-election speech, it is essential to delve further into its understanding and establish a connection to traditional gender stereotypes. Anne Phillips (Held, 1997) theory of presence forms the foundation of this analysis, aiming to shed light on how gender norms integrated in Croatia's post-socialist, patriarchal society influence its political landscape.

As previously defined, descriptive representation pertains to the concept where the chosen representative is supposed to share common characteristics, experiences, and outward appearances with the people they represent. Essentially, the representative mirrors some of the prevalent traits and attributes of the group, enabling them to better understand and advocate for the interests, needs, and perspectives of the population. It is argued that mere representation without action is insufficient. In essence, descriptive representation entails a deeper connection between the representatives' decisions and the wishes of those they represent, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of the people are effectively expressed and acted upon in the political sphere (Held, 1997; Rosenblum, 1997).

In the analysis, I establish a connection between Anne Phillips's theory of presence and the sources. The theory emphasizes the importance of having diverse representation in political spaces to mirror the interests and experiences of various social groups. While typically applies across a broader range of individuals, it can also be used to analyze the representation of a single person, such as Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. In this context, the focus shifts from assessing the diversity across multiple individuals to examining how the actions and traits of a single representative contribute to wider discussions of gender and representation.

Applying Anne Phillips's theory of presence to Grabar-Kitarović involves evaluating how her presence as a female political leader impacts perceptions of gender and representation in Croatian politics. By analyzing Grabar-Kitarović's pre-electoral speech through this theoretical lens, I explore how her presence in the political realm, as a woman in politics, perpetuates gender stereotypes in Croatian society.

To organize the analysis, the speech has been categorized into groups of descriptive and substantive representation codes. The descriptive codes encompass themes related to Grabar-Kitarović's characteristics, experiences, and external appearance, while substantive codes correspond to themes related to her interests, opinions, and concerns. Additionally, these themes are examined through the lens of traditional gender stereotypes.

Firstly, I delve into the themes associated with Grabar-Kitarović's language and body language. Then, I transition to examine themes related to women and those associated with her leadership style.

Before delving into the analysis, I provide a brief understanding of what a speech is. Speech is the act of verbal expression, directed at a person or a targeted audience (Cambridge Dictionary, s.a.). In the act of speaking, both the verbal and the non-verbal aspects are equally important to leave an impression when addressing an audience (Odak Kراسić & Pavlović, 2021). Combining the verbal and non-verbal aspects is crucial as they collectively contribute to the overall understanding and interpretation of the speech. Verbal cues convey explicit messages and themes, while non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice offer additional layers of meaning, emotion, and emphasis. Together, they create an understanding of the speaker's intention and attitude, enriching the audience's comprehension and engagement with the speech (Odak Kراسić & Pavlović, 2021).

A political speech requires a combination of empathetic communication, a clear and compelling message, authenticity, confidence, and a focus on addressing the key interests of the targeted audience. The political speech given by Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović aims to inspire and

gain support from constituents. The speech employs rhetorical strategies, emotional appeals, and convincing language to connect with the audience (Lukšić, 2023).

Given the timing of the speech, occurring towards the end of the pre-electoral campaign, there may have been heightened pressure and a sense of weariness evident for Grabar-Kitarović. These circumstances may have influenced the tone, content of the speech, and Grabar-Kitarović's appearance (Lukšić, 2023).

When Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović steps on the stage, she greets the audience waving and bowing, wearing a mild smile, while the audience shows their support by applauding.

As the speech starts, Grabar-Kitarović adopts a clear, determined, and direct tone, providing a sense of confidence to the audience. Her professional attire and attitude contribute to her overall appearance of professionalism. With a confident posture and a warm, approachable smile Grabar-Kitarović stands on the stage, as expected from a political leader.

However, as the speech progresses, she appears to face vocal challenges, stumbling over words, stuttering, and occasionally struggling to articulate herself. This shift in circumstances challenges the perception of her vocal abilities, transitioning from skillful and professional to unstructured and uncertain. Such characteristics can be attributed to traditional gender stereotypes where women are portrayed as emotional, less assertive, and lacking in leadership qualities compared to their male counterparts.

Throughout the speech, Grabar-Kitarović appears distracted and struggles to express her thoughts clearly. For instance, while reminiscing about wartime experiences, she suddenly transitions to share a personal anecdote about attending a wedding in eastern Croatia. While she tells the story she uses expressive gestures, fails to complete sentences, stutters, pauses, and forgets words. This makes it hard to follow, leaving the listeners unsure of the story's purpose. The perception of Grabar-Kitarović as distracted and struggling may be connected to the stereotype that women are inherently less competent or articulate than men. Moreover, Grabar-Kitarović's use of expressive gestures, incomplete sentences, stuttering, pauses, and forgotten words during the storytelling further perpetuates stereotypes of women as emotional and irrational. These linguistic and nonverbal cues are often associated with femininity and may contribute to the perception of her as less capable or authoritative in her speech delivery. Grabar-Kitarović's difficulty in maintaining a coherent narrative may be interpreted as a manifestation of the gendered expectations that women do not belong in the world of politics.

Other noteworthy aspects of her speech are the grammatical errors and the use of slang and dialect, which are viewed as unprofessional in public speaking in Croatia. Language

competence is often equated with professionalism and intelligence and deviating from standard linguistic norms, labels a person as less competent or less credible (Lukšić, 2023).

