

Representation of Patriarchal Ideology and Its Negative Effects on the Characters in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*

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Abstract—Patriarchy is a social system that systematically considers women as inferior to men. Therefore, this study aimed to examine patriarchal ideology and its detrimental effects on characters in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*. Using a qualitative descriptive and a feminist methodology, the results showed that patriarchal violence manifested in various forms, including physical and sexual assault as well as murder. This narrative suggested that women empowered by the control over electricity retaliated against men, showing the negative effects of patriarchy extended to both genders.

Index Terms—patriarchy, negative effects, feminism

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a diverse array of artistic expressions, including short tales, poems, novels, dramas, and songs originating from writers of various national and cultural backgrounds using multiple forms of English (Arafah, 2018; Afiah et al., 2022). It serves as a collection of literary works for both written and unwritten narratives, such as texts as well as spoken language (Fadillah et al., 2022; Baa et al., 2023), allowing a platform for individuals to express thoughts through words, actions, and writing (Iksora et al., 2022; Ananda & Arafah, 2023). This form of expression engages readers by incorporating compelling language in literary works (Sunardi et al., 2018; Asriyanti et al., 2022). Therefore, literature is generally defined as a written work of art created by a particular author (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019a; Yulianti et al., 2022). For example, literature may reflect a society's cultural values (Mokoginta et al., 2021; Hasyim et al., 2023) and bridge existential gaps as well as connect individuals (Moi, 2009; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023b).

Literary works offer valuable lessons in the domain of environmental conservation and human survival. It further provides insights into life at particular junctures, offering diverse benefits to readers (Anggrawan et al., 2019; Arafah et al., 2021). Several genres of literature, such as poetry, prose, and theatre, are distinguished by the content, intricacy, and use of symbolic language. Additionally, novels present fictitious narratives in prose form, examining the characters' lives within specific contexts, including conflicts and problem-solving abilities (Hasjim et al., 2020; Takwa et al., 2022a;

Yudith et al., 2023).

The novel is selected as the literary work for this study and is defined as a largely fictitious prose story (Mazzoni, 2017; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b). It has the potential to accomplish more than philosophy, poetry, science, and other forms of literature (Lawrence, 1936, p. 168; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023a). "*The Power*" by Naomi Alderman explores the limitations imposed on women and the consequences of defying these restrictions, emphasizing patriarchal practices and their impact (Sunyoto et al., 2022; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a).

Patriarchy denoting "rule of the fathers" is widely understood as a social, organizational structure where cultural and institutional beliefs reinforce the dominance of older or more powerful men over women and youth (Levy, 2007; Kaharuddin et al., 2022). This system grants men greater power, social control, material wealth, and higher social prestige than women (Hill, 2009; Kaharuddin, 2022). Patriarchal traditions further place women beneath men, erasing independence and autonomy (Udasmoro, 2017; Hasyim et al., 2020). Beyond the concept of "sexism", patriarchy is a societal creation of male-gendered authority with a specific structure (Ortner, 2022; Halil et al., 2024). According to Richards (2013, p. 184), the underlying patriarchal view was consistent with the sexist belief that women's minds and bodies were the property of male deities.

Historical investigations of violence against women through a patriarchal lens often idealize the oppressed and denounce the oppressor (Hunnicut, 2009; Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). Radical feminists further assert that patriarchy and women's subjugation originate from violence and control over other sexualities primarily influenced by ego and social connection in humans (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019; Purwaningsih et al., 2020). Feminism characterizes men's systemic power relations as patriarchy, where men govern women (Scraton, 2013; Takwa et al., 2022b). This perception perpetuates the community's view of men as dominant while environmental factors fail to equalize gender roles (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019b; Asri et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2024), making patriarchy challenging to stop.

Walby further asserts that recent Western history has seen two types of patriarchy and further separated into two categories, namely private and public. Private patriarchy is predicated on the relative isolation of women from social spheres other than the household, exploiting women's services individually and directly in the seemingly private domain of the home (Walby, 1989, p. 228). However, public patriarchy does not exclude women, with the appropriation of women occurring collectively rather than individually (Mutmainnah et al., 2022; Kuswanti et al., 2023).

