



**RECONSTRUCTION OF PATRIARCHY THROUGH MATRIARCHY: A
CRITIQUE OF GENDERED POWER STRUCTURES IN NAOMI
ALDERMAN'S *THE POWER***

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JANUARY 2025

ÇANKAYA UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES MASTER'S THESIS

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ABSTRACT

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ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES MASTER'S THESIS

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Berkem SAĞLAM

January 2025, 130 pages

This thesis explores the power dynamics in Naomi Alderman's novel, *The Power*, built between genders following a power reversal from patriarchy to matriarchy due to women's sudden acquisition of electrical power. The shift in society favouring women is dealt with by focusing on women's representation in religion, the media, and politics. Michel Foucault's theories on power provide the infrastructure for discussing the nature of power throughout this thesis. Louis Althusser's framework of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) helps to describe how certain institutions in *The Power* perpetuate ideologies and shape matriarchal culture and politics. Kate Millett's ideas on gender and Judith Butler's views on the performativity of gender support the aim of this thesis to highlight the double standards and fragility of gender norms dictated by society. By examining the religious shift, this thesis explores how religion serves as both a tool of empowerment and a means of legitimizing new power structures by granting a superior position to the previously oppressed group. Similarly, the media's role is scrutinized for its pivotal function in shaping public perception and reinforcing the emerging matriarchy. Also, political changes, powerful women's ambitions and the strategic use of females' physical power further demonstrate the complexities of governance in a dystopia reversed in gender dominance. Although Alderman creates a feminist dystopia where women overpower men, she does not suggest that this world is better than the

patriarchal one. The author mirrors the current situation of women being oppressed by patriarchy by shifting the receivers of violence and oppression from women to men in her novel. By showing that merely changing the holders of power only perpetuates the cycle of oppression, Alderman reveals the inherent problems with the notion of power.

Key Words: Naomi Alderman, power, matriarchy, patriarchy, state apparatuses, gender



ÖZET

ATAERKİLİĞİN ANAERKİLİK ÜZERİNDEN YENİDEN İNŞASI: NAOMİ ALDERMAN'IN GÜÇ ADLI ESERİNDE CİNSİYETÇİ GÜÇ YAPILARININ ELEŞTİRİSİ

AKIN TAZEGÜNEY, NİLÜFER

İNGİLİZ EDEBİYATI VE KÜLTÜR İNCELEMELERİ YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

Danışman: Dr. Öğr. Gör. Berkem SAĞLAM

Ocak 2025, 130 sayfa

Bu tez, Naomi Alderman'ın *Güç* adlı romanında, kadınların aniden elektrik gücüne sahip olmasıyla ataerkillikten anaerkilliğe dönüşen iktidarın ardından cinsiyetler arasında yeniden inşa edilen güç dinamiklerini incelemektedir. Bu tezde, toplumdaki kadın lehine değişim, kadınların din, medya ve siyasetteki temsiline odaklanılarak ele alınmaktadır. İktidarın doğasını incelemek için altyapısal temel oluşturmak üzere Michel Foucault'nun iktidar üzerine kavramına başvurulmuştur. Louis Althusser'in Devletin İdeolojik Aygıtları ve Devlet'in Baskıcı Aygıtları çerçevesi, iktidardaki belirli kurumların ideolojileri nasıl şekillendirip sürdürdüğünü açıklamaya yardımcı olmaktadır. Kate Millett'in toplumsal cinsiyet ve Judith Butler'in toplumsal cinsiyetin performatifliği üzerine görüşleri, bu tezin toplum tarafından dikte edilen toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının çifte standardını ve kırılganlığını vurgulama amacını desteklemektedir. Bu tez, dini değişimi inceleyerek, dinin nasıl hem bir güçlendirme hem de daha önce ezilen gruba üstün bir konum vererek yeni güç yapılarını meşrulaştırma aracı olarak hizmet ettiğini araştırmaktadır. Benzer şekilde, medyanın rolü de kamu algısını şekillendirmedeki ve ortaya çıkan anaerkilliği pekiştirmedeki önemli işlevi açısından incelenmektedir. Ayrıca, siyasi değişimler, güçlü kadınların hırsları ve kadınların fiziksel gücünün stratejik kullanımı, cinsiyet egemenliğinin tersine döndüğü bir distopyada siyasi yönetimin aldığı karmaşık hali

daha da gözler önüne sermektedir. Ancak, Alderman kadınların erkeklere üstün geldiği feminist bir distopya yaratsa da, bu dünyanın ataerkil dünyadan daha iyi olduğunu öne sürmez. Yazar, romanında şiddet ve baskının alıcılarını kadınlardan erkeklere kaydırarak kadınların ataerkillik tarafından ezildiği mevcut duruma ayna tutar. Alderman, yalnızca iktidar sahiplerini değiştirmenin baskı döngüsünü devam ettirdiğini göstererek, iktidar kavramının doğasında var olan sorunları ve günümüzde iktidarın kadınlar üzerindeki suiistimalinin sonuçlarını ortaya koyar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Naomi Alderman, iktidar, anaerkillik, ataerkillik, devletin ideolojik ve baskıcı aygıtları, toplumsal cinsiyet



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Assistant Prof. Dr. Berkem Sağlam. Her detailed and prompt responses throughout this journey have not only shaped my work significantly but also bolstered my confidence immeasurably. I am profoundly thankful for her guidance and support. I am also immensely grateful to Prof. Dr. Özlem Uzundemir for her constructive and detailed feedback. Her course titled “(ELL 580) Concepts in Theory and Criticism” has been a great journey for me, illuminating the complex philosophies that underpin literary studies, which enriched my understanding and appreciation of the field. Likewise, my heartfelt thanks go to Assistant Prof. Dr. Selen Aktari for her calming support and insightful feedback, which were instrumental in refining my thesis. My appreciation extends to Özge Üstündağ Güvenç, whose Research Methods and Academic Writing course significantly enhanced my confidence in writing academic papers. Her recommendation of Naomi Alderman’s *The Power* was pivotal in shaping the direction of my thesis, for which I am deeply grateful. Her spiritual support throughout this process felt truly heartfelt and was also immensely valued.

A special thank you to my best friend, Gülşen Altun, for being my soulmate across the miles—your friendship is a treasure. I am equally grateful to Şule Akdoğan Kılınç, Zeynep Saçan, Gökçe Arslan Aşan, Ezgi Mirioğlu, Hülya Can, Şenay Karademir, and Çiler Akyüz Penbegül. Your collective spirit of “one for all, all for one” has been a pillar of strength for me. Associate Prof. Dr. Tolunay Ozanemre Yayla and Dr. Yavuz Yayla made my intellectual journey a lot more fun and engaging thanks to their deep insights into philosophy and their unique way of friendship; I have always felt your sincere support for me. Thank you to Şadiye Deniz Bilgiç and Sinem Maden for sharing both laughter and tears with me during my most challenging times. My thanks also extend to Zuhall Kul and Esra Çaylı for being constant reminders of my youth and joy, and for always being there. I must also extend a special note of thanks to Ebru Yeğen, Sevilay Kaplan Altun, and Gülçin Yıldırım, with whom I have shared not only an academic path but also a professional one since our days at Çankaya

University's Modern Languages and Preparatory School Departments. We have walked through this journey together, and you know exactly what I mean.

I am deeply grateful to Nazan İnce, whose camaraderie and insight enriched my journey through challenges that we both faced. Discussing every aspect with someone who understood so profoundly was not only comforting but also invigorating. Nazan's presence made navigating these experiences more willing and meaningful, reminding me how fortunate I am to have such a supportive colleague.

I owe a profound debt of gratitude to my parents, Aysel Akın and Cahit Akın, whose endless support has been the foundation of my life's work. Your belief in me has been unwavering and has carried me through. My brother Kemal Akın, and my sister Ayşegül Çelik, speaking "the same language" with you is priceless.

To my husband, Eray Can Tazegüney, your support in managing daily chores and sharing the load of childcare has been invaluable. Your efforts, even if occasionally adding complexity, have helped me maintain my focus on this thesis. I love you more than I can express with words, regardless of the rollercoaster we ride together at times.

Finally, to my children, Mercan Devrim Tazegüney and Deniz Ural Tazegüney, your unconditional love sustains me. I feel incredibly fortunate to be your mother and am deeply committed to making up for the time spent apart during this period. My deepest wish is for you to grow up in a world that values equality for all and to become individuals who lead by example in shaping a better society.

This thesis not only represents my academic aspirations but also embodies the collective spirit and support of each one of you. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF NONPLAGIARISM	III
ABSTRACT	IV
ÖZET.....	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I SUBVERSION OF MALE HEGEMONY IN RELIGION BY MOTHER EVE.....	25
CHAPTER II DEFYING PATRIARCHY VIA THE MEDIA.....	48
2.1 TUNDE’S LENS: MEDIA AS A TOOL OF DOCUMENTATION AND MANIPULATION	49
2.2 OTHER MEDIATIC AGENTS OF MATRIARCHY: ADVERTISEMENTS, KRISTEN AND TOM	68
CHAPTER III WOMEN HARNESSING POLITICAL POWER: THE MATRIARCHAL POLITICAL CONTROL OF MARGOT CLEARY	74
CONCLUSION	101
REFERENCES	109
CURRICULUM VITAE	119

INTRODUCTION

Naomi Alderman was born in London in 1974 into a family with a Jewish background. Her father, Geoffrey Alderman, is an academic specialist in Anglo-Jewish history. Due to her religious upbringing in a Jewish community, she grew up as a religious person but lost her faith in her adult life. Alderman explains that “[g]iving up *Orthodox Judaism* was the major event of my early 30s, an unravelling and reknitting of self that took me the best part of a decade to feel complete, solid and peaceful again” (2018). As Armitstead suggests, “[t]hough no longer a believer, Alderman has continued to be fascinated by religion” (2016) and has explored topics related to religion in many of her novels. In addition to writing significant works of literature, she has also written popular digital games such as “Zombie Run!” and “Perplex City” and scripts for TV series. Her series scripts include “Doctor Who” and “The Walking Dead: Dead Run.” Alderman's work in digital media has allowed her to demonstrate her literary talent on a different platform and has earned her a large fan base. Alderman's literary works are often based on themes relating to gender roles and power relations. Besides *The Power*, the subject of this thesis, her other important works include *Disobedience* (2006), *The Lessons* (2010), *Doctor Who: Borrowed Time* (2011), *The Liars' Gospel* (2012), and *The Future* (2023), all of which focus on the subversion of traditional expectations of patriarchal societies.

In her first novel, *Disobedience*, Alderman depicts a highly religious Jewish community in the north of London in which two women named Ronit and Esti were in love with each other when they were teenagers, something strictly forbidden in that community. Although they do not see each other for many years, after Ronit's coming back to the city for her father's funeral, they reconcile and realize they still love each other. Their intimacy disturbs their community. Esti realizes that she wants to be herself, and despite her pregnancy, she demands her freedom from her husband, who is also a religious leader in the community like Ronit's father was. The two women break their chains from patriarchal societal constructions by going against religious and social expectations in this novel. From this perspective, *Disobedience* aligns with

The Power in its critical examination and deconstruction of deeply ingrained patriarchal values.

In *The Liar's Gospel*, Alderman tells the story of Yehoshuah, the historical name of Jesus, from the perspectives of four different characters who witnessed his death. The first is his mother Mary; the others are two of his disciples, Judas and Caiaphas; and lastly, Barrabas, the notorious prisoner set free in place of Yehoshuah. They all give a different account of what is told in the Bible. Alderman implies through their narratives that religious diversity results from the constructed nature of religion, a notion that is consistent with her jesting, "*I like a bit of blasphemy*" (Armitstead 2016). She says,

"They [the characters in the novel] all lie for their own reasons but somehow that seems quite true to me... Let's say a fundamentalist religion would like us to believe that there is one firm place to stand and we are standing upon it. And we know what is correct, but the truth is there's no firm place to stand. Everybody has their own view of how events in the world have taken place." (Hachette Book Group)

In *The Power*, too, Alderman highlights the malleability and the constructed nature of religious systems by deconstructing the "firm place" on which rests the norms of patriarchy. Allie in *The Power* becomes Mother Eve, the founder of a new religion favouring women, by shaping events using her religious knowledge to serve her agenda. Despite their unique settings and different contexts, both novels explore power, subvert established narratives, and present complex characters and ethical questions by presenting the possible outcomes of such challenges on societies and individuals.

Alderman's latest novel, *The Future*, published in 2023, is about a group of elites who hold the power in their hands thanks to their financial means. It is a dystopian thriller speculating on what the future would look like with advanced technology dominated by a group of rich people. In this respect, in *The Future*, Alderman is disguises similar issues discussed in *The Power*. As it is suggested,

"[The Future's] central questions are nevertheless a variation on the same theme: what happens when all the power, including the power to survive the end of the world, is concentrated in the hands of a select few? If it is our curse, as a species, to imagine the future, are we capable of imagining a better one, and what would we be willing to sacrifice for it?" (Merritt 2023)

In this sense, it could be argued that *The Future* is a kind of follow-up story to *The Power*, which was published seven years earlier. Despite this thematic continuity, *The Future* has not yet garnered the same level of acclaim as *The Power*. Nevertheless, Naomi Alderman's works reveal a consistent interest in themes of power, gender, and belief. Her narratives challenge readers to reconsider the established norms of the patriarchal order and to imagine new possibilities for social and personal transformation.

This thesis will focus exclusively on Alderman's *The Power* to examine the interceptions of gender and power in religion, media, and politics. The objective of this thesis is to analyze this novel through the lens of various theoretical frameworks, including Michel Foucault's perspectives on power dynamics and hierarchical constructs, Judith Butler's exploration of gender fluidity, Kate Millett's critique of patriarchy and sexual politics and Louis Althusser's Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses. This comprehensive examination seeks to illustrate Alderman's defiance of patriarchal power structures by creating a parody of it, evident in areas such as religion, finance, politics, and the discourse of the media, which systematically subordinate women while problematizing the notion of power and suggesting the non-viability of advocating for a gynocentric alternative as a solution. This thesis underscores the critical importance of gender equality as the cornerstone for achieving genuine social equilibrium.

In 2017, *The Power* was honored with the esteemed Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction, a highly regarded literary award in the UK. Additionally, it was selected as the Book of the Year by *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer*, and *The Times*, and this achievement further solidified its acclaim and recognition in the literary world. By some critics, it was regarded as "*an instant classic of speculative fiction*" (Jordan 2016). This novel is a feminist dystopian narrative about a future time when young women start to have physical power thanks to a new organ called a skein along their collarbones that produces electricity. Naomi Alderman crafts a framed narrative in which it seems as if the novel is written by a male author. The novel is framed with letters in the beginning and ending that are exchanged between Neil Adam Armon (an anagram for Naomi Alderman), the implied author, and an influential female figure named Naomi, who is Naomi Alderman's fictional self. Neil sends a copy of his unpublished novel titled "The Power" to Naomi, who has the authority to get this work published. He adopts the persona of a member of The Men Writers Association to

correspond with Naomi 5,000 years in the future, where men are no longer esteemed as skilled writers. Naomi Alderman sarcastically portrays the recent situation of women writers through Neil because “[Neil’s] letters read as obsequious as those of real-world women academics and writers forced to beg approval from more established men” (Garrett 2017). He maintains his deferential and circumspect manners in the face of Naomi’s flippant, condescending, and arrogant attitude towards him, which verifies his lack of authority against her. Naomi says to Neil in response to his email:

“I’ve seen you’ve included some scenes with male soldiers, male police officers and ‘boy crime gangs’...you saucy boy!... I’d rather enjoy this ‘world run by men’ you’ve been talking about. Surely a kinder, more caring and—dare I say it?—more sexy world than the one we live in.” (Alderman 2017: x)

Her response demonstrates that patriarchy has long been the established form of societal order in Naomi and Neil’s time. Her playful use of the phrase “saucy boy” adds an element of irony and highlights the reversal of power dynamics presented in the novel by reminding the condescending use of the word “girl” in misogynistic contexts. Furthermore, her statement about potentially enjoying a world run by men that is “kinder, more caring, and—dare I say it?—more sexy” subverts the assumptions and stereotypes associated with gender roles by assigning what are today’s female characteristics to men.