Additionally, her voice tone fluctuates from shouting to almost whispering, often influenced by the content and audience response. Her tone of voice rises when she is making a point and mostly when she is trying to be louder than the audience's applause. Rather than waiting for applause to quieten, she attempts to speak over it, resulting in a raised voice and shouting. Grabar-Kitarović's attempt to speak over applauses may reflect a desire to assert control and maintain momentum, which can be associated with male leaders. However, it could also be perceived as an interruption or lack of politeness, potentially reinforcing stereotypes of women as impatient.

Her body language shows pronounced expressions, characterized by spontaneous movements of the arms, head, and body throughout the speech. On a couple of occasions, she leans on the lectern and moves freely, maintaining a high level of energy. It is apparent that she aims to project confidence and determination, yet the presence of insecure language contradicts this intention.

Grabar-Kitarović's pronounced expressions and spontaneous movements may be interpreted as a display of passion, authenticity, and emotional connection with her audience. Her action of leaning on the lectern and moving freely can be seen as a sign of confidence and comfort in her skin, challenging traditional expectations of how women in positions of power should be soft and modest.

On the other hand, politicians in general are expected to have controlled movements during a public appearance. These are usually characterized by subtle shifts in weight distribution, often transitioning from one leg to the other, while holding their hands close to each other, typically positioned in front of their bodies or slightly to the sides. These deliberate movement patterns are a strategic display aimed at projecting self-control and professionalism during public appearances (Lukšić, 2023).

The aforementioned aspects of Grabar-Kitarović's performance, including vocal challenges, expressive and uncontrollable gestures, the presence of grammatical errors, and the fluctuations in tone from shouting to almost whispering, collectively create an impression of unprofessionalism. Contrasting the expectations of how politicians are expected to behave in public. Her language and body language may reinforce the notion that women are less capable or qualified for leadership positions. Steaming from the societal expectation that leaders should be confident in their communication.

After analyzing the components that contribute to descriptive representations mirroring female characteristics, I transition to discussing the topics addressed in the speech. Firstly, I focus on segments of the speech that specifically portray women. These segments serve both descriptive and substantive functions in representation, as they illustrate how Grabar-Kitarović incorporates themes to resonate closer and show resemblance to women while also advocating for their interests.

Throughout the speech, when addressing the audience, Grabar-Kitarović addresses women first. Just like Spanish, the Croatian language features distinguishes gender based on the last letters of a word (noun, adjective, verb). Prioritizing women in her addressing the audience may suggest a deliberate emphasis on their importance. This positioning choice could signal an effort to elevate the visibility and value of women's perspectives, experiences, and contributions. By acknowledging and validating their presence, Grabar-Kitarović promotes inclusivity.

Additionally, Grabar-Kitarović underscores the importance of women in society by highlighting their roles as wives, their contributions during the independence war, and their positions as leaders. She acknowledges the role of wives by addressing, naming, and publicly thanking the wives of her colleagues for their support. This gesture might be interpreted as reinforcing traditional gender roles by assuming that the wives' primary contribution is in supporting their husbands' careers rather than recognizing their achievements or contributions beyond the domestic sphere. Some may argue that this perspective perpetuates the notion of women as secondary to men and reinforces patriarchal norms.

Conversely, this acknowledgment can be interpreted more positively as recognition of the often unacknowledged labor that women undertake in supporting their partners' careers. It could be seen as appreciating the emotional and practical support that wives provide, which is crucial for the success of their spouses. However, even from this perspective, concerns may arise regarding the reinforcement of gendered expectations and roles within relationships.

Secondly, the acknowledgment of the significance of women's contributions during the war underscores the role of gender in shaping historical narratives and national identity (Leinert Novosel, 1994). In her speech, Grabar-Kitarović subtly addresses this aspect by presenting herself as an example of a woman who chose not to leave the country. She emphasizes the importance of being present and contributing in various capacities, even if not directly on the battlefield. This suggests a broader understanding of women's roles in wartime efforts, beyond traditional notions of combat. It reflects a feminist perspective that seeks to recognize and value

women's contributions to their communities and nations, even when those contributions may not fit conventional gender expectations.

Grabar-Kitarović recognizes women as leaders through her example. By sharing that her husband is at home taking care of their daughter, she portrays herself as a working mother and provider for the family, thus acknowledging others who are in similar positions.

In Croatia, there is often an expectation that women prioritize family responsibilities over career aspirations, while men are expected to be the primary breadwinners. By openly discussing her husband's role in childcare and portraying herself as a working mother and provider, Grabar-Kitarović disrupts these entrenched stereotypes. This portrayal challenges the notion that women should solely be responsible for caregiving duties and highlights the importance of shared responsibilities within the household. It signals a shift towards more egalitarian gender roles, where both men and women have the freedom to pursue their professional ambitions while sharing familial responsibilities.

Moreover, by acknowledging and normalizing the experiences of working mothers, Grabar-Kitarović validates the struggles and challenges faced by many women with the double burden of having a career while taking care of family commitments. This can help break down societal barriers and stigma associated with women in leadership roles, encouraging more women to aspire to positions of power and authority.

Next, I analyze a segment of the speech where distinctly feminine traits are prominent. Specifically, I refer to Grabar-Kitarović's mention of the player Luka Modrić from the Croatian national football team.