Currently, patriarchy is often overlooked and normalized, particularly within domestic spheres. Despite the detrimental effects as evidenced in the novel "*The Power*," patriarchy profoundly harms both women and men. While individual violence may be perceived as sporadic, it can also originate from underlying psychological disorders or social structural traits exhibited by men (Walby, 1989; Takwa et al., 2024). Therefore, women require strength, which extends beyond physical prowess to comprise education. Empowering women to make decisions about marriage, family size, income distribution, mobility, jobs, education, and entertainment can improve their quality of life, giving them the ability to be defensive (Khan et al., 2019; Arafah et al., 2024).

The study aims to explore patriarchal ideology as perceived by women and elucidate the impact on the male and female characters depicted in Alderman's novel "*The Power*". Additionally, advancements in science significantly influence society by altering lifestyles and perspectives (Arafah et al., 2020; Suhadi et al., 2022; Kaharuddin et al., 2023).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminism is a movement that advocates equal rights for women, aiming to achieve equality with men in various spheres, such as political, economic, and legal domains (Offen, 1988; Arafah et al., 2020; Yudith et al., 2024). Listening to past and present women's voices fostered a more receptive and rational method of hearing men's opinions anew. Arafah (2011) emphasized the importance of granting women a platform to share life experiences, enabling a comparison between the adventures of both genders. Women's voices should reflect personal experiences and serve as conduits for authors' perceptions, engaging in public discourse and driving social change.

The study of feminism evolved in response to the feminist movement possessing strong will and ambitions but lacked ideology and empirical foundation to substantiate the claims (Tomm, 2006; Kaharuddin et al., 2021). Eisenstein (1979, p. 73) underscored the necessity of a feminist analytical framework in understanding that the quest for gender equality was a current process riddled with internal challenges. The subfield of social feminism was further used to study the Novel's content. The following theory elements included objectification, power and oppression, stereotypes, gender disparities, inequality, and oppression. Furthermore, a journey across the landscape of feminist methodology was offered to show the reader how women should learn about gendered living and adopt the information to claim a social existence (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Arafah et al., 2023a).

As a framework for approaching and evaluating life and politics, feminism was characterized by inquiry and the pursuit of answers rather than predetermined political conclusions regarding women's oppression (Siwi et al., 2022; Manugeran et al., 2023). Feminist perspectives elucidated that oppression did not originate from individual characteristics but from power dynamics and the systems used by authority to perpetuate control. Cultural norms and practices often led men and women to resist or be unable to conform, resulting in oppression (Peters et al., 2008; Arafah et al., 2023b). A well-known feminist criticism further emphasized the subjugation and marginalization of women's oral narratives by patriarchal written accounts (Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022; Mardiana et al., 2023). Additionally, gender

issues were interconnected with private life, subjectivity, sexuality, and various social facets by feminism, deepening political conceptions, visions of social change, and modes of political engagement (Lennox, 1993; Arifin et al., 2022).

Feminism was a method deeply entrenched in daily life, permeating various aspects of societal interactions and personal experiences. This analytical method was considered revolutionary due to three significant factors (Eisenstein, 1979, p. 64).

- a. The emphasis on daily life and experience was not a moral choice but a necessity.
- b. Theory was integrated into daily practice, transforming social interactions in consciousness and reality due to its direct relevance to real-world requirements.
- c. As theory closely correlated with practical demands, it directly influenced social interactions in both awareness and reality.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adhered to the qualitative method's methods and principles, which were used to comprehensively understand the issues under investigation (Abidin & Kaharuddin, 2021). Data were collected through meticulous reading and comprehension of the Novel, accompanied by recording of specific words and sentences. Following the guidelines outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), data analysis comprises three main processes: data reduction, visualizing, and conclusion drawing/verification. During the data reduction phase, relevant data were selected from the novel text and subsequently simplified. The writer then provided the data by briefly discussing sections of the text or storylines containing patriarchal ideology and the consequences within the Novel. The presented text was elucidated in detail in the data visualizing stage, with novel excerpts correlating with the problem formulation, facilitating a methodical data analysis process. Finally, conclusions were drawn in the verification phase based on the problem formulation statement previously formulated by the writer (Arafah et al., 2023).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Naomi Alderman, the author of the novel *"The Power"*, recounted the story of violence experienced by women as a form of patriarchal action. In the narrative, women receive strength from God as a form of resistance and pursuit of justice. However, this power was used to take revenge on men, eventually leading to the control and dominance of social life by women.