The story starts with Neil Adam Armon’s first draft titled “The Power, A Historical Novel.” In this historical novel, girls start having electrical power as they reach puberty, and they can transfer/awaken it in older women if they wish to. This awakening is an evolutionary response to the violence that women have previously been victims of. Girls can perform it (preferably) on men to zap them for protection against them, to give them jolts for sexual pleasure, or even to electrocute them for necessity or pleasure, “because they can” (Alderman 2017: 179), highlighting the corruptive nature of holding power. The story is told mainly through the perspectives of four main characters, through third-person narration. These characters are Roxanne “Roxy” Monke; Margot Cleary; Allison Montgomery (Allie or Mother Eve, as she is often referred to by the narrator); and finally Tunde, the only male character who is given a narrative voice in the story. Roxy, who becomes the female counterpart of her father, who runs illegal businesses, is a feisty young woman with the most power and assertion. Allie, who later proclaims herself to be Mother Eve, is a foster child who

escaped home after killing her stepfather, who was abusing her psychologically and sexually. She becomes a religious leader, preaching the imperative of a matriarchal society and claiming that God is not a “He,” but a “She.” Tunde, a Nigerian journalist working for CNN, both chronicles and admires the global emergence of women's power, documenting its societal impact. Margot is an older female character who, as an American governor, plays an important role by establishing training facilities for girls to harness their newfound abilities for the good of the government and thus legitimizing them. Margot Cleary has an eastern European counterpart in the novel: Tatiana Moskalev, the despotic ruler of the women's republic of Bessapara, near Moldova. She becomes an ambitious leader who sees no problem in treating men with humiliation and cruelty. As the story progresses, the paths of these 4 main characters and also that of Tatiana cross, and each of them begins to question the phenomenon of power and its relationship with gender.

Alderman has stated that she had written the first version of the story through the mouth of a single female character, but then threw that version out thinking that giving voice to different characters and making one of the main characters male would transfer her message more effectively, saying that *“I think [Tunde] is the nicest person in the book [which] makes my point for me, and... if I didn't have a male perspective in the book at the start, I would have no female perspective at the end”* (PBS NewsHour). Tunde offers a male perspective that empathizes with the agony and endeavours of women in reclaiming power from the patriarchy. Even though he is mistreated by some of the female characters throughout the novel, he supports women's movements and believes that they deserve to be heard. By including a male perspective, Alderman aims at reaching a male audience, thus highlighting the complexity of power dynamics and the significance of understanding them from various angles.

Feminist dystopias scrutinize how gendered aspects of social control work on women. Through exaggeration, they amplify and satirize the unequal statuses of men and women in holding power in different aspects of social life. In fact,

“[t]he feminist dystopias portray patriarchal ‘hells’ of oppression, discrimination, and violence against women, thus mapping our contemporary social environment... On one level, these fictions offer an antidote to the banalization of misogyny, which still constitutes a pervasive evil in our society.” (Cavalcanti 1999: 1)

Cavalcanti highlights that feminist dystopias disclose the deep-rooted misogyny in society by demonstrating extreme versions of gender oppression. These stories aim to increase awareness about the everyday injustices women face and encourage a challenge against them. Feminist dystopias are also “... *a potent tool for feminist imaginative projects that are the necessary first steps in undertaking the cultural and social transformations that are the aims of the feminist political enterprise*” (Hollinger 2003: 128). Hollinger's argument supports Cavalcanti's by highlighting the importance of feminist dystopias as a reflection of society's flaws. Therefore, they play an important role in the feminist cause to alter society for women because these narratives act as a spark for visualizing and striving for a fairer future.

As Hollinger suggests, although “...*many feminist theorists and critics have tended to overlook it, discounting it as a form of escapist popular fiction*” (2003: 131), the role of feminist speculative fiction is crucial in facilitating the visibility of women in literature. Literature has historically been a crucial platform for women to express their experiences and challenge societal norms. Alderman, too, places her work “*in the grand tradition of feminist science fiction*” (PBS NewsHour), as it includes many characteristics, elements, and tropes of this genre such as its dramatic reversal of traditional gender roles, challenging existing patriarchal structures and exploring societal norms and the dynamics of oppression. Raso agrees, stating, “[c]ontrary to what contemporary readers may consider as an excess of political correctness typical of our times, Alderman is the heiress of a large genealogy of SF writers...” (2023: 71). Margaret Atwood, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy and Sheri S. Tepper are among those who have written influential feminist speculative fiction.

The Power by Alderman is often studied together with *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood regarding gender roles and partly because of Margaret Atwood's influence on this particular novel. In fact, *The Power* could be thought of as an “‘*Atwoodian*’ ... [or] ‘*Atwoodesque*’ novel” (Armitstead 2016) because

“... [n]ature and power are Atwoodian chronotopes, a chronotope being a cluster of devices that defines a novel as a certain kind of novel, as having been written by a particular author, and as having roots in its own milieu.” (Hengen 1999: para. 1)

Girls' skeins in *The Power* and the limited fertility in *The Handmaid's Tale* are natural biological phenomena that cause social orders to change, ultimately shaking balances of power, though in different directions. That is to say, *The Power*, like Atwood's canonical dystopian work, also includes these important concepts of nature and power.

The Handmaid's Tale is a very important novel in the genre of female dystopia. This story tells the story of a nation in a nightmarish future world known as the Republic of Gilead, where women are deprived of their rights and subjected to oppressive gender roles. In the novel, fertility rates among both men and women have substantially decreased because of the environmental pollution and diseases caused by industrial development. Being one of the few who is still fertile, the novel's protagonist, Offred, becomes a breeding girl among a few other chosen ones whose duty is to bear children for the ruling class. Atwood's novel depicts the horrors of a theocratic and patriarchal society and explores themes of control, reproductive rights, and the resilience of the human spirit. *The Power* reads like a reversal of Offred's story, which depicts the total oppression of women under theocracy. Margaret Atwood's most famous dystopian work came to prominence again just before the publication of *The Power* (2016), albeit under unfortunate circumstances related to the negative interference of American laws to limit the rights of women in America from other countries to benefit from health insurance plans that provide abortion services. Thirty-two years after its publication, the novel became a success again and was adapted for television, winning eight Emmys. "...[A]t the Women's March in Washington, a protester held a sign bearing a slogan that spoke to the moment: 'make Margaret Atwood fiction again'" (Mead 2017). This is important because the dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale* started to have a resonance with contemporary issues regarding women's rights and the abuse of power, and the world needed to see things turned upside down, this time favouring women. Naomi Alderman penned *The Power* seemingly in response to *The Handmaid's Tale*, exploring the concept of "what if women took control?" In fact, she wrote this novel through Margaret Atwood's mentorship and guidance. Alderman says;

"The one thing Margaret directly suggested was the idea of a convent... I'm really interested in who gets to tell the story, and of course the last time we rescued ourselves from the dark ages, monks were very important. Think how much of what we do is just copying out the story again with different characters and a different place, and how much we are shaped by that. And God knows, Hollywood is full of repeated stories."
(as cited by Armitstead 2016)

The convent that Alderman mentions is the convent of nuns that admits girls ostracized because of their power and provides a shelter for them. Allie also finds comfort there until she is told by the laconic voice in her head to "own the place" (Alderman 2017:

46) by becoming the religious leader. The convent is, in a way, Mother Eve's birthplace, where she shows her wonders and influences her first disciples. This suggests that Atwood's input played a significant role in shaping the thematic and narrative direction of *The Power*. Alderman acknowledges Atwood's influence on this work in the acknowledgements part of the work, thanking Atwood by saying that "[she] believed in this book when it was barely a glimmer" (Alderman 2017: 340). By inverting the patriarchy told in *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Power* "might read as the revenge fantasy of Gilead's women" (Miller 2020: 403). However, the main distinction between these novels is not only the power of matriarchy over patriarchy but also the emphasis on the concept of power, suggesting that it is problematic as a whole without necessarily being limited to men. Therefore, *The Power* is a parody of patriarchy rather than a revenge story.

When asked where she got the inspiration for *The Power*, Alderman says that it was shortly after she had to end a relationship because she was "too strong for him... [and] insufficiently girly and vulnerable" (Steffens 2017). On her personal website, she recounts an anecdote of hers about it:

"I was on a Tube train a few years ago, in the middle of a terrible breakup. And as the train pulled into the station, I saw a poster on the platform advertising some thriller with the face of a beautiful, terrified woman weeping. And something just broke inside me because it felt like the world was saying to me 'hey, this thing that you're doing right now, this terror and crying, we like that. Do more of that. We're turned on by it. Good girl.' And I thought in that moment: what would the world have to be like so I could walk onto the Tube and see a photo of a beautiful man weeping in terror, as if that was normal and desirable? What is the smallest thing that would have to change? And the whole idea turned up in my head, just like that." (Naomi Alderman)

Having witnessed a stereotypical depiction of women as being vulnerable in the subway station, Alderman describes here the deeply ingrained stereotypes about genders and ensuing inequalities, inspiring her to create this novel. The smallest thing that might bring about change is endowing women with physical power and superiority, and this leads to turmoil in gender and biopolitics in the novel. The consequences of such a reversal are displayed in every aspect of life, including religion, politics, media, financial affairs, and sexual dynamics. As Alderman claims,

"... people call it [The Power] a dystopia. But. Nothing happens to a man in this book that isn't happening to a woman somewhere in the world right now. I promise. So...

if this is a dystopia, does that mean we live in a dystopia right now? I think probably yes.” (as cited by Jarvis 2020: 5)

In her novel, by exaggerating the limitations on men imposed by women with political and military power and the consequential atrocities suffered by men, Alderman aims to underscore the absurdity of such a construction, suggesting that her story is merely an inversion of what women are suffering in the present system. As Sen suggests,

The women of the real world can effortlessly place themselves in a host of familiar situations as depicted in Alderman’s The Power, with the same threats and perils that the empowered fictional women can resist, while the real-world women have to give in. For instance, instead of women being afraid to be catcalled, harassed, or assaulted by men on the streets at night, we see men and boys being fearful of girls in The Power.” (2022: 144-145)

An example for this reversal is when Roxy’s brother Ricky is gang-raped by three women, he is physically and emotionally hurt, and feels ashamed of it. Her brothers and Ricky’s mother Barbara ask Roxy’s help in finding the women who have done it to him, as she is the most powerful and influential in the family now. The narrator says,

“they took turns on him... one of them got him in the throat and he couldn’t make another sound until they were finished. The whole thing took half an hour. Ricky thought he might die there. In between the black bags and thick grease coating the paving stones. ...And his face fish-white and his lips blue. Ricky kept very still until it was over, and didn’t say and didn’t do nothing. Just waited for it to be done.” (Alderman 2017: 194-195)

This scene is likely to be read from the mouth of an assaulted woman in the real world, which may allow a male reader to empathize with a woman who had such a horrible experience. When Roxy finds the girls and confronts the three women who raped Ricky, one of them says that *“he bloody loved it. ... He was asking for it”* (Alderman 2017: 196-197). This excerpt highlights the concept of “asking for it,” which is often used to blame victims of sexual assault for the violence inflicted upon them. Crall and Goodfriend argue that *“[r]ape myths reinforce false beliefs about the definition of rape, who the victims of rape are, and how to prevent rape from occurring, ultimately shifting the blame from the perpetrator to the victim”* (2016: 15-16). The parody in this excerpt from the novel operates through a dual coding system, where its meaning is interpreted based on the cultural stories it references. Alderman employs this scene *“as a necessarily haunting reminder of the physical realities suffered by women”* (Miller 2020: 421), pointing out the rape myth of “asking for it” and criticizing the

common reaction of people who blame the rape victim rather than the perpetrator. This rape scene, along with others in the novel committed against men, are in fact critical reflections of the wider cultural context regarding sexual violence that women suffer from in the real world.

The character of Tatiana Moskalev also provides a strong example of how Alderman creates a feminist dystopia in *The Power*, because this character demonstrates the reversal of traditional gender roles and deconstruction of patriarchy through female dictatorship. Before she takes over the power from her husband, who suspiciously dies from a sudden heart attack—probably electrocuted by Tatiana, women in a rural town of Moldova are kept as prisoners in a dark basement, and they are treated under inhumane conditions until a teenage girl transmits the power to them. This illustrates the disadvantageous condition of women in Eastern-European countries such as Romania and Moldova, which are notorious for sex trafficking of women; as the narrator says, “*Moldova is the world capital of human sex trafficking. There are a thousand little towns here with staging posts in basements and apartments in condemned buildings*” (Alderman 2017: 93). In the novel, women confined in basements represent women in the real world who are systematically and violently mistreated by men. Alderman refers to the normalization of sexual oppression and violence against women who are driven to prostitution through coercion or economic necessity to serve men’s interests. As Luce Irigaray argues, “[p]rostitution amounts to usage that is exchanged ... [the] nature [of a woman’s body] has been ‘used up,’ and has become once again no more than a vehicle for relations among men” (Irigaray 1985: 186). Therefore, the trafficked women in Moldova have both use value and exchange value because they are both used as sexual objects and exchanged among men. However, Alderman imagines a reversal of this ill fate of women in her speculative fiction, *The Power*. In one interview, Alderman says:

“If I could go and give to women being sex trafficked right now today in some dirty basement, waiting to be raped—if I could go and give them the power to electrocute people at will, even knowing that this might end badly, I would give it to them.” (Neary 2017)

Alderman radically reimagines power dynamics and suggests a desire to empower abused and marginalized women with this statement. Giving the trafficked women the ability to fight back against their oppressors subverts traditional narratives of female

victimhood. This perspective highlights the possibility of a world where women can exercise control and resist exploitation.

The captive women receive electrical power from the teenage daughter of a truck driver who brings these women stale bread and reports the situation to the owner of this house where these women are held prisoners. They pass this power on to each other and start practicing with their power in the dark. When one of the women is assaulted by an overseer, all the women attack and kill him. Afterwards, they take his keys and unlock each other from their chains.

“They kill every man in that house and they’re still not satisfied. ...The girl children [who have also been traded in the other cities of Moldova for forced prostitution] grow day by day until the power comes to their hands and they can teach the grown women. These things happen again and again and again; the change has happened too fast for the men to learn the new tricks they need.” (Alderman 2017: 93)

As apparent in this excerpt, women soon start to stand up for themselves and are reborn as oppressors instead of remaining as victims. Therefore, the power that they gain is a liberation tool from sexual violence, but it soon becomes an oppressive tool to be used against men. In this respect, the new matriarchal model mimics the patriarchal one while reversing it. As Cooke also discusses,

“Dualistic thought patterns automatically create opposing sides which exist unharmoniously as one is always observed as being superior to the other. Alderman’s The Power is no exception as female characters often perceive gender equity as a direct threat to their newly acquired power. In an attempt to ‘protect’ this power, extreme groups create policies which violate men’s human rights and then enforce these policies with their electrical power, often leading to deadly situations.” (2018: 19)

Rather than establishing an idealistic utopian society, women do not necessarily use the power for the good of everyone in society but abuse it profoundly once they get it. By getting the support of women in this country who are in a power frenzy, Tatiana Moskalev becomes the leader of Bessapara, the name of the matriarchal country that she reconstitutes from former Moldova. As the cruel female dictator there, Tatiana is an absurd embodiment of despotism who treats male individuals and female traitors with indignity. She also connives with her soldiers and *“gangs of women on the loose in the north near the border murdering and raping men at will”* (Alderman 2017: 258). Through Tatiana, the author draws a picture of a misandristic political regime in a fictional universe by importing the existing challenges and oppressions that women

face because of misogynistic political contexts that allow power imbalances based on gender. In fact, the new world is “*both hauntingly familiar and eerily divergent from the reality that we inhabit*” (Raso 2023: 66) for women because women create a copy of the patriarchy that they used to fight against. Five thousand years into the future, in Neil Adam Armon’s time, rather than implementing a change in the system, matriarchy transforms into a form of oppression. The times when men used to dominate women are not remembered, yet it is the same dialectical system in which only the victims have been replaced.

Naomi Alderman also reverses the existing political balances against patriarchy in *The Power* by prioritizing the empowerment of women and the establishment of a matriarchal society. In *Women in Power: World Leaders since 1960*, Hoogensen and Solheim examine the roles and situations of women in politics by giving a wide range of examples from around the world. For example, Margaret Thatcher, the first female political leader of a main political party in the United Kingdom, served as prime minister between 1979 and 1990. Yet, as Hoogensen and Solheim argue, she owes her position as the prime minister who has given the longest service to “[h]er coming from the conservative party and not being connected to any specific women’s issues [which] made her safe for established business and defense interests” (2006: 130). One of the main reasons for her long service was the fact that she was able to reassure the British ownership of the Falkland Islands in the 74-day-long undeclared war between Argentina and Britain in 1982 because it was an important sign of her military power, which is traditionally attributed to males.

Along with Thatcher, Kim Campbell in Canada and Angela Merkel in Germany also came to power to represent conservative parties. Because leadership positions are dominated by men even in relatively developed western and northern countries, women leaders have to maintain power by preserving the interests of their conservative societies that prioritize men and strict political measures that would not provide women with more space for economic and social growth. In this case, it can be argued that female leaders become the voices of patriarchy and are robbed of their female identities to gain and hold their political positions. However, in *The Power*, in addition to Tatiana Moskalev, the American senator Margot Cleary challenges patriarchal norms of leadership by prioritizing femaleness and female power. On the other hand, they are also similar to patriarchal leader figures as they silence, dominate, and ignore the other gender. Through Tatiana and Margot, Alderman highlights “*the*

shortfalls of all binary epistemological paradigms... [and the fact that] women are still under the thumb of patriarchal stereotypes, especially when it comes to their access to political power” (Raso 2023: 78). Therefore, while clearly depicting the present conditions of women imposed by men, Alderman problematizes binary oppositions in *The Power* by suggesting,

“...there is no guarantee that women always make a positive difference in terms of limiting military options, reducing arms, and promoting peaceful solutions to seemingly intractable world problems and sources of regional conflict.” (Hoogensen and Solheim 2006: 130)

However, it is critical to recognize that the suffering women have endured is a direct result of this binary thinking and to reexamine the deeply ingrained gender norms that give rise to unequal gender relations and the ensuing upheavals.