In the speech, Grabar-Kitarović refers to the football player as her son. By using the term "son" to refer to a professional athlete, Grabar-Kitarović portrays herself as nurturing and maternal, which aligns with societal expectations of women as caretakers. This portrayal could potentially reinforce traditional gender roles where women are seen as providing emotional support and guidance.

This reference might also be examined in terms of its impact on perceptions of female leadership. While Grabar-Kitarović's intention may have been to establish a personal connection, the use of maternal language in a professional context could potentially undermine her authority as a political leader. This highlights how women in positions of power often face expectations to navigate a narrow range of gendered behaviors, balancing traits associated with both strength and nurturing, whereas male leaders encounter fewer constraints in their expression of authority. This

often leads women in positions of power to adopt softer or more nurturing language to be perceived as approachable or likable (Sawer, et al., 2006; Banić, 2020).

Another example of Grabar-Kitarović adopting a soft, nurturing language is the use of the diminutive form "Lukica" to refer to Modrić. This form creates a sense of intimacy and familiarity, and while Grabar-Kitarović's reference to Modrić may resonate emotionally with some audiences, it inadvertently reinforces the notion that women's political agendas primarily revolve around personal relationships and emotional connections rather than fundamental policy issues.

Furthermore, by extending the metaphor of the football player to encompass all the children in the country, Grabar-Kitarović may reinforce the notion that women, as maternal figures, are responsible for the future generation's success and well-being. This can further be connected to the segregation between genders, where women are predominantly associated with domestic and caregiving roles, while men are often perceived as the primary breadwinners and leaders. The emphasis on emotions and interpersonal connection fits traditional gender stereotypes that characterize women as empathetic and relationship-oriented, positioning Grabar-Kitarović as a maternal figure seeking unity and belonging.

Her willingness to show emotions may be interpreted as a deliberate choice to align with societal expectations of femininity, even within the realm of political leadership where traditionally masculine traits are often valorized. Thus, her expression of emotion serves not only as a means of personal authenticity but also as a strategic validation of gendered identity within the public sphere.

Next, I analyze the parts of the speech where Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović addresses her leadership abilities. Through her leadership qualities, it is possible to draw a connection to substantive representation by advocating for development in Croatia, focusing on the unity of diversity, and elaborating on her plan to bring highly paid jobs to the youth of the country. The final demonstrates that her leadership style is reflected through descriptive representation, showing characteristics that align with the constituency.

Grabar-Kitarović addresses the public to be re-elected for president, positioning herself as a leader advocating for a program developed in collaboration with the citizens, focusing on fostering a progressive and prosperous Croatia. Throughout the speech, Grabar-Kitarović articulates a vision of the elections as a platform for delivering the best outcomes for Croatia and its citizens, rather than a competition among candidates. She emphasizes that the importance of the elections lies not in the individual candidate, but rather in the program they advocate. She

positions herself as a leader of a program developed during her first term as president together with Croatia's citizens, focusing on the collective strive for Croatia's development and advancement for the future.

By emphasizing the role of the program in fostering a “progressive, prosperous, and beloved” (HDZ, 2019, 1:28:35-1:28:44) Croatia, she directs attention to actions that are crucial for the nation's development and well-being. This emphasis suggests that Grabar-Kitarović is more concerned with the collective welfare of Croatia and its citizens than advancing her own political career or personal agenda. It reflects her dedication to addressing the pressing challenges facing the country and her commitment to enacting policies and initiatives that will contribute to its growth and prosperity. Additionally, by promoting a vision of Croatia as “progressive, prosperous, and beloved” (HDZ, 2019, 1:28:35-1:28:44), Grabar-Kitarović seeks to inspire unity and pride among its citizens, fostering a sense of national identity and solidarity. This emphasis on the above-mentioned issues underscores Grabar-Kitarović's leadership qualities are modest by showing her dedication to prioritizing the nation's interests above all other matters. Moreover, by emphasizing the importance of unity for national development, Grabar Kitarović underscores her commitment to representing the interests and aspirations of all citizens, regardless of their background. This inclusive approach to representation reflects an understanding of democracy, where elected officials are expected to advocate for the collective well-being of all members of society (Lukšić, 2023). This fits with the belief that women are more inclined to foster an inclusive policy and promote diversity (Weldon, 2002).

In another part of her speech, Grabar-Kitarović fosters inclusive policies and promotes diversity by acknowledging the diverse regions of the country and emphasizing the importance of unity and mutual support. This aligns with expectations for women to incorporate inclusion and diversity in policymaking.

In her concluding remarks, Grabar-Kitarović commits to generating job opportunities for the youth, promising a monthly salary of 8000 euros. This declaration raises interest, especially when considering that the average income in Croatia in 2019 stood at 850 euros (DZS, 2019).

The statement reflects a strong and assertive tone, which aligns with traditional gender stereotypes of masculinity associated with confidence and authority. This reinforces the perception that effective leadership requires assertive communication and decisive action, traits typically associated with men. The statement may reinforce traditional gender stereotypes regarding leadership, implying that strong and forceful leadership is necessary to make decisive statements and assert control. This can perpetuate the perception that effective leadership aligns

with masculine traits of assertiveness and dominance, potentially marginalizing alternative leadership styles associated with femininity. The statement highlights a potential strategy to challenge gender stereotypes and biases in politics.