A. Patriarchy Ideology Experienced by Female Characters

As the head of the family, husbands naturally exerted control or imposed restrictions on the wives. However, husbands resorted to physical abuse when wives committed offences, which was a highly unnatural action. Surrounding environments normalized domestic violence, leading to indifference towards occurrences of violence, as depicted in the Novel: "The men in the town beat the wives when attempts to bring more food were made" (Alderman, 2016, p. 103).

Men held power over their wives and acted without considering the consequences. Women were also perceived as vulnerable beings, as evidenced by the statement, "My mother's new husband has handcuffed the lady to the bed. Please send someone to rescue the lady" (Alderman, 2016, p. 127).

In marriages, husbands were responsible for the wife's well-being and had the duty to provide, love, and protect the wife. However, not every man fulfilled this responsibility adequately. Many mistreated the spouses and, in certain cases, resorted to violence, emphasizing patriarchal behaviour within the household (private patriarchy).

In the Novel *The Power*, female characters experience frequent physical assault in public. Women further endured physical abuse from men, even from strangers, as exemplified in the passage: "Two men were present, one taller with a face resembling a rat and the other shorter with a square jaw which was unfamiliar. The shorter one seized the mother by the throat while the taller guy pursued Roxy through the kitchens. The guy grasped the thigh as Roxy neared the back door, causing Roxy to stumble forward, then secured the hold around the waist" (Alderman, 2016, p. 7).

The men committed several acts of violence, including confinement, kicking, and striking, relying on their physical strength to mistreat Roxy and the mother without compassion, as evidenced by the passage, "The short man kicked Roxy's mum hard in the stomach. The mother doubled over in pain falling to her knees, then the man swishes the knife at Roxy" (Alderman, 2016, p. 9). Violence against women was also perpetrated by the police, as described in the following quotation.

...and that marked the end for the cops, pulling out the nightsticks and guns as the action commenced. Mez was screaming alongside the mother as blood stained the sidewalk, and both inflicted injuries upon the head. Mez recounted how the men restrained and caused harm with the tally seven to one." Allie listened intently, and upon Mez's conclusion, Allie inquired, "Is the lady alive?" Mez nodded. Do you know where the lady was taken to? Which hospital? Mez said the lady was not taken to the hospital. The men have taken the lady to the police station. (Alderman, 2016, p. 129)

The actions of these policemen showed the severity of patriarchy as women endured brutal physical violence despite their innocence. This assault was triggered by the officers' humiliation upon viewing a video of Roxy and Allie showcasing the strength online. The officers' disbelief in women's strength originated from the ingrained idea that men

were inherently more muscular than women, as depicted in the paragraph, "When facing the courageous fighters of Bessapara, it became evident who stood on the side of justice. Among the fighters were trafficked and shackled women, as well as individuals who might have perished alone in the darkness had it not been for the guiding light sent by a higher power" (Alderman, 2016, p. 211).

Violence against women was rampant in the Arab kingdom, where the royal family had been binding and trading women for decades. The extreme patriarchy in the Arab kingdom allowed for women's control and exploitation. Women's trafficking exemplified the low regard men held for women, allowing the gender to commit heinous acts with impunity, as described in the statement. "Upward of three hundred thousand women passed through the country every year, sold for the use of the moist bodies and fragile flesh. A great number of those have stayed having nowhere else to go" (Alderman, 2016, p. 108).

Patriarchy victimized women for over three centuries by being sold and exploited for their bodies. Women were often forced to submit to the actions of patriarchal perpetrators due to the lack of strength to resist. Poor women were more vulnerable to physical and sexual violence and often denied freedom as well as self-determination. Additionally, men's violence extended to the bombing of hospitals catering to women's health issues. "A terrorist group named Male Power claimed responsibility for the attack, which destroyed a medical clinic catering to women's health issues alongside a busy mall in Tucson, Arizona" (Alderman, 2016, p. 193).

A group of male terrorists targeted a hospital specializing in women's health issues as a protest against the government's allocation of funds. The terrorists advocated for equality as all funds were directed to the North Star Girls Training Camp, leaving no resources for men's defence programs.

The hospital attack was carried out by male terrorists aiming to provoke government action against what was perceived as a "human enemy" (Alderman, 2016). Women were perceived as the enemy of men, and monies for self-defence training were redirected to educate Northstar girls. Additionally, poor women were subjected to physical and sexual violence, as stated in the following sentence.