Chapter I highlights the role of religion in creating hegemony through Allie (Mother Eve), who starts as a disadvantaged and abused foster child but gradually dominates religion and politics using religion as a power tool, eventually oppressing men. Drawing from Antonio Gramsci and particularly Althusser, I will refer to religion as both a Repressive State Apparatus and an Ideological State Apparatus that help create and maintain hegemony, and I will try to explain how *The Power* utilizes religion to create a female-dominated order in society. In order to explain power relations between men and women, Michel Foucault and Kate Millett will be discussed with a focus on religion. I will also briefly mention Judith Butler for how Allie mimics and performs the role of a prophet, which is traditionally assigned to men. Chapter II deals with the role of the media in establishing (a matriarchal) ideology and hegemony by referring to the aforementioned theoreticians with a focus on the journalist Tunde, who is the only major male character. Additionally, the second chapter will analyze the roles of side characters Kristen and Tom, who are depicted as morning show TV presenters. Their portrayal and the evolving representation of gender over a decade, during which there is a significant shift in power dynamics, will be explored to illuminate changes in gender perceptions and roles. Chapter III focuses on the shift of patriarchal politics into a matriarchal one through another major character Margot Cleary’s firstly subtle but increasingly violent competition with Daniel Dandon, and the short aftermath of her ascent to political power, leading the world towards matriarchal apocalypse. This chapter aims to illustrate how politics, army, and financial power are utilised as Ideological State Apparatuses in establishing

matriarchy, yet ultimately replicating patriarchal politics by giving way to corruption and illegal deals, maintaining oppression on the other gender and gender non-conforming individuals.

In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett argues that male hegemony pervades every aspect of life. She uses the term ‘politics’ in a wider sense to “refer to the power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another” (2000: 23). By pointing out to the similarity between racial and gender issues, Millett suggests,

“...[t]he relationship between the races is indeed a political one which involves the general control of one collectivity, defined by birth, over another collectivity, also defined by birth. Groups who rule by birthright are fast disappearing, yet there remains one ancient and universal scheme that prevails in the area of sex. ...What goes largely unexamined (yet is institutionalized nonetheless) in our social order, is the birthright priority whereby males rule females.” (Millett 2000: 24–25)

In this excerpt, Millett indicates that any system based on birth is inherently political and reinforced through cultural norms, literature, and even language. These systems unfairly prioritize men and limit women.

Male-oriented domains such as history, politics and religion marginalize women and thus restrict them in gaining their rights. As radical feminists argue, women can overturn this male-constructed reality by eradicating patriarchy from its roots. In *The Power*, Alderman “provides an artistic realization of that desire. Unfortunately, the ferocity of matriarchal vengeance is catastrophic” (Lum 2023: 2). By pointing out the catastrophe caused by the unequal distribution of power—though women are given a higher position—Alderman suggests in a dramatic way that this fiction actually portrays women’s present situation. Although the narrative of *The Power* may sound like a utopia for some women, any system where one group is oppressed by another group is a dystopia.

Judith Butler, in her foundational work, *Gender Trouble*, contends that gender does not stem from an individual’s inherent characteristics. Instead, gender consists of the intricate behaviors and roles individuals perform, influenced by societal and cultural norms. She introduces the term “gender performativity” to explain this idea. Distinguishing between Butler’s concepts of “performance” and “performativity” is essential for understanding her work. For Butler, performance implies a deliberate act similar to that of a stage performer, such as an actor who portrays a character without

adopting this persona offstage. “Performativity,” on the other hand, involves deeply embedded cultural norms and signs that are repeatedly enacted, which makes their origins and validity difficult to track down. Butler asserts that gender identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through power dynamics and widely accepted social norms. As Butler argues:

“Identifying with a gender under contemporary regimes of power involves identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications by which they are insistently approximated. This ‘being a man’ and this ‘being a woman’ are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely.” (1993: 120-121)

Butler says that the body is shaped by culture as “male” or “female” with the presupposed characteristics. Drawing from Foucault, she says, *“the body is figured as a surface and the scene of a cultural inscription”* (Butler 2002: 165). History, *“as a relentless writing instrument”* (166), uses the body as a canvas and continuously creates cultures on it. However, in order to create an empty canvas for new inscriptions, the values attached to bodies must be destroyed. As Butler argues,

“In a sense, for Foucault, as for Nietzsche, cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page; in order for this inscription to signify, however, that medium must itself be destroyed—that is, fully transvaluated into a sublimated domain of values. Within the metaphors of this notion of cultural values is the figure of history...and the body as the medium which must be destroyed and transfigured in order for ‘culture’ to emerge.” (166)

For new cultural values about gender, the body must undergo metaphorical destruction or transformation.

The traditional understanding of gender difference rests on the forceful notion that it comes from biological differences given by nature, and for believers in God, it is inculcated by God. This kind of construction, believed to come from a superior order, is the reason that secures men’s favored position of dominance over women. To this end, Butler argues that such an order that has led to misogyny is inscribed in societies through iteration. This means that cultural practices regarding gender differences have been repeated for such a long time that they are naturalized and often go unsuspected. As a result, the notion and exertion of power as dominance serve “as

a more subtle structure of male privilege” (Karlberg 2005: 6). To exemplify this, many institutions value masculine traits such as competition and aggression over traditionally feminine traits such as being cooperative and caring. Unsurprisingly, males take advantage of rewards in public institutions. However, as Karlberg suggests,

“...even when women adopt aggressive and competitive attitudes, they have historically not received equivalent rewards for equivalent behaviors. Male expressions of aggression and competition have historically been rewarded because they have been viewed as natural and appropriate.” (6)

However, women have not received positive feedback or reward when they show the same traits because they have been deemed unnatural and inappropriate for women by the patriarchal culture, which does not grant much value to being caring and cooperative. In *The Power*, women start to be taken seriously when they exert their electrical power on men by showing how destructive they can be. Biological and anatomical difference represented by the female skein in this dystopian work replaces the phallus, which is deemed to grant men the power to be destructive in patriarchal thought.

The concept of deeply ingrained gender roles, or performativity as defined by Butler, bears resemblance to Plato’s allegory of the cave, which describes chained prisoners in a cave looking at shadows projected on a wall. These shadows symbolize the only reality known to the prisoners. As one of the prisoners escapes the cave and discovers that the shadows are not real, he goes back to the cave to tell his fellow prisoners about the real world outside the cave and the fact that the shadows are not real. The prisoners struggle to grasp or accept the escaped prisoner’s revelations. This analogy extends to the notion of gender in a similar manner. Individuals within a society perpetuate its culture across generations, gradually internalizing it as the fundamental influence shaping their lives and beliefs. In *The Power*, women escape the cave and see other possibilities, ultimately creating a new culture, or, to express it more appropriately, a new habitual misconception. Contrastingly, 5000 years later, in a time of established matriarchy, Neil Adam Armon endeavors to disrupt the roots of matriarchy by writing his book “The Power” and claiming that Mother Eve has not been a divine prophet but a self-proclaimed one. In this comparison, Neil claims the role of the escaped prisoner who emerges from the cave to enlighten his peers that men did not use to be dominated by women, but the religion established by Mother Eve shaped history in this way. The Neil character serves to describe the reality of women

in the present world by encapsulating some stereotypical behaviours, such as being apologetic and timid, which are traditionally attributed to women. In this respect, performativity relates to Neil Adam Armon and the fictional editor Naomi Alderman, both writers who exchange letters with each other about the former's novel titled "The Power." In their conversation, Neil accepts the superiority of Naomi as a female authority. It is a learned behavior through hundreds of years of repetition that has fabricated "*reality...as an interior essence; ...[and the fabrication of] a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies,...[so they] can be neither true nor false*" (Butler 2002: 174). The perceived reality that one gender is superior to another is a historically constructed illusion. Although Neil's main aim in writing *The Power* is to suggest the constructedness of the matriarchal system by providing a historical account of Mother Eve, he is careful in the choice of his words in correspondence with Naomi the fictional editor. On the other hand, the other fictional writer, Naomi Alderman, enjoys the perceived superiority of her gender by feeling free to make comments.

Given the thematic focus of this thesis on *The Power*, it is necessary to engage with Michel Foucault's pioneering contributions to the theoretical discourse on power. Foucault's ideas have certainly contributed to feminist studies in a broader sense, (also influencing Judith Butler in developing her theory of performativity), as he questions the transcendentalism of power by highlighting that power is in constant flux and not an eternal position held by a certain group. He suggests that "*...relations of power...have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play*" (1978a: 94). This means that power relations are capable of producing subjects who are integrated into a given dominant paradigm and who behave in a desirable and previously instructed way, either consciously or unconsciously. When things are repeated in the prescribed ways of practice for a long time, "[w]e see things as 'natural' or 'normal,' even though they are not, it is merely how we are taught to see things" (Gundersen 2021: 18). *The Power* illustrates the existing societal order that enforces male dominance across various aspects of life. However, when women start to have power, they repeat the same system of oppression on men and thus reiterate the patriarchal structure, albeit by shifting the victimized group. In other words, power produces the dominance of one sex over the other again in Alderman's novel.

Yet, Foucault rejects the concept of power being solely negative, depending on just prohibition, exclusion, and coercion. He says, "*Where there is power, there is*

resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1978b: 95). As this suggests, power produces resistance. Given that feminist dystopian works are a form of resistance against the patriarchy, they also exemplify the productive qualities of power. Also, the exclusion of women in many social and intellectual areas led to the reaction of certain women writers to produce texts that gradually increased the visibility of women’s problems.

Social control mechanisms often subtly impose certain constructed norms by manipulating feelings of conscience and shame in addition to coercion and force. Smaller social units, such as family, school, religious communities, and peers, also exert social pressure on members. Through these institutions, the subjects in a community, consciously or unconsciously, feel the pressure of being observed constantly, very much like the prisoners in panopticons designed by the architect and sociologist Jeremy Bentham in early 19th-century Britain. Borrowing from Bentham’s design of a prison with a tower in the middle, which gives prisoners the impression that they are constantly being watched, Foucault employs the panopticon as a metaphor for hierarchical, social, and institutional inspection to explain why people in a society act in socially approved patterns even when they are not viewed by an authority.

Dualistic patriarchal thought, both overtly and covertly, suggests the superiority of men over women. Therefore, it makes women feel that they are under constant surveillance, like prisoners in a panopticon. At the end of the observing end are mostly men and women with patriarchal ways of thinking, supporting oppressive norms against women. In *The Power* by Alderman, however, the receiving and providing ends of oppression change. Figuratively speaking, men are put into a panopticon, fearing and gradually internalizing that they are under constant surveillance starting after the Day of the Girls, or the cataclysm. This internalization leads to self-discipline in men. In Neil’s example again, Neil watches his own behaviors while talking to a female, who also happens to be in a superior position as the decision-maker. For example, he apologizes for attempting to contact his mentor, saying, “*Anyway, sorry, I’ll shut up now,*” and enthusiastically thanks her for her time: “*Thank you so much for this*” (Alderman 2017: x). Neil has internalized his inferiority so much that when he speaks against Naomi, he acts like the prisoners of the panopticon, who are constantly under observation. As Cooper also suggests, “[a]longside the panopticon is the confessional: the social urge to explain, justify, and seek forgiveness for intimate feelings, decisions, and actions” (1994: 438). Although

Naomi tries to be nice and encouraging towards Neil, the remains of the five-thousand-year-old matriarchy are so deeply ingrained and omnipresent that they lead to Neil's subconscious self-regulation and discipline.

In *The Power*, Alderman crafts a fictional reality in which men are deprived of their authority in every facet of life on both macro and micro levels. Through Allie/Eve, the female dominance in religion; via Margot and Tatiana, the female dominance in politics; and through Roxy, the female agency in physical and financial domains are portrayed, all of which can be thought of as macro-level stones of power. Through Tunde, the only main male character, Alderman showcases how the media is utilized to instigate a matriarchal order within society. However, although these major domains of society play a big role in maintaining or shifting ideologies, the oppression of men can be observed in every aspect of life, such as the choice of jobs, safety in the streets, credibility in authorship and so on. As Oksala suggests,

"...one should not start by looking for the center of power, or, for the individuals, institutions, or classes that rule, but should rather construct their 'microphysics of power' that focuses on the extremities: families, workplaces, everyday practices, and marginal institutions. One has to analyze power relations from the bottom up, not from the top down, and to study the myriad ways in which the power relations operate in different but intersecting capillary networks." (2016: 474)

One significant portrayal of the micro-oppression of men in the novel is in Neil and Naomi's correspondence. For instance, in Neil's present, five thousand years forward from today, he is insecure as a male author and feels obliged to please Naomi, a female editor in authority. It is understood in their correspondence that men have been marginalized and silenced for so long that the idea of soldiers, police, and authors being males leads to pornographic thoughts. For instance, Naomi tells Neil, *"I see you've included some scenes with male soldiers, male police officers and 'boy crime gangs,' just as you said you would, you saucy boy!"* (Alderman 2017: x). According to Naomi's reaction, it is understood that imagining men in professional positions of authority and physical dominance is sexually charged because it is a taboo in a matriarchal society. In an established system of matriarchy, such roles for men are considered so unusual that even the mere mention of it evokes a sense of taboo with an exotic and illicit fragrance. As Naomi the editor tells Neil:

"We were taught in school about women making men fight for entertainment—I think a lot of your readers will still have that in mind when you have those scenes where

men are soldiers in India or Arabia. Or those feisty men trying to provoke a war! Or gangs of men locking up women for sex... some of us have had fantasies like that! (Can I confess, shall I confess, that while thinking about this, I...no, no, I can't confess it.) It's not just me though, my dear. A whole battalion of men in army fatigues or police uniforms really does make most people think of some kind of sexual fetish, I'm afraid!" (Alderman 2017: 332)

Today, the number of female workers in these occupations is fairly low compared to that of men. Similarly, in the history of literature too, women authors have had to struggle to establish a place for themselves in this arena. In closer history, numerous female writers have felt the necessity to use male or ambiguous pen names. Two important examples are Nelle Harper Lee, the author of the American best-seller *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and the famous author of the world-famous *Harry Potter*, Joanne Rowling. Harper Lee dropped her first name because it had a feminine resonance, and J. K. Rowling went by initials only, as her publisher suggested that the novel was more likely to attract more male readers with a gender-ambiguous author name. Similarly, at the end of *The Power*, Naomi tells Neil that she needs to make some arrangements with others before the book is published, admitting that the story has potential. However, she subtly looks down on Neil's work because it is written by a man. Yet, as if she is a self-appointed guardian angel of Neil, and by relying on her reputation as a female writer with power, she comes up with a suggestion:

"I have one suggestion now. You've explained to me how anything you do is framed by your gender and that the frame is inescapable as it is nonsensical. Every book you write is assessed as part of 'men's literature'. So what I'm suggesting is just the response to that, really, nothing more. But there's a long tradition of men who've found a way out of that particular bind. You'd be in good company.

Neil, I know this might be very distasteful to you, but have you considered publishing this book under a woman's name?" (Alderman 2017: 339)

Alderman subverts misogynistic perceptions of authorship by saying that Neil's book is considered a marginal category of "men's literature" and that it would not attract more readers with a male name. In this instance, Alderman criticizes another aspect of women's oppression in today's world that concerns authorship.

Other practices of micro-level discrimination in *The Power* are also commonly observed after a greater number of girls start to have electrical power. In addition to the previously mentioned atrocious treatment of men in the novel, such as rape and harassment by some women, some other examples include sending boys to boys-only

schools to protect them from girls and making sure boys do not go out without a woman protector.

Foucault stands in opposition to the classical view of power, which is thought to operate from top to bottom. As mentioned earlier, rather than operating from just one center, power permeates in every aspect of life through,

“its infinitesimal mechanisms...and...these mechanisms of power have been—and continue to be—invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination.”

(Foucault 1980b: 99)

This does not mean that institutions do not play an important role in establishing power relations. This is more of saying that power relations, *“even if they are embodied and crystallized in... an institution, [are] to be found outside the institution”* (Foucault 2000: 343). Therefore, by crafting instances of men being dominated by women in numerous ways, not only by *“modulations of law and coercion”* (Foucault 2000: 343), Alderman refers to the systemic practice of male dominance over women in our present time. Such practices are so normalized and pervasive that they are often overlooked or unquestioned. Most aspects of gender dynamics are subtle and deeply ingrained in societies as parts of the routine, and challenging them is one of the aims of the female speculative fiction genre.