By making exaggerated promises, such as offering an extremely high salary, Grabar-Kitarović may be consciously seeking to disrupt the notion that her appearance holds more weight than her words and policies. In many political contexts, women are often subjected to heightened scrutiny and gendered expectations regarding their appearance, attitude, and communication style (Đulabić, 2020; Grbeša et al., 2024; Lubina & Brkić Klimpak, 2014). This can result in their ideas and policy proposals being overshadowed by superficial factors such as physical attractiveness or perceived likability. Making it difficult for women to be taken seriously in politics (Lubina & Brkić Klimpak, 2014). By making bold promises, Grabar-Kitarović may be attempting to assert her credibility and competence as a political leader, irrespective of traditional gender norms and expectations.

The interaction Grabar-Kitarović has with the audience is another aspect relevant for interpreting the speech, as it provides insight into how the audience responds to her statements, promises, and attitude. Throughout the speech, there is a notable display of support for Grabar-Kitarović from the audience. It appears that any mistakes she makes are overlooked, and regardless of her statements, the audience responds with enthusiasm and encouragement. Given that the audience consists of individuals already aligned with her campaign and identified as her voters, the interaction seems to be primarily characterized by mutual support, regardless of the content of the speech.

Grabar-Kitarović's performance combines a folksy style, which may be an attempt to build a closer connection with the audience, but it can also seem imprecise and unfocused.

Following I present how Grabar-Kitarović's leadership style is presented through characteristics of descriptive representation. She emphasizes her leadership abilities by openly declaring her willingness to criticize those with whom she disagrees. This characteristic can be interpreted as an assertion of her role as a bold and courageous leader. By openly criticizing the actions and decisions of her colleagues, she demonstrates a willingness to hold those in power accountable and to speak out against policies that she believes are not in the best interests of the Croatian people. This critique can be interpreted as an embodiment of substantive representation, where elected officials are expected to advocate for the interests and concerns of their constituency. Grabar-Kitarović seeks to ensure that the voices of ordinary citizens are heard and that their needs are addressed in the political process. Moreover, her willingness to critique

colleagues and policies can also be viewed as a demonstration of her commitment to transparency and accountability in government. By openly discussing the shortcomings and failures of existing policies, she signals her dedication to improving the political arena and fosters greater trust and confidence in political institutions.

Additionally, by openly challenging the expectation of following gender norms and asserting her willingness to critique, Grabar-Kitarović challenges traditional gender roles that dictate women should be accommodating and passive in leadership positions. This stance reflects a feminist approach by advocating for women's agency, assertiveness, and autonomy in leadership, breaking free from the constraints of traditional gender norms and paving the way for greater gender equality in positions of power.

The critiques she gives to her colleagues conform with Grabar-Kitarović's description of her personality as strong and determined, implying she can be challenging to work with. On one hand, her characterization can be seen as a reflection of the qualities often associated with effective leadership, while another perspective aligns with the stereotypes of women as being difficult to manage. Her personality as strong and determined raises important considerations about gender stereotypes and the expectations placed on women in leadership roles.

Grabar-Kitarović's self-description as strong and determined is often used in leadership contexts, regardless of gender. These qualities are typically associated with effective leadership, confidence, decisiveness, and resilience. In this light, Grabar-Kitarović's self-description aligns with conventional notions of leadership, emphasizing her capability to deal with challenges (Peović, 2020; Odak Krsić & Pavlović, 2021; Lukšić, 2023)

However, when she suggests that her strong and determined personality can make her challenging to work with, it reflects broader societal attitudes toward assertive women in positions of authority. Women who exhibit assertiveness or assert their opinions may be labeled as "difficult" or "bossy," perpetuating stereotypes that women are less cooperative or accommodating than men.

Next, by acknowledging the challenges of political engagement and openly admitting her need for rest, Grabar-Kitarović establishes a connection with the audience, portraying herself as relatable alongside the working class. Furthermore, Grabar-Kitarović highlights her upbringing in a hard-working family in an agricultural area, signaling her identification with the working class. By emphasizing the values of hard work and unity for national development, she positions herself as a relatable figure capable of understanding and addressing the concerns of ordinary citizens. Positioning herself as a leader who shares the nation's values and experiences, she seeks

to establish a connection with voters based on shared socioeconomic backgrounds and shared aspirations for national development. This portrayal of herself as an active and committed individual fosters a sense of trust and connection with her leadership, particularly for those from similar socio-economic backgrounds.

I have explored the gender dimension of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's speech by considering both descriptive and substantive representation. These forms of representation are closely intertwined, as evidenced by the systematic analysis of various themes such as language, physical appearance, body language, leadership style, and acknowledgment of women. By exploring Grabar-Kitarović's communication through themes, the relationship between gender, representation, and traditional stereotypes in Croatian politics is uncovered. These insights highlight the complex interplay between gender expectations, representation strategies, and societal norms, shaping Grabar-Kitarović's representation.

In the following section, I delve into the media's reaction and interpretation of the speech. This analysis seeks to unveil how the speech was perceived and depicted in the media, shedding light on the broader societal interpretation and reception of Grabar-Kitarović's representation. By examining the media's response, I can gain insights into the public discourse surrounding her speech and get a deeper understanding of the gender normative beliefs that are strengthened through the media.

4.3. Media Representation of Women in Politics

In this section, I aim to investigate how the media responded to Grabar-Kitarović's speech, paying special attention to how the president was portrayed using traditional gender stereotypes, to uncover how the media portrayed the speech to the public.