This was the place men came to when a woman was needed for use without law or license and discarded without censure. *The power* has been passed from palm to palm here for three years now, and the many death-bearing hands of women have a name here: Kali, the eternal. Kali destroys to bring fresh growth. Kali, intoxicated by the blood of the slain. Kali puts out the stars with her thumb and forefinger. Terror is her name, and death is her breathing in and out". (Alderman, 2016, p. 146)

Men exploited women without regard for legislation or consent, discarding the gender when no longer serving purposes. The treatment of women by men was deeply degrading, with the belief that the gender deserved the treatment and did not consider the possibility of retaliation.

Despite possessing talent, skills, and understanding, women were deemed unfit for leadership roles, particularly in politics. However, the women were expected to accompany the husbands rather than assume leadership roles merely. Women faced captivity and endured physical as well as sexual violence, hindering their ability to lead everyday lives, as described in the passage. "Tunde's report emphasized Tatiana Moskalev as a skilled political operator who effectively used Tatiana's influence" (Alderman, 2016, p. 107).

Men who exerted excessive control over women were deprived of the ability to make decisions. Women were regarded as the weakest creatures due to their incapability to be defensive or protective and thereby subject to governance and abuse by men, as evidenced in the following passage.

The men lurked in the darkness, honing their skills and ensuring the swift execution of the plan. The weapon was passed among the men, and marvelling at the power. It was a revelation for some who had been captive for an extended period and a curious rumour for others. The women believed it to be a miracle from God, similar to the deliverance of the Children of Israel from slavery. From the depths of despair, the women cried out and, in the darkness, found light. (Alderman, 2016, p. 102)

B. *The Bad Effects on Female Character*

The previous explanation discussed patriarchal ideas faced by women characters in Alderman's *The Power*. Furthermore, the author described the effects women felt against patriarchy as follows.

Physical Violence

In the novel "*The Power*", women experienced significant levels of physical assault both within the home and in public with men in control. Women were expected to adhere to strict rules, and any deviation or resistance was met with severe repercussions. This pervasive patriarchy inflicted considerable harm on women, reinforcing the idea of weakness as perceived by men (Arafah et al., 2023c).

Sexual Violence

Another manifestation of patriarchy depicted in the Novel is sexual violence, which occurs frequently. Sexual violence was defined as an attack on a woman's body or reproductive function. In "*The Power*", lower-middle-class women were sexually subjected to sexual abuse where men assert control over their bodies at will. The narrative suggested instances of sexual aggression, including groping and rape, emphasizing the extent of the dominance over women.

Trafficking of Women

Men engaged in the trafficking of women, particularly after committing sexual violence. This reprehensible trade primarily targeted underprivileged women, often living in destitution under bridges.

Murder

The most extreme consequence of patriarchy depicted in the Novel is murder. Men committed ruthless acts of violence against women, targeting individuals and groups. For instance, men carried out bombings targeting hospitals that catered to women's health issues.

C. The Bad Effects on Male Character

Patriarchy inflicted harm not only on women but also on the men who perpetrated the act. Effects observed on men committing these acts included.

Physical Violence from Women

Women resorted to physical violence as a means of retaliation against the oppression faced, as stated, "Roxy jumped over the prone man, groaning and pawing at the face" (Alderman, 2016, p. 9). For instance, Roxy fought a man to defend the mother due to the whisper of motivation to fight based on the statement in the passage, "Hit, poisoned, and use a needle full of poison to stick the man" (Alderman, 2016, p. 18).

A witch would further assault a man who had been flirting with the lady. This woman was bothered by the man's actions, using her strength to assault the man. Furthermore, women who were victims of sexual violence experienced additional physical violence as described, "And Roxy got the man at the throat, just under the jaw using a metal blade to slice the voice box. The man's mouth fell slackly open and made choking sounds. However, the man was still breathing and could not speak" (Alderman, 2016, p. 31).

Women who experienced sexual violence would fight back against the perpetrator. After discovering their power, the women would refuse to let the offenders take advantage. The following quote describes several examples of physical aggression, "The man was not supposed to say the mum's name. Roxy got the man across the throat, and the man screamed, saying, "Fuck. Fuck. Fuck" (Alderman, 2016, p. 57).