Foucault says that it is necessary to understand forms of resistance and opposition to understand a wider scope of power relations (2000: 329–330). First, they are transversal, meaning that they take place in every country. Secondly, *“[the] target of these struggles is power effects as such”* (2000: 330). This means that oppositions take place primarily because they lead to unequal and unjust treatment of the subordinated group more often than they bring about positive changes. In *The Power*, women start a revolution because they have been receiving bad treatment from the ardent supporters of patriarchy for quite a long time. Although the revolution starts as an egalitarian move to dismantle the historical injustices caused by patriarchy and ensure women’s safety and agency for their own lives, it leans towards revenge as women dominate all aspects of social and political life.

In addition, opposition and resistance are immediate struggles or direct confrontations. That refers to seeking answers and vengeance not necessarily from the ‘chief enemy’ but from the immediate exercisers of power. For example, Roxy kills the murderers of her mother and takes over the financial power from her father and her

brothers, while Allie kills her foster father, who harasses and beats her. Margot Cleary, on the other hand, jolts her rival Daniel Dandon live on TV during a debate for mayorship because of his misogynistic attitude. These female characters react to the immediate person who causes them misery. However, their actions find wider resonance with the larger female communities they interact with later on and change the male-dominant discourse into a female one.

These struggles are a challenge against restrictions imposed by power holders who create a disadvantaged group by identifying them in certain ways and separating them from others. As Foucault states, “[t]hese struggles are not exactly for or against the ‘individual’; but rather, they are struggles against the ‘government of individualization’” (2000: 331). In summary, oppressed groups struggle against forms of power that categorize them under classes by attaching a constructed truth to them in order to control them. Similarly, in *The Power*, the female characters’ newly discovered electrical powers threaten the established power systems that have historically classed women as the weaker sex. The characters in Alderman’s novel reject and subvert these forced identities.

Antonio Gramsci bases his theory of hegemony on the premise that people are ruled by ideas in addition to force. The dominant ruling class creates a “Weltanschauung,” or world view, and imposes it on the subjects in society as the inevitable norm. Rulers advertise the status quo as being beneficial to everyone, regardless of their social class. With this perception of norms, members of a society internalize political, social, economic, and religious ideas. As a result, they give their permission, or “consent,” to be ruled. As Gramsci explains,

“the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) that the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.” (1972: 12)

The idea of hegemony is related to the ideological relationships of control, dominance, and superiority among classes, which are maintained through ‘spontaneous consent.’ As this excerpt demonstrates, the majority accepts the rule of an elite group because of the prestige and important role of the ruling class in economic production. Their prestige builds trust over time and thus perpetuates the confidence of the ruling class. The discussion of hegemony and consent is related to *The Power* by Alderman because

it explains the present situation of women before the Day of the Girls, or the Cataclysm. This discussion also explains how men give their consent to be ruled by women in the future after women acquire power in every aspect of life thanks to their electrical power.

Building on these foundational ideas of hegemony and the role of ideology, Louis Althusser offers a further refinement and expansion of the concept of ideology. Althusser defines ideology as a concept that “*represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existences*” (2014: 256), namely, their world outlooks related to religion, politics, ethics, law, and other institutions.

Inspired by Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, Althusser introduced the concept of “State Apparatuses,” which serve to maintain ideological control in subtler ways. He divides State Apparatuses into two categories: Ideological State Apparatuses, (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). ISAs include a diverse variety of public and private institutions like families, religious institutions, the media, schools, and other cultural entities that largely operate on ideology. ISAs instill certain values, beliefs, and norms in individuals and thus regenerate the dominant ideology while making it seem natural and voluntary. RSAs, on the other hand, function predominantly through repression and coercion and include entities such as the police, the military, and judicial organs. ISAs can sometimes operate as an RSA. Although Althusser states that,

“What distinguishes the ISAs from the (Repressive) State Apparatus is the following basic difference: The Repressive State Apparatus functions ‘by violence’, whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function ‘by ideology,’” (2014:244)

He says that there is no apparatus that is ‘purely ideological’ or ‘purely repressive.’ Repressive apparatuses require an ideological base in the name of ‘values’ to maintain their cohesion and reproduction. Similarly, Ideological State Apparatuses involve a covert message of repression and coercion. Thus, it can be said that ISAs and RSAs are intertwined with each other and function together.

Althusser explains that subjects in an ideological system go through a mechanism called ‘interpellation.’ It is a key component in the reproduction of a given political system because individuals identify themselves as members of a society through interpellation. As Althusser states,

“...ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it

transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (2014: 264)

By being called out, or hailed, the individual becomes a subject, or acknowledges being a subject because he or she knows that the police address him/her. Interpellation positions individuals into certain categories whose roles have been predetermined by the ruling class and their ideology. By converting individuals into subjects, interpellation ensures the reproduction of ideology.

In *The Power*, the correspondence between the fictional writers Neil and Naomi reveals that matriarchy has been ruling for five thousand years. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, the long reign of matriarchy happens thanks to ISAs and RSAs, and through interpellation of women and men into dominant and submissive roles, respectively.

CHAPTER I

SUBVERSION OF MALE HEGEMONY IN RELIGION BY MOTHER EVE

This chapter focuses on the role of religion as a state apparatus and as a staple component of cultural hegemony in shaping a new matriarchal society in *The Power* by Naomi Alderman. In the novel, the male God in dominating monotheistic religions, which are inherently patriarchal, is replaced by a new female God, who is referred to as “the Mother” or “She”. Through the efforts of one of the main characters, Alyson Montgomery-Taylor (Allie), the idea of God becomes embodied in femininity. As Alderman suggests, the new system of belief soon becomes a discursive tool of power, yet it replaces women’s traditionally lower status in hierarchy with that of men’s, gradually creating a socially and culturally ingrained fundamental imbalance of gender relations that no longer favours men. In *The Power*, what starts as a liberating act of enabling women to stand up for themselves against the rigid limitations of the patriarchy of religion turns into a matriarchal replica of patriarchy. As Miller acknowledges, the novel reads as “*an imagined scenario in which the full horror of current gender relations is revealed*” (2000: 399). Alderman clearly demonstrates to men what women have to fight every day, including those shaped by religion, and “*slaps [them] with their own privilege*” (Abshavi and Kargozari 2020: 819) by forcing them to imagine themselves in women’s place and to empathize. To analyze these dynamics, this chapter draws upon Althusser’s concept of State Apparatuses, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, and Foucault’s views on power. Althusser’s notion of State Apparatuses helps to understand how religious institutions operate as part of the state’s ideological and repressive apparatuses to shape and maintain social order. In line with Althusser, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is be used to explore how religion, as a cultural institution, legitimizes domination over one gender within society through coercive and ideological power. Additionally, Foucault’s perspectives on power provides insights into how religious beliefs and practices can both enable and constrain individuals in a given social context. I will also briefly refer to Kate Millett to discuss how patriarchy works, and to Judith Butler to explain Mother Eve’s

performance of behaving like the male prophets in dominating world religions. By integrating these theoretical frameworks, I aim to offer a comprehensive analysis of the role of religion in the construction and maintenance of a matriarchal order in *The Power*, in a mostly chronological order concerning Mother Eve's journey in the novel.

At the beginning of the novel, before Mother Eve proclaims herself as the prophet of the matriarchal religion, the political and social dominance of patriarchy still persists in society. In *Sexual Politics*, Millett says, “[i]t is often assumed that patriarchy is endemic in human social life, explicable or even inevitable on the grounds of human physiology” (2000: 27), which seems to legitimize patriarchy as a logical and historical reality based on biological strength. According to Millett:

“It is possible that the circumstance which might drastically redirect such attitudes would be the discovery of paternity. There is some evidence that fertility cults in ancient society at some point took a turn toward patriarchy, displacing and downgrading female function in procreation and attributing the power of life to the phallus alone. Patriarchal religion could consolidate this position by the creation of a male God or gods, demoting, discrediting, or eliminating goddesses and constructing a theology whose basic postulates are male supremacist, and one of whose central functions is to uphold and validate the patriarchal structure.” (2000: 28)

Millet's argument explains that patriarchy was not a natural state but rather a product of religious stories that tailored male dominance and diminished the importance of women in reproduction. Mother Eve's actions to set up a new matriarchal religious system in *The Power* are definitely a rebellion against this narrative. By undermining the male-centered theology to create a new society where women hold power, she causes a historical shift against the patriarchy described by Millett.

Allie's proclamation of herself as the prophet of the new female-dominant religion plays the most significant role in the maintenance of the female discourse in the long run, because the acceptance of females as deity figures allows the subjects of religion to think that there is a superior being that orders things to be in this way by giving women the skein, and thus allowing them to exert their power on men. In the beginning, Allie mimics the male prophets, particularly Christ. As Luce Irigaray suggests, “[t]here is, in an initial phase, only one ‘path,’ the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately, thus to begin to thwart it” (1985: 76). Initially mimicking male prophets like Christ, Allie's

deliberate assumption of the feminine role, as suggested by Luce Irigaray, is a strategic move to subvert the traditional assignment of passivity to the female gender and to redefine it as the dominant one, crucial for challenging patriarchal norms and sustaining female discourse over time.

Judith Butler suggests that when characters are unaware of the performance they exhibit, they are in a performative act. According to her theory of performativity, gender is not a stable identity but rather a reiterated performance or act whose origins are so ingrained in society that individuals do not remember how they have come to be the way they are. In this respect, it could be suggested that Allie is engaged in a performative act in which she repeats Christ's behaviour, rather than a deliberate one. However, her act is rather a performance because she is repeating a male prophet's behaviour as a female self-proclaimed prophet. There is no female predecessor for her to follow. She does what she does despite the social and religious constraints imposed upon women. Butler explains that drag performers, by parodying and exaggerating traditional gender roles, expose the performative nature of gender and challenge the idea that there is an essential or fixed gender identity. In this respect, by mimicking the situation of men in religion, Allie problematizes male privilege in religion. Her performance allows her to "*introduce [herself] into such a tightly-woven systematicity*" (Irigaray 1985: 76) of religion in a conscious way:

"Her actions have a clear (and likely intended) parallel to the actions of Jesus Christ throughout the biblical gospel stories. As a result, Allie's femininity itself has a huge impact [on] the symbolic foundation of the new religion. Allie's clear imitations help the reader identify the impact of ritual performance on religious authority and its subsequent consequences for gendered power structures within the church." (Froslic 2020: 23)

Allie's deliberate mirroring of the biblical gospels, replacing the male prophet with a female one (herself), enhances her power and authority as a female religious leader in the foundation of a new religion. As a result of the religious and political power she gains, five thousand years into the future, according to the setting in *The Power*, females in society live in an established system of matriarchy in which new subjects are born into this discourse.

Allie's life experience as an American foster child of mixed-race parents exposes the challenges faced by women of color due to intersectionality. In fact, she is not only marginalized by her skin colour, but by her disadvantaged social

background as well. The aim of Alderman in picturing Allie in such a frame is to include “*characters from different societal backgrounds, and by doing so [to express] the intention to be inclusive and diverse*” (Roodbeen 2020: 16). Before proclaiming herself as the prophet of a new matriarchal religious order, she suffers from the constraints of racial stereotypes, microaggressions, and discriminatory attitudes within supposedly caring environments. In fact, the narrative of her suffering is used to justify her takeover of power from a patriarchal-minded religious society. She is dragged between foster homes and finally ends up in Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor’s house. However, she does not find peace in this house either, mostly because of her distant stepmother and abusive stepfather. For example, her stepmother sees her climb a tree easily a couple of times and she says, “*‘Would you look at that, she climbs just like a monkey.’ She say[s] it like she’[s] long suspected this would be the case. Like she’[s] just been waiting to find out*” (Alderman 2017: 30). Being a woman of colour and a foster child increases the difficulty of her situation in the story and contributes to the notion of social marginalization and intersectionality. Allie’s unique position at the crossroads of gender, race, and socio-economic status not only highlights the various challenges she faces in the narrative but also portrays the difficulties faced by women like herself due to oppression, discrimination, and societal biases. The Montgomery-Taylors is a religious family, and so is Allie, most probably because the Montgomeries wanted her to be religious. However, Allie also has a voice inside her head that talks to her. “*... the voice Allie hears, [may be] the one she thinks...is God. It might actually be God, or it might be Allie’s quick and remarkable powers of intuition: We don’t know for sure*” (Grady 2021). The voice is like a mother to her, guiding her through the pain she endures. For example, when Allie’s stepfather takes her to his meat-packing company and makes her watch chickens being uncrated, she feels furious because she perceives the evil in him. However, the voice says, “*This is not the time, daughter. Your moment has not come*” (Alderman 2017: 27). The voice acts as a guiding mechanism for Allie. In fact, it is an imitation of a God-like presence, but a female one in this feminist dystopia, who uses Allie to spread a message, just like the other prophets of monotheistic religions.

Allie remains silent against the injustice she receives at first because she lacks the confidence and instruments for reaction. Her passiveness reflects a concealment and latent power, which aligns with Foucault’s examination of “*silence as a characteristic of the oppressed and excluded*” (as cited by Carrette 2000: 33) until

they confidently assert their full power. Allie realizes that she has electrical power one day at the dinner table when a spark jumps at the fork from her fingertip. Yet the voice tells her not to tell her foster parents, saying, “*This is the first of my gifts to you, daughter. Learn to use it*” (Alderman 2017: 28). The voice further instills the notion of something grand approaching that will be in her power by saying, “*There will be a day to use this, and on that day you will know what to do*” (28). What the voice implies here is that there is a purpose, destiny, and yet-to-be-revealed plan associated with Allie’s electrical power.

Allie starts using her power to rise up against the unjust treatment she has experienced and to take revenge from the patriarchal religious community. Fed up with the treatment she has received, especially from men, she first hurts two boys with her electrical power. They are her friends from school whom she occasionally plays sexual games with so that she can practice electricity on them. The boys think they can play with her as they wish now that she has brought them to an empty graveyard, implying she is already “asking for it.” Yet Allie does not give them what they want. On that day, she feels she now possesses enough power and teaches the boys a lesson by hurting them. She determinedly goes home after confirming from the voice, her spiritual mother, that “*it’s today*” (Alderman 2017: 29) and climbs to her room through the window only to find her drunk foster father waiting in her room to accuse and punish her with rape for what she has done with the boys that day, saying “*Filthy. Little. Whore*” (30). It is not only Mr. Montgomery-Taylor, the foster father, who abuses her, but his wife too, by ignoring the abuse despite her knowledge of it. Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor gives her silent consent and condones her husband’s violence against Allie by turning up the volume of the Polka music she has been listening to and pretending not to hear what is going on upstairs. She also salves her conscience by thinking that Allie deserves it by being a bad girl, referring to the original sin of Eve and saying to herself, “*You know how men are*” (Alderman 2017: 31). Mrs. Montgomery Taylor is a religious woman who has an active role in the Christian community; she takes Allie into their house “*out of Christian charity*” (30-31), but she does not protect Allie against her husband’s abuse. Therefore, her behaviour is an example of “*ecclesiastical misogyny*” (Gilmore 2001: 81), even suggesting that it is Allie’s fault because she allows Mr. Montgomery to approach her, and she also thinks that the treatment Allie receives is “*no more than she deserves*” (Alderman 2017: 31). However, Allie decides to execute her plan to rise up against the oppression that she

has been exposed to for so long and electrocutes her foster father while he is still on her, and then escapes the scene. After Allie escapes, Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor readjusts the murder scene to make it seem as if her husband was delivering the catechism to Allie when he was killed by her and calls the police. Although she knows exactly what has happened, she does not want to harm the reputation of their family or cause their devoted Christianity to be questioned by society. This is further evidence that Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor's religious belief is far from sincere and that she prioritizes patriarchal values such as societal appearances and the reputation of her family over the truth or justice. Allie, on the other hand, takes the first big step in taking control of the power from her oppressors by electrocuting Mr. Montgomery. As Foucault states,

"[p]ower must be analysed as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here and there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization." (1980: 98)

Also, Allie feels that her mother helps her; "[s]he feels the palms of her mother around her own small fingers" (Alderman 2017: 32), the owner of the voice, as she puts her fingers around her foster father's temples to kill him, showing that she does not act as an individual but an extension of something larger, which is a female God—one that is ready to reclaim power from men. Similarly, in the framed narration, the imaginary writer Neil refers to the structure of power in "The Book of Eve," the holy book of Mother Eve's religion, in the beginning of his historical book:

"The shape of power is always the same; it is the shape of a tree. Root to tip, central trunk branching and re-branching, spreading wider in ever-thinner, searching fingers. The shape of power is the outline of a living thing straining forward, sending its fine tendrils a little further, and a little further yet." (Alderman 2017: 3)

This portrayal aligns with Foucault's assertion that power operates as a network rather than a localized entity because power relations are intricate and interconnected within given structures. Although she acts for herself, Allie feels that she is not alone, and she is just a branch of a large network of women who have experienced and felt the same. According to this, despite the long reign of patriarchy allowing men to indulge in power, partly with the help of the feeling that she is not alone thanks to the voice, Allie disrupts the pervading chain of patriarchal and phallogocentric religious power by

asserting her female power over him. This event points to the fluidity of power surrounding gender relations.