The analysis follows a similar structure as in the previous chapter. First I start with delineating the descriptive aspects delving into the language of the sources describing the speech and Grabar-Kitarović's characteristics. Next, I present the themes of the speech through Grabar-Kitarović's leadership style, analyzing aspects of the speech presented by the media.

The articles discussing Grabar-Kitarović's speech vary in their approaches and the aspects of the speech they choose to focus on. Some articles provide a summary of the speech's content, detailing the key points made by the Grabar-Kitarović, and offering analysis and commentary on the significance of her statements (Pavić, et al., 2019; M.T., 2019). Others place a stronger emphasis on errors and mistakes made during the speech, critiquing

Grabar-Kitarović's performance and questioning her competence (Klauški, 2019; Zdelar, 2019). The third group of articles analyzed offers context to the speech, explaining the president's statements and performance. These articles aim to offer a more comprehensive understanding of Grabar-Kitarović's statements and performance (D.I., 2019; Ružičić, 2019; V.P., 2019).

I begin by examining the descriptive aspects of the media's reactions and analyzing the language used in articles to describe the speech and its delivery.

In a couple of articles, the speech is described as "bizarre" (Pavić, et al., 2019; Zdelar, 2019) and "unprofessional" (Zdelar, 2019). These descriptions of Grabar-Kitarović's speech reflect a critical assessment of her effectiveness as a political leader, suggesting a perception of incompetence or inadequacy in her performance. This undermines her credibility and authority. The labeling of Grabar-Kitarović's speech as "bizarre" and "unprofessional" may also reflect broader societal norms and expectations regarding acceptable behavior and communication styles for women in positions of power (Đulabić, 2020; Grbeša et al., 2024; Lubina & Brkić Klimpak, 2014).

Furthermore, other articles characterizing her performance as "paranoiac," "improvised," and reaching "a new level of nonsense" reflect a deep-seated skepticism and dismissal of her capabilities as a political leader (Klauški, 2019; Duhaček, 2019). These descriptions not only criticize the content and delivery of her speech but also suggest a fundamental lack of trust in her judgment and decision-making abilities.

The use of terms like "paranoiac" (Klauški, 2019) implies a sense of irrationality or instability in her behavior, casting doubt on her capacity to lead effectively. Similarly, describing her speech as "improvised" suggests a lack of preparation, further undermining perceptions of her competence and professionalism. Additionally, labeling her performance as reaching "a new level of nonsense" (Klauški, 2019) suggests that Grabar-Kitarović's statements and performance have become even more nonsensical or illogical than before, reinforcing the notion that her speech lacks credibility. This characterization not only diminishes the substance of her message but also diminishes her authority as a political figure.

The headline of one source reads, "Luka Modrić is like my son! My Lukica...". This segment of the speech has been extensively discussed in the preceding chapter. It's worth noting that while few sources reference this portion of the speech, this particular source chooses to highlight it in the headline, seemingly to attract readers through mockery of Grabar-Kitarović. This portrayal diminishes her authority and leadership by reducing her relationship with the player to one of maternal care rather than professional respect. By highlighting this segment in

the headline to mock Grabar-Kitarović, the source perpetuates the stereotype that women in positions of power are not to be taken seriously and are subject to ridicule. Moreover, by mocking her statements, sarcasm can reinforce the idea that women's perspectives and opinions are less valuable or worthy of consideration. This can contribute to a culture of sexism and discrimination, where women are systematically marginalized and their voices silenced.

In a broader context, these descriptions may reflect biases and stereotypes about women in leadership roles, perpetuating stereotypes of women as emotionally unstable and lacking the standardized characteristics expected from a leader.

The aforementioned descriptions of Grabar-Kitarović's speech are a reflection of societal expectations regarding gendered behavior in politics. The portrayal of Grabar-Kitarović's representation in the media is filled with negative remarks. Her appearance on the stage, body language, tone of voice, and pronunciation are considered inappropriate for a presidential figure (Pavić, et al., 2019; Duhaček, 2019; M.T., 2019; 10 Media). One journalist interprets the speech as signaling the conclusion of Grabar-Kitarović's political journey, according to Duhaček (2019). He suggests that the speech may serve as a significant milestone or turning point in her political career.

I continue analyzing the media's responses to Grabar-Kitarović's performance, focusing on descriptive representation by examining the media's opinions regarding her performance.

Grabar-Kitarović is perceived as a politician facing difficulties and changes (M.T., 2019), with general concern arising about her unusual behavior during the campaign, leading to speculation about her physical and mental state (Duhaček, 2019; D.I., 2019; Zdelar, 2019; L.R., 2019). Grabar-Kitarović's speech in Osijek is described as unintelligent, and lacking sense, which led to suspicions that she may have been under the influence of alcohol, and other substances or may be suffering from mental health issues (Duhaček, 2019).

Another journalist goes further, suggesting that Grabar-Kitarović's uncontrollable actions could pose a threat to national security, indicating a need for her behavior to be regulated or controlled (L.R., 2019). Some commentators even suggest that only the secret services could solve the mystery of her performance, sarcastically highlighting the seriousness with which her actions are viewed (L.R., 2019).

The speculation about the secret services' ability to explain her behavior aligns with the stereotype of women being emotionally driven or irrational, reflecting stereotypes of women as incapable of handling positions of power and responsibility without supervision or help. Further suggesting that she is feeling overwhelmed by the pressure and expectations placed upon her as a

leader. The interpretation of Grabar-Kitarović's insecurity suggests vulnerability or instability, characteristics traditionally associated with femininity in stereotypical portrayals.