Roxy exacted revenge on the individual who murdered the mother. The revenge took the form of physical violence experienced by the murderer. The second retaliation was carried out by ladies who reside beneath the bridge, as evidenced in the following passage, "The women of Delhi had discovered a new tactic and found that electrifying a jet of water aimed at attackers could deliver lethal shocks. With hands in the spouts, the women unleashed death from the fingertips resembling the Goddess walking the earth" (Alderman, 2016, p. 146).

Victimized by patriarchy, women found an avenue to retaliate against men using electrical power. Women possessed the strength to wield against their enemies as the gender was no longer depicted as weak. In "*The Power*", Jocelyn cautioned Dakota against provoking physical assault. Jocelyn asserted women's collective show of strength in solidarity with those oppressed under bridges and deprived of water (Alderman, 2016, p. 147).

Women retaliated against men who posed a threat to their safety, as depicted in the statement, "Jocelyn pushed Dakota out of the way, leaned down, and gave the man a jolt in the head. This was to teach the man what would happen when the man messes with the women" (Alderman, 2016, p. 234). Additionally, women were not only defensive from threats but also aided the community, as described in the following passage:

As the ladies approached closer, the individual addressed the women, stating, "The man was not sure what the ladies witnessed, but a blow was delivered to the woman on the back of the neck. It was a fair exchange with a strike made, plain and simple." Magda, Marinela, Veronyka, and Irina seized the man's limbs, directing power onto the surface of the skin, leading to scars and markings, penetrating the flesh, loosening and twisting the joints. (Alderman, 2016, p. 345)

Women who rejected the idea of men mistreating the community often evolved as heroes or aides, leveraging their strength to confront men. This emphasized that when women possessed power, greater influence was used and exerted significant control over men.

Sexual Violence from Women

Men may be sexually abused due to patriarchy, as described in the following passage, "the woman sitting on the man's chest applied the palm to the genitals with a low hum of spark. Despite the man's muffled screams and attempts to escape, the pain was not too severe. Roxy inflicted similar acts on men ostensibly for amusement. The man's reaction was predictable with the arousal similar to a betrayal or foolishness" (Alderman, 2016, p. 316). In response to attacks on the camps, women retaliated by perpetrating sexual violence against the men.

The Lowered Status of Men

Another impact on men when women have power is their counterparts' lesser degree of control. The men would not be trusted in the public or private sectors. This influence was more severe than that felt by women, as men had historical dominance over women. Subsequently, the men were merely perceived as individuals who could only accomplish something with women's approval and assistance. Restrictions were imposed on men's activities, such as driving cars and owning businesses, while women even had the authority to use foreign journalists and photographers. Even assemblies were regulated, with men only permitted to assemble in groups larger than three when a woman was present (Alderman, 2016, p. 273).

Murder

The most heinous consequence of patriarchy was murder. When women felt oppressed and angered by men's actions,

they aimed for vengeance through killing, as described in the following passage.

"The woman put a hand to Primrose's temples and killed the individual (Alderman, 2016, p. 58). Subsequently, the woman tipped the man back into the pool and lit it up once, making the scenario appear as though the man had a heart attack, fell in, shot, and drowned. The lady then sat for a bit, feeling the power within, crystalline and complete, that something was killing Newland. (Alderman, 2016, p. 228)

Roxy exacts retribution on those responsible for the mother's murder by killing the two individuals who murdered the mum. Roxy pursued justice, and the men should also be killed when the mother was murdered. Women showed remarkable strength due to the knowledge of how to use the power to be protective or seek revenge. God gave women strength to be defensive, as observed in Jocelyn's experience:

Jocelyn's skin twitched because of excitement. It worked better than ever since Mother Eve cured her, showing why the miracle occurred. The aim was to save her from an evil man attempting to kill her. (Alderman, 2016, p. 342)

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Naomi Alderman described the cruelty of patriarchal actions experienced by women in the novel "*The Power*". The representation of patriarchy appeared in the form of physical and sexual violence, as well as the brutal murder of women, just as Kaharuddin et al. (2024) suggested. However, women are not always victims in this Novel, as they are the gender that receives strength from God. This strength enabled the women to take revenge against men, causing men to experience the consequences of patriarchal actions perpetrated.

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