Allie's ability to manipulate people's ideas and actions is essential in establishing matriarchy as the norm by using religion, which is also a hegemonic tool in the construction of a given culture. After escaping her foster family home, Allie wanders around and stays in places like a library, a church, and a museum. One day, she goes to an aquarium and sees electric eels in a tank for the first time. She observes them giving jolts to their prey and shocking them. This scene is included in Allie's narrative to give the story some degree of biological reality and also to illustrate Allie's power for sensing other girls with power and her ability to manipulate people. Also, this scene portrays Allie drawing inspiration from the electric eels' ability to exert control, aligning it with her own journey of becoming a religious leader. After this brief encounter with the eels, she finds herself in the 'Sisters of Mercy Convent' run by nuns that help homeless girls like herself. This is a monastery where girls receive religious teachings and food in exchange for doing daily tasks, as well as a roof over their heads. When asked her name, Allie knows she cannot give her real name as the police are after her for murder, so she introduces herself as Eve. The voice approves of this choice, saying, "*Good choice, the first of women; excellent choice*" (Alderman 2017: 42). As it is apparent from the excerpt, the choice of the name Eve suggests her upcoming important religious role as the first woman, while also suggesting that Allie sees the potential in herself to be the instigator of a new belief system or spiritual movement. In fact, Mother Eve emerges as the character "*whose mission is powered by a drolly laconic voice in her head, has a theological blueprint for the new world order*" (Jordan 2016). With the encouragement she takes from this voice, Allie firmly continues to establish her new identity and the significant role she is destined to play in shaping the beliefs of those around her. In the convent, the other girls take their time to practice their power. Allie also tries hers, but "*she is more subtle about it*" (Alderman 44) while she sends out little jolts to her friends to stun them, sometimes making their limbs jump or sometimes preventing them from thinking straight. She controls them just enough so that they do not realize she is doing it until she is more confident. As Lease says, "*[r]eligion is... a key node for... control over... consciousness*" (1994: 459; cited by Strenski 1998: 345). This little game foreshadows Mother Eve's power to control the masses and also suggests that religion is used as a tool for manipulation to create and maintain a given and/or desired order. Moreover,

her ability to enter into her subjects' minds could imply that she has a penetrative power—a traditionally phallic power¹. She uses this quality to enter into two important domains that typically belong to men: religion and politics.

Allie, soon to become Mother Eve, not only fights her war against the male members of the patriarchy but also its female members, who help perpetuate phallogentric monotheistic religions. Although Allie feels at home in the nuns' convent, where she enjoys the company of women, and never wants to leave it, the abandoned girls in the convent are not welcomed by all the sisters there. While sister Maria Ignacia is more understanding and hopeful about the girls and their power, sister Veronica thinks and excruciatingly expresses that this power comes from the devil and should not be tolerated: "*It is the Devil. The Devil walks abroad and tests the innocent and the guilty, giving powers to the damned, as he has always done*" (Alderman 2017: 45). Sister Veronica believes that girls with electrical powers are sinful because of their taboo abilities, and thus they imperil the holiness of the convent. In fact, she is so uncomfortable with these girls that the other sisters have ceded the right to "*pick and choose those in whom she detects the Devil working*" (Alderman 2017: 76). She either throws those girls out of the convent or punishes them. Although sister Veronica is a woman, she speaks as the voice of the theological patriarchy that emphasizes male leadership because of phallogentric monotheism. Her stance is also obvious when she says that "*[the girls] have powers that men are not meant to know*" (Alderman 2017: 45). She implicitly suggests that girls or women should neither be capable of nor deserve such power, as being powerful suits men. As Sister Veronica's attitude demonstrates, "*religious frameworks frequently urge the containment of women in order to protect male authority, suggesting that female 'otherness' will compromise the stability of the state and radically unsettle the 'divinity' of patriarchal systems of thought*" (Miller 2020: 409). Her reaction is more than a personal view because of her religious position, and reflects a broader patriarchal ideology. In fact, Sister Veronica's reaction against the newly-emerging electrical power in the girls is another example of "*ecclesiastical misogyny*" (Gilmore 2001: 31) as mentioned earlier, because she is a member of a Christian institution shaped by religion as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). Althusser argues,

¹ For example, Mother Eve uses this power to manipulate Tatiana Moskaev (see page 46), and to heal some people so that the viewers believe she has powers, or miracles granted by the female God.

“... Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression... (There is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus.) Thus...[c]hurches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection etc., to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks.” (2014: 244)

In this respect, religion can also be observed as a Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) because sister Veronica uses her religious position to punish the girls and expel them if they do not adhere to the rules and traditions predefined by the patriarchal values of Christianity. Sister Veronica says that young girls awakening power in older women are sinful like Eve, who committed the original sin by passing the forbidden apple to Adam. Allie, overhearing this conversation, feels alarmed and instantly knows that she should do something about it: *“A bit of shaking up. Something new”* (Alderman 2017: 46). The voice tells her that she has to *“own the place so they can’t take it from [her]”* (Alderman 2017: 46). Owning the place and shaking up the world mean dethroning men and their male or female patriarchal-minded supporters. This utterance, “owning the place,” marks the beginning of a large-scale transformative upheaval to overturn patriarchy by founding a female-dominated religion, and is repeated a couple of times in Allie’s chapters. The need for transformation comes from the fact that Christianity, like the other monotheistic religions, subordinates women to men as can be seen in the following excerpts from a biblical verse:

“1 Corinthians 11:3: But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ...

1 Corinthians 11:8–9: For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” (Good News Bible)

Devout female members of a religion do not resist their subordination but rather give their silent consent to it by internalizing the given order, which insensibly leads to its perpetuation. As Gramsci explains, *“the need for overt coercive power decreases”* (cited by Koç 2022: 52) when a certain ideology has already penetrated into the cultural domain. Thus, being a crucial element of culture, religion is a powerful tool of influence that operates through the consent of individuals rather than coercion. Although subordinated by it, female members of a religion in orthodox / traditional practice accept hierarchy favouring men as a divinely ordained norm. As Millett says,

“...the arena of sexual revolution is within human consciousness even more preeminently than it is within human institutions. So deeply embedded is patriarchy

that the character structure it creates in both sexes is perhaps even more a habit of mind and a way of life than a political system.” (2000: 63)

According to this, it is even more difficult to deal with human consciousness when it gives consent to oppression by disguising it as the natural norm than to deal with oppressive institutions. For this reason, Allie sees sister Veronica as a threat to her agenda because she represents both an individual and an institutional embodiment of the patriarchal mindset.

The transformation of Allie into Mother Eve signifies the emergence of a spiritual mother figure who nurtures and cares for women who are not traditionally welcomed by the punitive patriarchal religions. Alderman emphasizes the manipulation of belief systems to align with specific agendas and the need for change in this structure oppressing women through the voice in Allie’s head, who rhetorically asks, “[i]f the world didn’t need shaking up, why would this power have come alive now?” (Alderman 2017: 46). This suggests that religion traditionally favors men, it does not protect women, and it has served its time. Therefore, a transformation is urgent for Allie, who cleverly chooses the name of the first woman, signaling her intention to be the first woman and the female messiah of a new matriarchal religious system by disrupting the established order. As Yebra argues, “*Mother Eve’s theocracy constitutes a return to the archaic mother*” (2019: 75), and the first archaic mother figure in religious history is Mother Eve. By choosing this name, Allie indirectly suggests that she is the loving, nurturing, and caring representative of the female God and that she will be committed to the wellness of women. This choice also resonates with the Madonna-whore complex, which Sigmund Freud first suggested as “*psychical impotence*” (1922: 5) of men to acknowledge women embracing their sexuality as valuable as women conforming to cultural expectations of sexual restraint. Here, Madonna refers to the religious figure of Mary, who is perceived as a symbol of virginity and purity. According to this complex, from childhood, men perceive women as either a pure loving object, like a mother, or as sexually desirable object, like “a degraded whore.” From a patriarchal point of view, Mary and Eve posit dichotomous characteristics that are attributed to women. While Mary is seen as the paragon of purity and obedience, Eve symbolizes sin. Drawing from monotheistic religions, patriarchal narratives justify male authority and control over women by linking Eve to sin and disobedience, who eventually leads humanity to fall from heaven. Therefore, Allie’s transformation into becoming Mother Eve suggests Alderman’s intention to

subvert religious narratives, which dichotomize women as either pure and nurturing, or sexual and corrupt. This suggests that the new matriarchal religion established by Allie/Mother Eve knows no boundaries for women set previously by the patriarchy and creates a holistic and powerful representation of women embracing their feminine agency.

Sister Veronica is a character who acts like a control mechanism on women to make them behave in socially acceptable manners. One night, while the girls in the convent, including Allie, are watching the lightning storm, which gives them an exciting feeling and gives their skins an itchy sensation, a girl named Savannah feels like sending out little jolts, and sister Veronica warns her for this behaviour. Yet Savannah does it again, much to sister Veronica's disapproval and anger. Therefore, she punishes her by saying, "[n]o meals for you tomorrow, Savannah, ...If you cannot control yourself in the slightest, our charity does not extend to you" (Alderman 2017: 76). She uses this punishment tool to ensure that the girls obey the given patterns of behaviour. As Foucault suggests, micro punishments may consist of "*a whole series of subtle procedures...from light physical punishment to minor deprivations and petty humiliations*" (1980: 178). This shows how power operates through everyday disciplinary practices to maintain control and conformity within societal norms. Through these minor acts of discipline, Sister Veronica enforces a rigid structure designed to suppress individuality and spontaneity. However, one important incident makes the girls in the convent start to believe that there is something special about Eve. A girl named Luanne attempts to talk sister Veronica out of punishing Savannah, yet she is reprimanded firmly. Luanne, already suffering from frequent seizures, has another convulsion right then out of distress. Allie, who is now known as Eve, asks for permission to do something about this situation and fixes Luanne by just sending a flicker of electricity from Luanne's notch. From this moment on, Eve comes to be known as the healer and starts to build trust in the other girls. She uses this reputation cleverly, with the guidance of the voice, to establish a new realm of matriarchy in religion. Other girls who need healing are also brought to her, and Eve solves their problems as well, even though these cures are usually temporary fixes. Nevertheless, more girls start to believe that she is the hand of God and that God speaks through her. She takes ten girls to the ocean at dawn, saying that she heard the voice, wants them to go there, implying God. She refers to the voice as "She." The narrator says, "*And this 'She' is a new teaching, and very shocking. But they understand it, each of them.*"

They have been waiting to hear this good news” (Alderman 2017: 78). Since these girls possess electrical power, their families ostracize them thinking that it is sinful and unnatural. However, Eve asks for baptism for these girls. “*Eve says, ‘Holy mother, show us what you want of us. Baptize us with your love and teach us how to live’*” (Alderman 2017: 79). With this attempt, she assures the girls of her miracle and makes them feel the glory of being part of the beginning of a new religion. Also, this ritualistic act of baptism marks the acknowledgement of her position as the messenger of the new God who is a female. Julia Kristeva describes abjection as the following:

“[i]t lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out.”
(1982: 2)

Rooted in Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection, the electrically charged female bodies are seen as abject—disruptive, taboo, and threatening to societal norms. Within this context, the idea of a female deity offers the girls empowerment and liberation and transforms their abject status into a source of divine strength.

The first girls to be baptized become Eve’s disciples, and through them, this event soon spreads among the members of the convent. As a result, more girls join in for her teachings. In one of these teachings, Mother Eve says,

“‘God is neither woman nor man but both these things. But now She has come to show us a new side to Her face, one we have ignored for too long...Jesus is the son. But the son comes from the mother. Consider this: which is greater, God or the world?’”
(Alderman 2017: 80)

Alderman refers to the transcendence of God’s preconceived gender as male and defamiliarizes the reader with the portrayal of God being exclusively male. She offers a more inclusive notion of divinity by saying that God is genderless. Nevertheless, she also implies that men have already enjoyed their time of being privileged with the perceived notion of a male God; therefore, it is now Mary’s time, being the mother of Jesus, who is also God. She is the real creator. Some religious authorities keep saying that this new order is the work of the devil, but Eve assures her yet-small number of followers that “*the true religion is love, not fear*” (Alderman 2017: 81). However, realizing that Mother Eve has been accumulating power in the convent, Sister Veronica hurriedly orders that the girls be locked and burned to end this heresy. Nonetheless, she is found dead with her arms stretched on a cross. It is understood that she has been

killed by electrification. It is subtly suggested that Eve might have killed her and disguised this killing as a miracle of God Mother. In this crucifixion scene, Sister Veronica seems like a martyr, but more like a martyr of patriarchal religious ways. The whole thing is a parody of Christianity because it mocks the idea of divine intervention and contributes to Eve's credibility. Also, it could be seen as a shift in emphasis towards the feminine divine, giving the female body a holy significance within monotheistic religions without displacing the traditional concept of God as the great creator. However, because it is implied that she was killed by Mother Eve, sister Veronica's death actually highlights the corruptive nature of the pursuit of power and control on even the most sacred beliefs and practices. By killing her, Mother Eve suggests that the old patriarchal way is now gone, and it is her time now.

The death of sister Veronica signifies the beginning of Mother Eve's rule with less scrutiny by the former religious order. Eve promises a new land and justice for women, which is documented on mobile phones and transmitted around the world. She says that God will be with women if they trust in "Her," and that heaven and the world are allocated to them from now on. In her speech to the congregation in the convent, her words sound promising for all humanity, while also favoring women, and saying that it is now time to wipe away the injustices women have been suffering from. Despite the victorious beginning and the ecstasy it creates, one of the girls in the convent is still suspicious and unsure of the new rule, and so she expresses her fear that they will not be allowed to stay there and that the police will come and get them. Eve condemns her, saying, "... *you will be damned for your doubt. God will not forget that you did not trust Her in this hour of triumph*" (Alderman 2017:84). This girl is punished by being thrown out of the compound. The expulsion of the skeptical girl clearly portrays religion as an RSA through which Mother Eve consolidates her power in the convent, suppresses dissent, and maintains control. Therefore, she shows that she is no different than Sister Veronica in terms of repression and punishment. Through this mechanism, Mother Eve reinforces the idea that questioning or doubting the new order is not only a defiance against her leadership but also a betrayal of God. This emphasizes the RSA's role in dealing with opposition and ensuring unwavering adherence to the established religious hierarchy. Therefore, "*Eve plays a part in a nuclear devastation of the planet, the world is seemingly good as new*" (McDevitt 2022: 8), and Mother Eve's rule starts as a positive, and to some extent, a utopian

movement towards justice. However, Alderman hints with Mother Eve's first act of ostracizing that the story is taking a dystopian shape with a darker twist and reality.

When Roxanne Monke, known as Roxy, comes to Mother Eve's convent, Mother Eve begins to feel more secure in general, partly because she believes that she is "[the] soldier [who will] come" (Alderman 2017: 84) that the voice inside her head has heralded to her. In fact, Mother Eve feels so secure as Allie in Roxy's company that the voice inside her head gets silent during Roxy's stay there. However, Roxy's real significance lies in the fact that she provides Mother Eve with a bank account and network. With the support of Roxy's network and know-how in financial issues (thanks to her father), the number of Mother Eve's followers substantially increases. Roxy and Mother Eve's affiliation and friendship is an example of a non-coincidental relationship between what Althusser names as "*the religious ISA (the system of the different churches) ... and the trade-union ISA*" (2014: 243). This means that Roxy's unmatched power, which is superior to that of any other girl, reinforces her financial power while also being used as a repressive tool against men who did her wrong. Also, her influence helps Mother Eve to step out of the convent, operate from different places, gradually spread her teachings, and even have a crucial effect on politics. In fact, this structure could be explained through Althusser's explanation of the 'infrastructure' or the 'base', and the 'superstructure' in Marx's terms: Althusser clarifies that Marx saw society as made up of two main parts: the economic base, including how things are made and who owns what; and the superstructure, which includes laws, the government, and ideas like religion and ethics (2014: 237). Althusser explains the metaphorical quality and relationship of these two concepts as follows:

"It is easy to see that this representation of the structure of every society as an edifice containing a base (infrastructure) on which are erected the two 'floors' of the superstructure, is a metaphor, to be quite precise, a spatial metaphor: the metaphor of a topography ... Like every metaphor, this metaphor suggests something, makes something visible. What? Precisely this: that the upper floors could not 'stay up' (in the air) alone, if they did not rest precisely on their base." (2014:237)

This suggests that the economic base acts as the foundation, exerting a definitive and decisive influence on the events and dynamics of the entire social structure. In *The Power*, Mother Eve takes advantage of the financial opportunity in the name of expanding her matriarchal religion. Roxy's father's network provides Roxy and

Mother Eve with fake ID cards and passports, as well as bank accounts and a good amount of cash. Roxy stays for nine months in the convent, and thanks to the bank accounts, the convent starts accepting donations. As a result, more members keep joining what has become Mother Eve's convent now. Nevertheless, Althusser adds that "*there is a 'relative autonomy' of the superstructure with respect to the base;*" (2014: 238). This autonomy is relative because the economic base still determines the ultimate shape the superstructure would take. In *The Power*, Mother Eve starts her cause without any initial financial base, (though still depends on another ISA: the communication ISA - the media). However, the impact of financial power gained thanks to Roxy on spreading the new matriarchal religion is obvious. Althusser also suggests that "*there is a 'reciprocal action' of the superstructure on the base*" (2014: 238). This refers to the fact that the relationship between the base and the superstructure is dialectical to some extent rather than being completely unidirectional. Therefore, it could be inferred that Roxy facilitates Mother Eve's actions financially not only because she trusts and believes her but also because she sees Mother Eve's effect on her followers. Mother Eve advises Roxy not to trust any men including the ones in her family, so Roxy takes care of much of her dad's business.