The emphasis on Grabar-Kitarović's perceived emotional state, mental stability, and capacity to handle the demands of her position, perpetuates the stereotype that women in positions of power are emotionally unstable or incapable of effective leadership. Her portrayal as emotionally unstable or unreliable, based on perceived errors or inconsistencies in her speech, reflects the beliefs that women are incapable of performing as political representatives. Criticism of her appearance and attitudes also aligns with societal expectations that women should conform to certain standards of behavior and appearance to be considered credible leaders.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that certain criticisms could apply to any politician, regardless of gender, due to the unrealistic and unprofessional performance. Politicians are expected to uphold a certain level of professionalism regardless of gender. While some critiques towards Grabar Kitarović may have gendered undertones, others may stem from broader expectations of politicians in general.

The descriptive characterizations and labels of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović from the media seemed to be confirmed when Grabar-Kitarović canceled appearances at two events the day after the analyzed speech (D.I., 2019). This turn of events served to reinforce beliefs surrounding Grabar-Kitarović's perceived instability.

Additionally, the media compares her five-year mandate where she was perceived as engaging close to the public, as opposed to what was observed during the campaign. The campaign is described as controlled, with limited contact with the public and journalists, and only short public appearances (Duhaček, 2019). The media assigned these observations to her mental state, as needing supervision to be under control since her public appearance is described as unpredictable and out of control (L.R., 2019).

Next, I present the analysis of the media's reactions to Grabar-Kitarović's specific statements.

The media prioritized topics expected to gather the highest public interest, thus in addition to the discussions surrounding Grabar Kitarović's mental health, considerable attention has been drawn to her announcement regarding highly paid job opportunities.

The majority of the articles analyzed the statements concerning the employment opportunity offering an 8000 euro monthly salary (Pavić, et al., 2019; Klauški, 2019; Zdelar, 2019; M.T., 2019; D.I., 2019; Ružičić, 2019; V.P., 2019; D.I., 2019). The notable interest in this statement can be drawn from the fact that the promised salary is four times today's average salary

in the country (DZS, 2019). Consequently, her announcement gathered significant public interest, requesting further investigation and explanation.

Eight (Pavić, et al., 2019; Klauški, 2019; Zdelar, 2019; M.T., 2019; D.I., 2019; Ružičić, 2019; V.P., 2019; D.I., 2019) out of eleven media sources analyzed, commented on the statement as confident and ambitious. Some sources offered context and explanations for the statement, while others criticized it. Grabar-Kitarović's ambiguous announcement has prompted inquiries regarding the nature of the job and why such details were not disclosed earlier.

One article provides an answer to Grabar-Kitarović's bold statements explaining the details about the nature of the job (Ružičić, 2019). It clarifies that it is regarding information technology (IT) occupations that would be performed in connection to Israel, where there is a shortage of workforce in the sector. Another source confirms Grabar-Kitarović's announcement regarding job opportunities, as stated by the Croatian Prime Minister (V.P., 2019), thereby lending credibility to her statement.

Other sources mock the statement, linking it to schemes promising free money, akin to those dubious emails claiming you've won a fortune from a prince in Tunisia (Klauški, 2019).

One particular article stands out as it dedicates its entirety to responding to Grabar-Kitarović's statement regarding the IT job connection with Israel (D.I., 2019). The response comes from an IT specialist located in the birth city of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in Croatia and provides a thorough critique of the statement with detailed explanations. Grabar-Kitarović is criticized for being disconnected from reality, urging her to focus on her duties and avoid discussing topics she lacks knowledge about. She labels her as outdated and unhelpful. Grabar-Kitarović's promise is viewed as lacking truthfulness and credibility. The IT specialist highlights the skepticism and mockery surrounding her promise, indicating a sense of disbelief among the public. The capability and authenticity of Grabar-Kitarović's promise is questioned, particularly emphasizing the uncertainty surrounding her claim. Finally, she is described as out of touch with reality and advised to stick to areas where she has expertise (D.I., 2019).

The articles portray Grabar-Kitarović as a leader who makes assertive statements without providing detailed plans or explanations, raising questions about Grabar-Kitarović's competence and credibility in fulfilling her promise, particularly given the lack of clarity and specificity in her statement.

Through the above-mentioned statement, Grabar-Kitarović is portrayed as making bold, unrealistic promises, questioning the transparency and timing of her announcement. Moreover,

she's criticized for using a rally to promote job opportunities, comparing her to a recruitment agency advising her to leave the questions of employment to the experts (Klauški, 2019). However, when viewed in the context of Croatia's economic situation, it is possible that any politician, regardless of gender, would face the same amount of criticism for making unrealistic promises.

The criticism and mockery Grabar-Kitarović face based on her statement may stem from societal expectations that women should stick to traditional roles and avoid topics perceived as more suited to men. Additionally, the characterization of Grabar-Kitarović as disconnected from reality and outdated can further reinforce the stereotype that women are less capable or knowledgeable in leadership roles. However, the claims need to be considered in the context of her statement which lacks coherence when compared to prevailing salary standards in Croatia suggesting that she might lack the expertise to make such claims.