The relationship between Mother Eve and Roxy is vital as it portrays how economy and religion are two key components that influence each other in creating hegemony and thus a certain discourse.

"Hegemony, which always has its basis in the decisive nucleus of economic activity, operates principally in civil society via the articulation of the interests of the fundamental class to those of its allies in order to form a collective will, a unified political subject." (Mouffe 1979: 9; cited by Tok 2003: 244)

This means that economic power is central to the establishment and maintenance of hegemony. In this respect, to open new religious centers and help more oppressed women, Mother Eve uses Roxy's economic resources to influence and control larger groups in the newly emerging matriarchal society and thus keeps them under her hegemony. Establishing an alliance in accordance with her interests and agenda is crucial in order to create a stronger base of support to let herself operate more smoothly along her course.

Some members on a forum called 'Freedom of Reach' discuss whether Mother Eve has bribed or threatened those who suggest and spread the news that she is Allison Montgomery, the woman who disappeared after murdering her adoptive father. Some

believe the resemblance is just a coincidence or someone has doctored it, while one of the opponents, along with some others, says,

“It’s well-known that it is Alison M.T. This has been reported to the police in Florida before, but she’s got them paid off. They’ve been extorting money and threatening people all along the eastern seaboard. Eve and her nuns have joined up with fucking Jewish organized crime.” (Alderman 2017: 140)

This excerpt implies how financial power can be used to manipulate information and silence voices against the designated agenda. Although Mother Eve does not ask for this favour;

“...there is only one woman Allie can think of who could make police files disappear just like that, just by making a phone call maybe, just by making a phone call to someone she knows. It must be Roxy. ‘You look after us, and we’ll look after you,’ she’d said.” (Alderman 2017: 188)

Mother Eve initially thinks that she has taken advantage of Roxy’s network and sources and benefits from this power to suppress inconvenient truths that could possibly jeopardize her reputation as a trusted religious leader even though it is revealed at the end of the novel that Mrs. Montgomery “*was the one who made the police documents disappear*” (Alderman 2017: 317). Mother Eve feels a strong connection to Roxy as a true friend; however, she also feels that her ability to control her background and create a powerful public image would be significantly diminished if it were not for the financial and network-wise power that Mother Eve is allegedly granted through Roxy. Also, it is important to highlight that Mrs. Montgomery Taylor has power to get important data deleted from the Internet through the religious connections she has maintained by running “*a children’s home ... under the auspices and with the blessing of the New Church*” (Alderman 2017: 315). When she sees that the religious order is changing now under the leadership of her previous foster daughter, Mother Eve, she quickly adapts to it and starts to take an active role in the system to enjoy any benefit she can get from it.

Mother Eve becomes an important figure in politics as well because the leader of the fictional country of Bessapara, Tatiana Moskalev, asks for her hand en route to her much-desired victory against Saudi Arabian President Awadi-Atif, who has escaped to the north of Moldova with his troops after women took over power in his country. Tatiana Moskalev knows that wars “*cannot come through the barrel of a gun, but only through... a revolution of the mind and heart*” (Fulton 1987:199). As this

excerpt suggests, she knows that she needs to win potential supporters' minds and hearts through a channel that has a strong influence on people and thus eases the process. Being an important element of culture, religion is an important hegemonic force, too, which Tatiana is well aware of. She tells Mother Eve, "...when I saw you. *The force in the way you speak to the people. I see that you are Her messenger, and you and I have met at this time for this reason. To bring this message to the world*" (Alderman 2017: 189). She wants to accelerate and secure her reign not only by coercion but also by gaining the consent of people through religion, which supports her discourse of power. While Mother Eve is in this conversation with Tatiana, the voice in her head tells Eve, "[s]he wants you to bless her war" (Alderman 2017: 190). It reveals how religious authority could be used by politicians to legitimize their actions, even those as morally complex as war. Mother Eve also considers her own interest in this collaboration, which would enable her to gain more power by telling the voice, "*You told me I couldn't be safe unless I owned the place*" (Alderman 2017: 190). Mother Eve, formerly Allie, the black girl with no home or family, starts first with owning the convent and then with Bessapara, the country of women. On a video to be spread across the world, she says, "*This country... is God's country, and this war is God's war. With Her help, we shall have a mighty victor...[and] everything will be overturned*" (Alderman 2017: 190). She refers to Bessapara in this speech, meaning that she accepts to guide Tatiana Moskalev in her ascent to power. However, this is a symbiotic ascent because Mother Eve calculates her future steps to gain more power and influence by strategically aligning herself with Tatiana's rise to power. This move secures the tandem growth of their influence and authority.

Although it is nothing more than using the right amount of electricity in the right place, Mother Eve continues to use her alleged healing power on people to manipulate them into following her religion. In this respect, she uses religion as an ISA here rather than an RSA because an ISA functions through persuasion and a habit of repetition to influence people's values, beliefs, and perceptions. Before meeting Tatiana, she performs a public healing in Bessapara that is turned into a show during which she heals a little boy named Christian, who cannot walk but whose condition is promising in terms of potential improvement. Mother Eve chooses a child with a milder problem so that she is sure she can fix it. Another important reason is that Christian is more presentable on TV compared to another child with acne whose fracture is "*too profound...to be sure she'd be able to cure it*" (Alderman 2017: 182).

As this ceremony is devised to create the perception that Mother Eve is generously delivering God's mercy to true believers and is televised to a larger audience, she chooses a better-looking 'model' to influence people on TV. "*Allie's ritualization has no 'core,' as she has no true connection to the divine*" (Froslic 2020: 34), which subverts her alleged divinity in helping those in need and raises doubts about the sincerity of her religious message. Her actions seem to be a deliberate performance, so they are not originally intended to spread God's mercy. As Alderman mentions a few times in the novel, "[n]ot very many miracles are required... You don't need so many miracles. Two is plenty. Three is an abundance" (Alderman 2017: 75). By 'required,' Alderman implies, 'required to make others believe in you'. Therefore, these so-called miracles are purposeful performances to create more believers and, in an Althusserian term, subtly to interpellate them as subjects into the new religious and social order.

Neil Adam Armon, the fictional male writer of the book, presents the story as a historical account of the emergence of matriarchy, suggesting that Mother Eve was a fraudulent and self-proclaimed religious figure. He implies this by stating,

"I've put in some terrifically troubling stuff about Mother Eve... but we all know how these things work! Surely no one will be too distressed... everyone claims to be an atheist now, anyway. And all the 'miracles' really are explicable" (Alderman 2017: ix).

Neil's comment suggests that so-called miracles are just manipulative tools rather than actual supernatural phenomena. Mother Eve's agenda is, in fact, Allie's agenda to "own the place" to avoid going from one place to another through performing like a patriarchal male prophet. In this respect, Mother Eve's ritual acts are obviously "*fabrications meant to help her gain authority within a religious community, [and she] serves as a new prophet and messiah figure...*" (Froslic 2020: 23), and not necessarily as a requirement of her religious devotion. She intentionally creates an image that resembles male religious leaders like Jesus Christ. As Miller points out, "*the role of Mother Eve suggests [that] part of the reversal process involves the reclamation of religious texts and ideologies*" (408). While adapting the familiar allows Mother Eve to implement her teaching more easily, she also subverts the established patriarchal religion that requires traditional gender roles, bestowing absolute power to men to use upon women.

In order to shed light on how religious beliefs have been used to uphold patriarchal dominance, De Beauvoir states,

“Man enjoys the great advantage of having a god endorse the code he writes; and since man exercises a sovereign authority over women, it is especially fortunate that this authority has been vested in him by the Supreme Being. For the Jew, Mohammedans, and Christians, among others, man is Master by divine right; the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse to revolt in the downtrodden female.” (De Beauvoir 2010: 746-747)

As De Beauvoir suggests, this divine endorsement serves as a powerful tool for creating male hegemony and maintaining the status quo, as it is traditionally accepted that male dominance is divinely ordained and thus immutable by humans. For this reason, women are conditioned to accept their subjugated status as part of a divine order dominated by men, as can obviously be told by the male pronouns used to refer to God. However, Mother Eve slowly reclaims divine power and reshapes it into a female discourse, first by using female pronouns. In fact, as demonstrated in the following excerpt, Mother Eve draws on already existing female religious figures from dominant religions to enhance her credibility and legitimacy through well-known archaic female figures:

“‘God loves all of us,’ she says, ‘and She wants us to know that She has changed Her garment merely. She is beyond female and male, She is beyond human understanding. But she calls your attention to that which you have forgotten. Jews: look to Miriam, not Moses, for what you can learn from her. Muslims: look to Fatimah, not Muhammad. Buddhists: remember Tara, the mother of liberation. Christians: pray to Mary for your salvation.’” (Alderman 2017: 114–115)

Mother Eve refers to these female figures as they are well-known by anyone with a little knowledge of divine religious teachings. In fact, these female figures are not central but peripheral characters in certain religions. Mother Eve puts them in a central position while not totally rejecting the existing religions. What is rejected is the transcendentality of masculinity in religion. As Miller suggests, “[i]ndeed, while religious organizations are not overturned, the spiritual premises which position the male as dominant are rejected” (411). Such a reversal is necessary for Mother Eve to displace men from their unquestionably holy and higher ranks in religions that historically put women in lesser positions. Also, Mother Eve bestows a goddess-like quality and symbolism on female religious figures because the goddess symbol carries significant psychological and political implications for present and potential followers. For women, embracing this symbol “...means the defeat of the view engendered by patriarchy that women’s power is inferior and dangerous” (Christ 4). Her choice of

name, Eve, also suggests a revolt against the misogynistic patriarchal understanding of women as sinners and sources of evil. Her strategy to refer to female religious figures allows Mother Eve to subvert traditional gender roles that have also been shaped by established religious hierarchies and dominant misogynistic narratives. As a result, by portraying herself as a woman with divine authority who can perform miracles through rituals, Allie, or Mother Eve, constructs herself, and thus the female body, as the central figure of a new religious movement in order to assert authority and influence over her followers. It is important to notice that,

“[i]n her speeches, she frequently uses paraphrased verses from religious scriptures, mostly the Bible, which she feminises by the change of pronouns referencing God. For instance, ‘She cuppeth the lightning in her hand. She commandeth it to strike’... is almost a direct quote from the Book of Job (Job 36: 32), but the pronoun he, referring to God, is replaced with she, referring now to a woman.” (Warchał 2020: 92)

Changing the pronouns is a linguistic revolution that concerns religion and helps reconceptualize the idea of God which has unquestionably been thought of as male in history. According to Deborah Cameron’s article titled “Ideology and Language,” it is obvious *“that signs and words stand for ideas, and language is the means for conveying these ideas. This process is ‘underwritten by a sort of social contract, whereby speakers of a given language agree to make the same signs stand for the same ideas’”* (2006: 143; cited by Gundersen 2021: 51). Mother Eve initiates the execution of the groundbreaking social contract of accepting a deity as a female ontological and ideological being by inserting feminine pronouns describing God into language. This is crucial in maintaining dominance through the naturalization of words, and thus aligning words and thoughts. As Foucault also suggests, *“[n]atural history is nothing more than the nomination of the visible. Hence its apparent simplicity, and that air of naïveté it has from a distance, so simple does it appear and so obviously imposed by things themselves”* (2005: 144). Aligning with Foucault’s argument, Mother Eve’s use of female language to describe God and her referencing of female figures is an act of naturalizing a female-dominant religious discourse.

As for her political contacts, Mother Eve also gets into contact with the American senator Margot Cleary in Bessapara, who has come there upon Tatiana Moskalev’s invitation for political alliance². She makes a deal with Margot Cleary on the terms

² Senator Margot Cleary’s daughter Jocelyn is also in Bessapara as a member of the NorthStar Girls Training Camp. On witnessing Mother Eve’s so-called miracles, Jocelyn, without her mother’s

that she will receive US support in Bessapara against Awadi-Atif's troops in exchange for hiring North Star soldiers in Bessapara. This is a good deal for Senator Cleary too because of her political and financial ties to NorthStar.

The impact of religion on politics becomes obvious when Mother Eve starts to consider replacing Tatiana. Mother Eve observes that Tatiana is over-ambitious against men and is dangerously cruel when Tatiana unnecessarily humiliates a male waitress. She tells Roxy, "*Tatiana Moskalev will soon have outlived her usefulness to the Holy Mother... She's unstable. I think in a few months' time the country will be ready for a new leadership and the people here trust me*" (Alderman 2017: 233). Having started making plans about leaving Tatiana out of the scene, she first thinks that Roxy, whom she trusts both as a friend and as the most powerful woman she has ever met, could take Tatiana's place. However, when Roxy disappears, Tatiana becomes all the more paranoid, fearing that she has been sold out by Roxy, and that Roxy has "*even given the Glitter to her enemies*" (251). However, Tatiana trusts Mother Eve so much so that "*she has even signed into law a measure making mother Eve the de facto leader of the country if she, Tatiana, is incapacitated*" (251). With this decision, Tatiana not only acknowledges Mother Eve's influence but also elevates her to a position of immense authority. Yet, Mother Eve uses this trust against Tatiana by leveraging the religious influence and political power that is bestowed on her by Tatiana. When Tatiana feels overstimulated by worry and paranoia, Mother Eve speaks comforting words to her to ease her going to sleep. As Foucault says, "*[religious] power cannot be exercised without knowing the insides of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscious and then ability to direct it*" (1980: 333). She also uses her immense ability to control Tatiana to manipulate her thoughts and actions. In fact, she turns Tatiana into "*an obedient child*" (Alderman 2017: 253) so she can wield her influence on her. Realizing that other girls could soon become aware of the fact that they could use their power to control thoughts, Mother Eve acts swiftly and tells Tatiana, "*I think you'd like to sign these papers now, wouldn't you?... You've thought it over, and the Church really should have the ability to try its own cases and enforce*

knowledge, also decides to resort to Mother Eve's powers to cure her abnormality causing her blockage and inability to control the amount of power to exert. Mother Eve does her tricks on her, making the whole procedure seem like a religious ritual that calls for divine intervention. Namely, Jocelyn is also influenced by Mother Eve's ritualistic healing power.

its own statutes in the border regions, shouldn't we?" (253). With these papers, it becomes official that the Church has the power when Tatiana is gone. Sometime later, Mother Eve controls Tatiana's hand to make her slash a sharp letter opener at her own throat and kill herself. She does it in such a way that on cameras, it seems as if Mother Eve jumps to save her to no avail. This manipulation underscores Foucault's view that religious authority necessitates an understanding of individuals' minds and spirits, suggesting that Mother Eve leverages this insight to influence Tatiana. By positioning herself as a source of comfort and counsel, Mother Eve further consolidates her influence over Tatiana. Her intervention blurs the boundaries between religious leadership and political dominance. As a result, although it is through subtle coercion, Mother Eve succeeds in putting the female voice at the center of religious and political discourse.

In the course of the novel, Mother Eve transforms from an all-embracing religious leader into a ruthless figure willing to use power at any cost. Her shift reflects that absolute power can become degenerative regardless of the gender holding it. Roxy, having witnessed many wild actions when she was hiding in the forest area, tells Mother Eve that they should do something to stop the atrocities orchestrated by women troops. Mother Eve does not agree and says, "*There is only one way to put it right. The war has to start now. The real war. The war of all against all*" (Alderman 2017: 313). Eve is determined to own the whole place, no matter what it takes, as a woman and as the savior of all the women who believe in her. She thinks, "*It's the only way. If I don't do it, they [men] will*" (314). Having taken her share from the unrighteous cruel actions of men against women and Roxy's current situation of being left skein-less by men, she foresees that the war is unstoppable, and therefore she needs to take agency to protect what she has achieved so far. As Mother Eve experiences the sensation of wielding power and the freedom to act on her desires, she becomes unwilling to relinquish it. However, her decision to ignore the atrocities that men and children have suffered and be even more violent marks an important digression from her starting point as an all-embracing religious leader who has said "*the true religion is love, not fear*" (Alderman 2017: 81). In this respect, it can be argued that Mother Eve departs from her ideals and moral principles once she holds absolute power and performs patriarchal traits such as coercion and violence. Also, her digression is an important indicator of the corruptive nature of power, regardless of which gender holds it.

In conclusion, by pretending to have miracles, Mother Eve deliberately mimics male prophets to assume religious power. To assure the power that she gradually gains, she uses religion both as a Repressive State Apparatus and an Ideological State Apparatus to secure the trajectory of her agenda to ensure her political power, and thus own the place. In fact, she wants to reverse her own history of being the unwanted child dragged from one family to another. Nevertheless, her personal struggle has a significant effect on society as a whole. In order to protect herself, she needs to own the place, and so she does. By replacing the dominant male deity of traditional monotheistic religions with a new female God embodied in the character of Mother Eve, Alderman's account of Allie's story catalyzes a challenge to established patriarchal structures, particularly to monotheistic religions that are influential *"cultural discourses that subject women to masculine violence"* (Kelly 2016: 87; cited by Miller 2020: 404). Starting as a symbol of liberation, Mother Eve ultimately becomes a victimizer, mirroring the oppressive patterns of the patriarchy she sought to overthrow.

CHAPTER II

DEFYING PATRIARCHY VIA THE MEDIA

“Almost from birth, we are trained and socialised in a world in which the inevitability of male aggression and dominance and the importance of pretty, pliant female submission is completely normalised.” (Bates 2022: 1881)

This chapter investigates the critical role of the media in establishing patriarchy as a permanent dominant discourse in the dystopian setting of *The Power*. In addition to religion, as covered in the preceding chapter, the media also plays a significant role in defining and preserving a certain social order. Thus, patriarchal ideology is constantly reproduced by the media, favouring patriarchal views and controlling society by oppressing the female gender. One example of suppressing women is through the portrayal of women in advertisements, which depict women in submissive and domestic roles. TV shows, soap operas, and daily news showing women on the receiving end of violent actions also perpetuate the perception about women as being powerless and vulnerable. These depictions suggest that physical appearance and homemaking abilities constitute the largest portion of women's values. This idea reinforces patriarchal norms and limits women's opportunities for autonomy and power.

Alderman refers to the representation of female power in the media in this dystopian novel to highlight its corruptive use, regardless of who controls it. To investigate the role of the media in establishing and maintaining patriarchy, this chapter first focuses on Tunde, Kristen, and Tom as media personas to examine how their portrayals reflect and influence societal attitudes and contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchal power structures. This chapter explores the role of media in maintaining political and social order through the lens of Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). Michel Foucault's perspectives on the

relationship between knowledge and power will be considered, particularly in the context of learned and observed cultural practices. Additionally, Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity sheds light on how certain characters in the novel transgress gender stereotypes.

2.1 Tunde's Lens: Media as a Tool of Documentation and Manipulation

In an interview, when Jessica Valenti, a feminist American author, is asked whether she is a third-wave feminist, she replies, "*Maybe we are on the fourth wave. Maybe the fourth wave is online*" (Solomon 2009). The existence of feminism online has been accepted as one of the key elements of the fourth-wave feminism movement, and it refers to digital platforms that enable widespread dissemination of feminist ideas and provide support networks. This online presence promotes awareness of gender-based discrimination and violence, and facilitates organized and widespread action against it. Thus, it challenges traditional media narratives suppressing women. As Munro also says, "*Contemporary feminism is characterized by its diversity of purpose, and amid the cacophony of voices it is easy to overlook one of the main constants within the movement it currently stands - its reliance on the internet*" (2013: 22). For example, "Hashtag Activism" is also considered as part of the fourth-wave feminism and contributes to the flow of communication for feminist activism³. It helps the formation of ideas and the creation of awareness and consciousness about related issues while challenging sexism and misconceptions about genders. In *The Power*, too, social media and online news are key factors in the spread of patriarchy. These media tools play an essential role in Alderman's novel by broadcasting the course of events in different countries, spreading patriarchal propaganda around the globe, and thus shaping public perception.

³The #MeToo Movement was started by Tarana Burke in 2006 and was revived through social media hashtags in 2017 to draw attention to the pervasiveness of sexual violence, and it is a major example of Hashtag Activism. The Movement has begun to challenge the silence culture that forces the victims of sexual violence to remain silent for fear of powerful male assaulters, sustaining the continuation of rape culture. Its website <https://metoomvmt.org/> offers support and healing practices for survivors. As Forbes says:

“... the ‘Me Too’ movement must grapple with the same questions *The Power* does: how did we allow this culture of abuse to stand for so long? And how do we undertake the hard work of imagining the world differently?” (2018)

The #MeToo Movement and Naomi Alderman's *The Power* both challenge socially integrated power dynamics and the cultural conditions allowing abuse to persist. They question how such a culture endured and encourage readers to reimagine societal norms to prevent future abuse, as highlighted by Forbes.

Tunde is the most crucial character in the discussion that concerns the role of media in *The Power* in the transition from patriarchy to matriarchy. He is the primary transmitter of the societal shift as “a [21-year-old] male autodidactic journalist from Nigeria,...who leverages digital platforms to disseminate a live account of such epochal changes” (Raso 2023: 67). He studies journalism at the break of events, and is one of the four main characters from whose perspectives the story is told; more importantly, he is the only male protagonist.

To understand Tunde’s significance in the creation and dissemination of matriarchy as the dominant social system, I would like to refer to Michel Foucault, who says;

“...it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.” (Foucault 1978b: 28)

As Foucault suggests here, knowledge is not simply created by individuals through their intellectual activities. Instead, he asserts that power and knowledge are deeply intertwined and co-constitutive, creating and supporting each other. Widely accepted social norms become “truths,” or “knowledge,” after certain “processes and struggles,” referring to the various ways in which power is introduced, exercised, resisted, and negotiated within society. Thus, knowledge becomes a product of these dynamics and their constant relationships in any given society. These processes and struggles determine what knowledge is produced, validated, and accepted. Drawing from Foucault’s views on knowledge and power, it could be argued that Tunde is pivotal in creating knowledge that establishes matriarchy as the dominant system. His videos on the international TV channel CNN and his personal YouTube channel contribute to fostering matriarchal power in major domains of society, such as religion and politics. Especially his YouTube channel, as a social media platform, serves to transmit and popularize the idea of women being powerful and autonomous, because social media platforms increase the reach and impact of these transformative narratives. In other words, his documentation of women’s struggles in different parts of the world and their eventual takeover of power serve the establishment of knowledge, which, once established, can be used to regulate and control people like a panopticon.

In addition to being useful for discussing the role of media in power relations, Tunde’s journalistic endeavours also provide a lens for examining gender through the

concept of gender performativity, which refers to Judith Butler's idea that gender is a performative act that individuals internalize by the iteration of certain behaviour and language. Therefore, rather than an innate quality, gender is an assumed identity dictated by the social norms of the dominant ideology. However, gender is a fluid concept that can take different shapes according to changing conditions. The origin of the "true" characteristics of being a man or a woman is untraceable because meanings and identities attached to gender are constantly subjected to reinterpretation and transformation. In *The Power*, Tunde is the only male character who quickly sees the change in gender roles and its impact on gender relations and grasps the necessity of adapting to it. His non-patriarchal gender identity which does not prioritize male dominance under any circumstance enables him to navigate the power shift process more smoothly and understand the motives of women to challenge the misogynistic rules of patriarchy. Moreover, when it is considered that the media has a crucial role in disseminating information and raising social awareness, being a media persona without traditional patriarchal characteristics allows Tunde to communicate these transformations effectively. By showing the instability of power and gender dynamics, his reports help the public recognize and understand the fluidity of gender more rapidly. Furthermore, as Raso argues:

"Although provided with evident psychological depth, Tunde's character is conceived as a reversed polarization of the virtues women are expected to show in the Western traditional imagery. That is, while Tunde's gaze dominates the narrative as it records how history is reshaped by women, his is not the vantage point of a patriarch. Instead, he is presented to us as an outsider to his sex, and for this reason, often accepted or at least tolerated whenever he finds himself in the company of women." (2023:67)

By portraying Tunde as an outsider to typical masculine norms, Alderman suggests that gender may be performed in ways that deviate from cultural expectations. Tunde's divergence is observed in the fact that he appreciates women's rise to power, while typical patriarchal men expect the old system where men are superior. Tunde's deviation from traditional masculinity can be attributed to his Black-African identity because he is Nigerian. Although his country (or broadly African countries) are perceived as conservative in terms of patriarchal norms surrounding gender and Tunde also reflects some patriarchal attitudes at the beginning of the story in the way he views women, Tunde's individual experience as a young journalist and traveler allows him to transcend his society's norms. Moreover, coming from the former African colonies

allows him to understand the scope of marginalization, oppression and exploitation based on race. This shared history of subjugation aligns with women's experiences under patriarchy, making Tunde empathize with systemic inequality.

Tunde's realization of the shifting power dynamics between men and women signifies a pivotal turning point in his understanding of gender roles and reporting. Tunde comes to this realization gradually but rapidly when he experiences an electrical jolt from a young woman directly, being one of the first men to feel the sensation of the female electrical jolt. Before girls develop skeins, Tunde is also a relatively-traditional male character who seems to have internalized the perceived superiority of men over women. In the first chapter that Tunde is introduced into the narrative, he falls for a 17-year-old girl named Enuma, who comes from another city for summer vacation. She is the cousin of a boy from Tunde's photojournalism class. She has the electrical power, too, but Tunde does not know about such a power at this point of the narrative. Tunde schemes a plan to stay alone in the pool with her while his other friends go to the beach. While making advances towards Enuma, he uses a male-superior language: "*'Hey,' he says, in a mock-lordly tone. 'Hey, servant girl, bring me that Coke ... 'Aha, trying to keep that drink from your lord and master,' he says. 'What a wicked servant girl you are' (Alderman 2017: 13–14).*" His language preference suggests the deeply ingrained social perceptions that suggest his perceived superiority to the girl. As he tries to get Enuma's attention and grabs her by the waist, Enuma slightly hurts him, to his astonishment. He feels like there is a pinprick in his hand or an insect sting. Then he understands he is helpless against her. Although he seems to find it sexy, he feels confused and vulnerable because of this unusual experience. He is taken over by "*... his absolute vulnerability, the feeling that she could over-power him if she wanted*" (Alderman 2017: 15). Tunde's confrontation with his weakness against female power causes him to question the deep-seated and unconsciously absorbed societal norms imposing male dominance.

Tunde's short but influential experience with Enuma leads to his decision to become a journalist who documents the course of events that build up to a matriarchal societal system. Becoming obsessed with his confusing and exciting experience with Enuma, he begins to be more attentive to any kind of scientific evidence, a video, or a photograph that would explain what happened to him. One day, he spots a 15-year-old girl in a market who is harassed by a much older man than her. Sensing that something is about to happen, Tunde secretly starts filming on his mobile camera. The girl

suddenly jolts this man hard. People around her think she's a witch who struck him or poisoned him. Tunde starts to feel more afraid by looking at the man who suffers the electric shock because he understands that Enuma could also use her power to kill him if she wished.

People begin to understand the seriousness of the issue after Tunde's video of what happened at the grocery store gathers a lot of attention online. CNN authorities ask for the rights to this video and say that they want more of such footage by him, leading to his career as a journalist. Therefore, Tunde decides to take a semester off to travel to different countries and document the events globally. Tunde thinks, "*I'll be the one who'll tell the story*" (Alderman 2017: 55). He is aware of the potential power of visual media in shaping public perception and discourse, and wants to be the agent who facilitates it. Rosi Braidotti, who explores how digital technologies and cyberspace can be reimagined as spaces for feminist resistance and creativity, also acknowledges the significance of visual media, stating that,

"Our era has turned visualization into the ultimate form of control, in the hands of the clarity fetishists who have turned CNN into a verb: 'I've been CNN'd today, haven't you?' This marks not only the final stage in the commodification of the scopic, but also the triumph of vision over all the other senses." (2002: 351)

Therefore, visual media has an overwhelming influence on contemporary society, where images and videos have become the primary means of control and communication. This underscores the crucial role of Tunde's videos in the spreading of a matriarchal societal order. Althusser also recognizes the critical role that the media plays in preserving the prevailing ideology in his theory of ISAs. He lists "*the Information and News Apparatus [and] the Publishing and Distribution Apparatus*" (2014: 75) among the category of ISAs. He asserts that "[t]he communications apparatus [crams] every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvanism, liberalism, moralism, etc., by means of the press, the radio and television" (2014: 250). By deciding what is broadcast, the media propagates the ideology of the ruling class among the general public. In this sense, it manipulates a society's norms, values, and beliefs to conform to those of the ruling class. Since the maintenance of ideology is maintained by the consent of individuals, as Gramsci states, alternative views and fractional ideas become marginalized, further reinforcing the status quo. In *The Power*, the dominant class of patriarchy is rapidly replaced by women as they gain physical and political power. Therefore, with images and footage of powerful women on the

media, matriarchal order is reinforced and reproduced. Thus, in this novel, the media serves as an important ISA that reproduces matriarchal ideology, shapes individuals' perceptions of themselves and others according to the dominant ideology through interpellation, and normalizes the values of the dominant ideology in subtle but immanent ways.

Tunde's first destination is Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which is not a coincidental choice by Alderman as this country is notorious for its lack of women's rights⁴. Upon his arrival in Riyadh, Tunde witnesses the uprising of women for the murder of two girls who stood up against their punishment for using their electrical power and got beaten to death by their male family members. As Arab women march on the streets shouting in increasing numbers, "[t]hey [understand] their strength, all at once" (Alderman 2017: 56). Although the police and other men retreat because women do not want any men among them, Tunde earns the women's trust. He is thus allowed to record their triumph as a CNN reporter.

Women's uprising against the country's men-favoring practices in various areas of life in Saudi Arabia in *The Power* explains the rapid shift in gender roles. Noor, one of the protestors, briefly refers to the discrimination that women in her country have been exposed to, saying, "[i]n our country, it is forbidden for a man and a woman to hold hands in the streets. In our country, a woman is not allowed to drive a car. Women are no good with cars" (Alderman 2017: 58). As Tunde's camera is on record, Noor causes a car to explode by using her electrical power to show the whole world what

⁴For example, Sharia rules in Saudi Arabia dictate that women need male legal guardians in many legal decisions, such as traveling abroad, marrying, studying, etc. As it is suggested:

"The infamous 'male guardianship law' imposes some of the world's tightest restrictions on women in Saudi Arabia. Under this regulation, all Saudi women are required to seek permission from a male guardian — whether it be their husband, brother or even son — in order to undertake various activities in their day-to-day life. This includes: the ability to travel, marry, study, attain healthcare, exit state shelters and prisons." (Nguyen 2017)

Related to this regulation, women were not able to drive when *The Power* was published. The law allowing women to drive was issued on September 26, 2017 by King Salman, and as of June 24, 2018, women started to get their driving licenses officially. Several women had been arrested because of their videos showing themselves driving as a protest against sharia banning them from driving. As suggested by ABC News,

"A staunchly conservative and religiously orthodox country, Saudi Arabia embraces and enforces a strict, all-encompassing version of Islam called Wahhabism. The laws of the religion are one and the same as the laws of the state. Gender segregation rules are strictly observed, and the idea of a woman behind the wheel, driving herself wherever she chooses with no man accompanying her, was seen by many as scandalous, even sacrilegious." (McGarry 2019)

The arrests of female drivers in Saudi Arabia resemble the themes of Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, in which social standards are strictly enforced to oppress women.

women are capable of. Other girls also start to put the engines of more cars on fire as a reaction to long-standing male oppression. As Abshavi and Kargozari argue, depriving women of common rights such as driving cars

“adds to the inherent power structure. Alderman is radicalizing this form of oppression by giving these women the power to blow up the car they are not allowed to drive, suggesting that radical physical domination can change institutionalized discrimination. Tunde’s narrative gives an image of the power of women’s gathering and gravity, which shifts the balance of power, by describing how violence increases women’s motivation to resist the police and the government, and ultimately leads to the destruction of all governments.” (2020: 822)

As this quote also suggests, the wild protests of women in Riyadh demonstrate that the stricter a society is toward women, the more powerful women’s rage may become. Alderman refers to the incidences from strict countries such as Saudi Arabia because she aims to show the panorama of:

“... women’s perceived oppression from a global perspective. Using the variables of culture, race and class provided by Butler, one deciphers that women within liberal societies are less thirsty for vengeance. Incidentally, women in restrictive and impoverished societies become militant and eager to avenge their oppression. Abuse is portrayed as an impetus for matriarchal vengeance in Alderman as women rise to topple patriarchal oppression upon receiving the power.” (Lum 2023: 4)

Therefore, there is a link between stringent obedience to prescribed gender norms and the following intensified chaos as a result of oppression. By incorporating different variables like culture, race, and religion, Alderman suggests that a more dramatic shift towards matriarchy should be expected in environments where women have endured more restrictions and injustices.