The next most discussed aspect of the speech is the announcement declaring her husband Jakov's involvement in family duties. By stating that Jakov needed to attend to family matters, Grabar-Kitarović challenges the stereotype of women as primary caregivers and homemakers, taking on typically male traits as the provider and supporter of the family. However, a journalist reported Jakov's attendance at a hockey match where Croatia was playing, contradicting Grabar-Kitarović's statement about his whereabouts (Duhaček; 2019). The discovery of sharing misleading information during the rally, questions Grabar-Kitarović's trustworthiness. Her references to her husband's whereabouts ended up providing the media with additional information that targets Grabar-Kitarović's position as a leader.

Nonetheless, she responded to the media by defending her husband on Twitter, justifying his presence at the hockey match as somehow linked to Croatia's success in sports (R.I., 2019). This development adds further uncertainty and disbelief to Grabar-Kitarović's performance and speech in Osijek.

How does Grabar-Kitarović's defense of her husband reflect on her political image, and how might this affect perceptions of her leadership abilities? The contradiction between her statement and the reported whereabouts of her husband raises questions about her transparency and credibility. It could undermine her image as a trustworthy and reliable leader, especially if voters perceive her explanation as an attempt to cover up inconsistencies.

Next on the agenda is Grabar-Kitarović's attempt to identify her favorite tamburitza musicians (M.T., 2019; D.I., 2019; Zdelar, 2019; Duhaček, 2019). Due to her confusion about their name and the origin of a popular song connected to the independence war, criticism has

been directed towards Grabar-Kitarović and her team. It can be explained as an attempt to connect with the audience through references to local culture, music, and common ground. Mistakenly referring to the musicians by the wrong name and incorrectly naming the artist of a widely recognized song on a national scale related to the time of the war has highlighted a lack of preparation and cultural awareness in the speech. The media addresses these mistakes as unacceptable for someone holding her position, particularly since the correct information is considered common knowledge in Croatia and easily accessible (M.T., 2019; D.I., 2019; Zdelar, 2019; Duhaček, 2019). Hence, also questioned the credibility of her teams and those standing behind the speech. It suggests a lack of attention to detail and thoroughness in the preparation process, which reflects poorly on Grabar-Kitarović's leadership and management skills. Additionally, it raises doubts about the professionalism and competence of her advisors and speechwriters, as well as their understanding of the cultural and historical context in which Grabar-Kitarović operates. Ultimately, it undermines trust in her ability to surround herself with capable and knowledgeable individuals who can support her effectively in her role as a political leader.

The audience's reaction to Grabar Kitarović's statements during the speech is characterized as uncritical. Despite the potential lack of coherence or substance in her remarks, they respond with applause, indicating a strong commitment and support for her candidacy. It appears that the audience consists primarily of loyal supporters who are predisposed to vote for her regardless of the content of her speech. One article highlighted the audience's tendency to applaud her every statement, even if they did not fully understand the message given (Duhaček, 2019).

Taking into consideration all the above analyses it can be stated that the media transformed the speech into a subject of mockery aimed at Grabar-Kitarović. There is a sense of irony and sarcasm in the media reactions and an underlying tone of doubt regarding the trustworthiness of her promises.

It's important to recognize that the media's criticism of Grabar-Kitarović can be seen as somewhat understandable based on her peculiar representation. Additionally, politicians, especially those in high-ranking positions, are subjected to greater examination and criticism for their public performances. This heightened level of analysis is a natural consequence of their roles as public figures responsible for shaping policy and representing the interests of the public. Therefore, while the media's criticism may seem harsh, it reflects the inherent expectations and

standards placed upon political leaders to communicate effectively and inspire confidence in their constituents (Lukšić, 2023; Lubina & Brkić Klimpak, 2014).

The analyses have shown how Grabar-Kitarović's speech and media reactions intersect with broader societal norms and stereotypes surrounding gender and political representation guided by the theory and conceptual framework. In the next chapter, I delve into the findings of the analysis, presenting the results drawn from the analysis. The results of the analysis help in answering the research question concerning how political communication in Croatia perpetuates stereotypes regarding gender and representation.

5. Conclusion

Women's political representation has become a universal benchmark for measuring democracy. Within this framework, gender inequality takes the central stage in this thesis, posing the question: How does political communication reproduce stereotypes on gender and political representation in Croatia?

According to Anne Phillips and her theory of presence, the mere presence of women in political positions can lead to challenging traditional gender norms and reshaping societal perceptions of leadership. She argues that women's presence in political institutions is essential for effecting change, as not just anyone can represent everyone.

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's speech, serves as a case study for investigating the theory of presence, exploring how her presence reinforces or challenges societal attitudes towards gender and representation in politics. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's representation is perceived through the filter of traditional gender stereotypes, which prescribe specific behaviors and attributes to women. The analysis applied a feminist perspective, examining the concepts of gender, representation, and stereotypes, guided by Anne Phillips' theory of presence. By scrutinizing Grabar-Kitarović's political communication in her speech and the media response to it, the research assesses how her presence influences perceptions of gender roles and expectations.

The thesis initiates with an introduction to the topic and research questions, laying the foundation for subsequent exploration. Emphasizing the significance of investigating gender dynamics within Croatia's political arena, it underscores the importance of achieving equal representation. Building upon this premise, the conceptualization of key concepts and the theoretical framework of gender and representation are explained in subsequent chapters.

In the third chapter, a comprehensive explanation of the research design and methodology is provided, outlining the approach taken in conducting the study. Next, the thesis transitions into the analysis phase, scrutinizing both the speech and the media's reactions. This critical examination offers valuable insights into the portrayal and perception of female politicians within Croatian society, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in politics.

The analysis of the speech suggests that Grabar-Kitarović's representation both aligns with and challenges traditional gender stereotypes and expectations of leadership, highlighting the complex interplay between gender, representation, and social norms. However, the analysis of the media's reactions has provided an alternative view of the speech and Grabar-Kitarović's portrayal. It sheds light on her peculiar behavior, offering a new perspective by questioning her well-being and mental state, indicating that her representation and political communication may be attributed to a third factor.

In this conclusion, I first present results showing the blend of female and male traits analyzed in her representation. Next, I demonstrate the alternative view on the representation presented through media sources.

Grabar-Kitarović reinforces gender stereotypes, particularly through her portrayal of a nurturing and caring character. The motherly traits that she uses to connect with the audience and voters are portrayed when she refers to the football player, when she speaks about unity and support among the citizens, and when she emphasizes the feeling of solidarity during the war. Through empathy and emotional intelligence, she aligns herself with the societal expectation of women as maternal figures who prioritize caring for others and being modest by prioritizing the success of the country over personal accomplishments. However, by showing her emotional side, she satisfies the need to show her femininity as expected from female politicians, suggesting that her worthiness as a leader is tied to her fulfillment of traditional gender expectations.

On the other hand, Grabar-Kitarović's representation also challenges conventional gender stereotypes in leadership by emphasizing herself as a strong leader. For instance, she displays assertiveness and decisiveness when presenting her plans challenging the stereotype that women are inherently less competent or authoritative than men in positions of power. Additionally, she presents herself as a hard-working individual coming from a working-class family, showing her commitment to the public by actively including herself in society. Her bravery is reflected through her criticism towards political colleagues and she is presented as the provider for the family, while her husband is taking care of family responsibilities. Moreover, her increasing

expressiveness and gestures throughout the speech are also interpreted as a deviation from traditional gender norms, usually assigning these characteristics to men. By displaying assertive gestures and vocal delivery, she challenges the stereotype that women should be passive or soft in their communication style. Through these actions, she challenges the stereotype that women are inherently less competent or authoritative than men in positions of power.

By examining the aspects of the speech that illustrate how Grabar-Kitarović both reinforces and challenges gender stereotypes, the findings can be linked to the dual challenge that women face when entering the political sphere. The dual challenge, faced by Grabar-Kitarović, entails navigating the male-dominated arena while simultaneously showing her feminine traits, striving to balance between gender norms and political expectations. On one side Grabar Kitarović endeavours to embody masculine political traits to underscore her ability to compete with male politicians. She appears confident, reasonable, and hard-working as she discusses plans, concerns, and actions for the future of the country. On the other side, as outlined above, she displays emotion and empathy to align with the societal expectations for a female representative in politics.

Turning now to the media's reception of the speech, the findings will be presented, derived from the analysis of how the media sources responded to the speech. The interpretation of Grabar-Kitarović's speech in media sources underscores the complex dynamics of political representation and sheds light on a different perspective offered by media outlets regarding Grabar-Kitarović's representation.

The media's representation of the speech is overwhelmingly negative, featuring sarcastic comments, negative descriptions, and mockery of her figure. Even sources aiming to provide a straightforward overview of the speech fail to refrain from negative commentary. The analysis focuses on stereotypical traits portrayed through the media, yet the findings suggest that the media's negativity stemmed from the speech's actual quality. One source explicitly declares it as her worst performance ever (Duhaček, 2019). The media's focus on Grabar-Kitarović's weaknesses and topics aiming at mocking her, instead of analyzing her political engagement, can reinforce harmful stereotypes about her capabilities and political position.

On one side, the media's criticism of Grabar-Kitarović's speech reflects societal expectations and standards placed upon political leaders, particularly women. While some criticism may seem harsh, it underscores the scrutiny and criticism faced by public figures responsible for shaping policy and representing the interests of the public. Generally, women leaders often face greater scrutiny and are held to higher standards than their male counterparts.

They often face criticism for behavior or speech that would be tolerated or even praised by men. This criticism is connected to the dual challenge that women face, highlighting the obstacles they encounter in leadership roles.

In a broader context, these descriptions perpetuate notions of gender norms and expectations, suggesting that women are inherently less capable of handling the demands of leadership positions. By characterizing Grabar-Kitarović as emotionally unstable or erratic, these descriptions reinforce the stereotype that women are overly emotional and irrational, traits that are often deemed incompatible with effective leadership. Furthermore, they imply that women leaders should conform to a standardized set of characteristics typically associated with male leaders, such as assertiveness and decisiveness, rather than embracing their unique leadership styles.

These findings reflect the complexities of gender stereotypes in political communication, highlighting the ongoing struggle for women leaders to navigate societal expectations while asserting their authority in male-dominated spaces. Therefore, in the example of the provided case study political communication reinforced stereotypes by adhering to them.

Applying Anne Phillips's theory of presence to Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović's case entails scrutinizing how Grabar-Kitarović's role as a female leader is perceived through traditional gender stereotypes. By examining Grabar-Kitarović's visibility and representation, the study delves into the complexities of gender dynamics in Croatian politics, aiming to foster a more inclusive and equitable political landscape. This analysis can further contribute to the broader discourse on gender and representation by recognizing the existence of stereotypes and raising awareness of their harmful effects.

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