Tunde’s role as a media figure is vital because he enables the rest of the world to witness women’s empowerment. His dedicated journalism serves as a catalyst for spreading the idea of matriarchy by increasing its visibility, thanks to his Youtube channel and videos he provides for CNN, along with common girls and boys sharing videos of girls using their electrical power. For example, people all over the world learn what happens with women in Saudi Arabia, India, and Moldova through the media. While encouraging women to embrace their power and take action to rise against oppression, the coverage of women’s power in the media leads to the questioning of the traditional power structures favoring men because of their perceived superiority. In *The Power*, when the world starts to understand that the social position

of men is not an inherent superiority that is biologically coded in the male body, but an illusion constructed by the same systems, this understanding leads to a reevaluation of the existing gender roles. As the female body gains a new meaning while the male body loses it, the world as it was known is shattered rapidly due to social media.

Tunde's position as a male character who communicates what happens directly by also supporting the women's movement makes everything seem more objective in the media. In a magazine interview, Naomi Alderman says that she identifies herself with Tunde because,

"Tunde starts out as very confident, and the world slowly teaches him the reasons that perhaps he should not have been that confident. His story is the story about how a man in a world run by women learns how women have felt in a world run by men, living among wandering sadists, people who turn violent just because they can. Tunde is a writer, like me. He is also the nicest character in the book." (La Ferla 2018)

Naomi Alderman's reflection on Tunde highlights his role as not just a journalist but as a narrative device that provides a unique and compelling perspective on the shifting dynamics of power between genders. When the crowd of women starts to gather to protest against the oppression by men in Saudi Arabia, some women do not trust Tunde saying, *"You cannot walk with us, CNN, ... There will be no man with us today"* (Alderman 2017: 57) because they fear he might have guns or he may try to jeopardize their cause. However, he gains their trust by introducing himself and taking off his clothes to show that he only has a camera to record them. His observations could be seen as less biased because he does not have a personal gain from the new power women hold. Having a male commenter who is not an electrically empowered individual helps viewers better assimilate ongoing events and accept changes more quickly.

Tunde's success in documenting the events in Saudi Arabia and showing the world what women are really capable of earns him the trust of women in Moldovan border towns, too, as can be observed in the following excerpt:

"Tunde files a series of reports and interviews from the Moldovan border towns where the fighting has been most acute. The women trust him because of his reports from Riyadh. Not many men could have got this close; he's been lucky, but he's also been smart and determined. He brings his other reports with him, shows them to whatever woman says she's in charge of this town or that. They want their stories told." (Alderman 2017: 93)

Tunde's ability to bridge cultural and gender differences enables him to gain unique access to pivotal events and personal stories. His willingness to enter these hotspot areas where women are fighting actively and his capability to communicate these stories to a global audience highlight the critical role that media figures can play in highlighting certain stories for the good of the disadvantaged and shaping public perceptions.

As a determined journalist who wants to publicize women's struggle and rise to power, Tunde interviews former victims of sex trafficking and other oppressed women who have formed gangs to rebel against the dictatorship led by Viktor Moskalev. As a young woman reports to Tunde;

"It wasn't just those men who hurt us... We killed them. The police knew what was happening and did nothing. The men in the town beat their wives if they tried to bring us more food. The Mayor knew what was happening, the landlord knew what was happening, postmen knew what was happening." (Alderman 2017: 94)

In the dictator-led patriarchal society of Moldova, male officials often fail to challenge the injustices and maltreatment faced by women by remaining passive. With the police and the Mayor acting as Repressive State Apparatuses and essential representatives of state authority, they reinforce the ideological burdens subordinating women. By ignoring these and other injustices, they normalize such practices as acceptable within a traditional society. However, Tunde is aware of the paradigm shift and writes everything down in the form of notes and a diary. He thinks that;

"[t]his revolution will need its chronicler. It's going to be him. He has in his mind a broad, sweeping book—with interviews, yes, and also assessments of the tides of history, region-by-region analysis, nation-by-nation." (Alderman 2017: 94)

Tunde is the only male character in the narrative who genuinely appreciates the power and uprising of women. While he watches women in Riyadh blowing up cars, "[h]e knows then this thing is going to take the world and everything will be different and he is so glad he shouts for joy, whooping with the others among the flames" (Alderman 2017: 59). His efforts are vital to the establishment of a matriarchy, as he takes significant steps to demonstrate globally that the foundations of patriarchy are being dismantled. As Lum also argues;

"Alderman provides a panoramic global dystopia by artistically developing unique character experiences introducing the reader to women's uprisings in Saudi Arabia, India, Moldova, Nigeria, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The authorial intention is to show that this is a global apocalypse, not just an isolated phenomenon."

Tunde, the young journalism student... acts as the objective outsider who brings the entire panorama together.” (2023: 8)

Tunde’s investigative journalism facilitates the documentation of the most socially catastrophic events occurring in diverse parts of the world. He successfully connects the events together and weaves them into a coherent narrative of resistance and empowerment.

The normality of the systematic subordination of women in patriarchal societies is observable in Tunde’s interview with Viktor Moskalev, who is the dictator leader of Moldova, and Tatiana’s husband, about the forty-three towns occupied by women rebels in his country. This interview with a patriarchal-minded male leader who is totally against any compromises with women shows that leaders of closed societies, such as dictatorships, often fail to grasp the full impact of societal changes and are slower to adapt to these shifts compared to more liberal societies. Viktor Moskalev hesitates to answer fully because he is afraid of the media spreading the news about the events in his country. Tunde assures him that the interview is not going to be on the Internet or the radio, says it is for his future book, and realizes that President Moskalev is not aware of what awaits him and the true capability of women, as he says that everything will go back to normal within a few days, as the military forces of his country are “... *already moving to quash these rebels*” (Alderman 2017: 95), enigmatically claiming that they will not hesitate to bomb and burn all the seized towns if they have to. Here, “going back to normal” suggests that women will continue to be subordinated to men, and the dire situations they have to endure will continue to be neglected by the authorities. Even though the women he calls rebels are the victims of sex-trafficking in his country and start an upheaval for their unrighteous treatment, Moskalev does not grant them any empathy and refuses to recognize their plight. In fact, he justifies the violent military action against them as a necessary measure to maintain control and order. As Roodbeen suggests;

“The use of the word rebels as a description for women who have escaped a future in sex-trafficking, again shows the parody used by Alderman to emphasize how women are treated within a misogynistic nation.” (2020: 31)

As this quote explains, misogynistic patriarchal societies justify the suppression of women in any given situation. Moskalev’s reaction suggests his underestimation of the situation for women and his willingness to resort to extreme measures to suppress women because it is how men fought wars for years.

As part of his plans to document the global paradigm shift from a larger perspective, he decides to investigate more about the former Saudi Arabian leader Awadi-Atif, who takes refuge with his army in Moldova and fights female guerillas. He secretly learns this information from Viktor Moskalev's wife, Tatiana, who tells Tunde that "*Awadi-Atif...[has] been feeding Viktor money and arms. That's why Viktor thinks he can crush the rebels*" (Alderman 2017: 97). Tatiana also tells Tunde that she has electrical power too, but that Viktor does not know about it. With Tatiana disclosing this information, Tunde realizes that Tatiana is ready to undermine her husband's authority to position herself advantageously in the changing political landscape. His suspicions are confirmed when Viktor dies after an alleged heart attack in his sleep, and Tatiana is immediately appointed as the interim leader of the country. In his report, Tunde notes that "*Tatiana Moskalev may have been easy to underestimate; she was a political operator of skill and intelligence and had evidently used her leverage well.*" (Alderman 2017: 98). Tatiana's strategic disclosure to Tunde highlights the crucial impact that media figures have on revealing and affecting political shifts. By entrusting critical data to Tunde, Tatiana takes advantage of his potential to manipulate public perception and document changing power dynamics. In short, Tunde's role as a media figure is critical because the news he makes not only reveal the true nature of events but also affects the directory of those who fight for power in conservative societies like that of Moldova. The Tunde character shows the deep impact of the media on revealing and shaping political scenery. After receiving this critical information, Tunde does his research and is able to take six photos of Awadi-Atif's army training in the mountains of Moldova and even of Awadi-Atif himself. This achievement brings Tunde wider recognition, both by citizens and by media circles such as the Reuters. His popularity contributes to his cause of spreading the news about the global shift towards matriarchy. However, his proximate position to women's struggles leads to discomfort among men. He reads on subforums that men talk about him as a gender-traitor because he shared the news about Awadi-Atif's troops instead of keeping it a secret to give men leverage against women. This group of men think that Tunde should also report on the men's movement against the rising female power. Therefore, Tunde's position near women that does not align with traditional men's interests challenges established gender boundaries, causing anxiety among men who feel threatened by the potential loss of their societal privileges.

Tunde's third major journalistic trip is to Delhi, India, where he documents women's takeover of power through painful social upheavals with his CNN ID. Here, he learns from Indian women that it has been three years since the electrical power of women first emerged in India. Indian women call their death-bearing hands "Kali"⁵. Women in this country have been suffering from patriarchy's oppression and terror for centuries; for this reason, the narrator says, "*Her [Kali's] arrival in this world has been long expected*" (2017: 132). The author refers to the oppression and marginalization of women, especially in countries such as India that are notorious for their unfair treatment of women⁶. Women here cannot experience their physical power and social equivalence with men peacefully. They fight with male individuals and the patriarchal government for their rights, dignity, and power. A woman that Tunde interviews during the protests says,

"It was like being part of a wave of water...A wave of water from the ocean feels powerful, but it is only there for a moment, the sun dries the puddles and water is gone. Then you feel maybe it never happened. That is how it was with us. The only wave that changes anything is a tsunami. You have to tear down the houses and destroy the land if you want to be sure no one will forget you." (Alderman 2017: 133)

The woman's expression, which likens the surge of events to a tsunami, suggests that it is collective and violent actions that bring about change rather than individual practices. Tunde becomes the channel that transmits the collective actions of women in disadvantaged areas to other parts of the world. Lekssays agrees, stating,

"If power is taken as an absolute tool that cannot be discussed, [the] media becomes a tool in the hand of the regime to manipulate people's voice and show what the regime wants to appear and hide what can lead to question it. On the other hand, if the power is taken as a tool to protect people's voice by giving them the chance to talk

⁵ "Kali" primarily refers to the Hindu goddess Kali, who is a fierce and powerful deity representing time, change, power, and destruction. The name "Kali" comes from "Kala," the Sanskrit word that means "time" or "black," symbolizing her association with both the passage of time and the darker aspects of life and nature.

⁶ Goel describes India as "*a country with deep-rooted patriarchal morals, where the women are supposed to tolerate each and everything that is thrown in their way*" (2020: 9). Similarly, as Sharma notes:

"Instances of violence against women in ancient India are mentioned. Mahabharat [a Sanskrit epic account of ancient India] cites the violence meted out to Dropti. Yudhishtir staked his wife Dropti in gambling and lost her, following which Duryodhana ordered his brother Dushasan to strip her in the royal palace and he attempted to do so, but Lord Krishna came to her rescue. Kans killed seven newborn babies of his sister Devaki. In modern societies also violence against women is a major public health problem affecting women and children." (2015: 132)

These excerpts from Goel and Sharma depict a persistent narrative of gender-based violence against women in India whose roots can be traced in historical texts and contemporary society.

and discuss the issues that concern their environment, media becomes a free and important element in the growth of any nation.” (2017)

In *The Power*, Tunde is the one who uses the power of the media to make women’s voices heard. As a result, their struggles are validated more rapidly worldwide, and the movement grows.

Tunde’s followers believe him because he is physically among the women while he shoots his footage, increasing his credibility. This is why CNN is ready to pay for the rights to his video. On the other hand, despite the power of the media to influence public perception, the media cannot simply tell all the audience what to think because “*people do not absorb media messages uncritically*” (Happer and Philo 2013: 321). This is because media viewers have varying degrees of capacity, prior experience, judgments, biases, or interest in the media content. Moreover, most media users of the current era are aware of fake news and manipulative content such as clickbaits, which allows them to engage with various sources critically. One example from the narrative is when Margot Cleary does not believe the videos she sees on Fox News:

“‘It has to be fake.’

‘Fox News is saying not.’

‘Fox News would say whatever makes the most people tune in to Fox News.’

‘Sure. Still.’

‘What are these lines coming out of her hands?’

‘Electricity.’

...

‘There are a lot of nut-jobs out there, Daniel. Fakers. Scammers.’

‘There are more videos. Since this one went out, there have been...four or five.’

‘Faked. People get excited about these things. It’s a what-they-call-it— a meme...’”

(Alderman 2017: 18)

This illustrates the fact that the credibility of the video also depends on the personal perceptions and sensationalism of the audience. This point is where Tunde fills this lack as he engages in one-to-one contact with women despite the violence he is subjected to. For example, he is attacked violently in Delhi during wild street protests by a deranged woman who attempts to rape him. Another occasion is when he tries to rescue a pregnant woman whose leg is stuck under a collapsed wall. With the increased electrical power due to pregnancy hormones and the fear caused by the situation, she cannot control her power and causes more harm both to herself and to Tunde, who is hospitalized after the incident. He had another uncomfortable moment with a woman

named Nina, who asked him if he had a sexually transmitted disease “... *because she’s used her thing in bed and he’d shied away from it. Told her to stop. Started crying*” (Alderman 2017: 176). The narrator explains that what Nina did to him was no worse than what other men experienced because of women. She also betrays him by plagiarizing his work and publishing it under her own name. However, despite some bad experiences with women, he continues to document their journey in an unbiased way and tries to understand the rationale behind women’s anger against men. For this reason, Tunde provides a seemingly more reliable alternative in getting news. His direct experience with women as a result of the positive rapport he builds with them lends authenticity to his footage and thus wipes out potential doubts to a large extent. As Happer and Philo suggest:

“...a number of factors including direct experience, knowledge from other sources, logic and the generation of fear or anger [contribute] to the degree to which audiences [accept] or [reject] the media message.” (2013: 328).

As a result, Tunde’s firsthand, unfiltered content fosters a rapid and less critical acceptance of the changing conditions. His dedication to revealing the truth, his journalistic integrity and his proximity to his subjects build a strong trust with his audience.

Another medium through which patriarchy is discussed is online forums where mostly male members comment informally on what this change is all about and its possible implications, which they think are potentially dangerous. One such forum is titled “*‘Freedom of Reach’, a nominally libertarian website*” (Alderman 2017: 139). On this forum, there is a counter-action against women’s rise to power. Some users even call the shift of power towards patriarchy “feminazi.” As Horan explains;

“Feminazi...has become a well-known insult, used in mass and online media to discredit and stigmatise women whose views or behaviour are regarded as not only feminist, but moreover threateningly ‘radical’ or ‘extreme.’” (2019: 2)

“Feminazi” is a highly pejorative slang word to define radical feminists to condemn them, likening women’s efforts to ask for human rights to the Nazi regime. Unlike Tunde’s adaptable and understanding nature against change, these users inculcate fear and hatred for women rather than trying to understand why women rise against patriarchal norms. One of the users, nicknamed AveryFalls, asks whether other users have seen Tunde’s photos showing Awadi-Atif’s male army getting ready to fight

women. He says he wishes he and his fellows would join his army. Another user nicknamed Manintomany replies:

“That’s exactly what I thought. Only wish I were younger. If my son wanted to go, I’d wish him godspeed. He’s being fucked by a feminazi now though. She’s got her claws into him good and tight.” (Alderman 2017: 144)

Other users talk about their own experiences of violence and discomfort, express their wishes to harm women, and teach them their lesson. One of the most active users respected by men is nicknamed UrbanDox933, who posts: *“There will be nowhere to hide. There will be nowhere to run to. There will be no mercy”* (Alderman 2017: 146). His posts manipulate the already-panicking men into feeling more trapped and hopeless against female power, increasing the social upheaval. Tunde and Urbadox know each other’s strong influence on public perception. For this reason, Tunde accepts Urbadox’s invitation to talk. The aim of Urbadox is to get Tunde by the men’s side in the potentially upcoming war between men and women, but Tunde does not give him much credit because he considers his posts as *“...mean-spirited, semi-literate, bigoted, angry rhetoric...”* (Alderman 2017: 176). Urbadox tries to convince Tunde that women hate all men and *“[t]hey’ll only keep the most genetically healthy of [them] alive”* (Alderman 2017: 180). Tunde expresses that this generalization is not valid for all women because he is aware of the dangers of extremist and polarizing messages that incite fear and discrimination among people. This awareness makes him feel responsible as a journalist for not supporting or amplifying harmful ideologies. Thanks to his direct contact with women, especially the ones suffering at the hands of patriarchy, Tunde can see beyond the us-versus-them scenario. His reluctance to join Urbadox indicates his desire to avoid conflicts and find a middle ground for peace and reconciliation.

However, Tunde’s neutrality fades away as he encounters the violent treatment of men by women. He sees the seventeen-year-old waiter who is made to lick a broken wine glass from the floor by Tatiana. The narrator explains that the waiter has nowhere else to go because he has heard that people who try to pass to Ukraine from Bessapara get shot. In fact, as the narrative unfolds, men start to internalize the pain and humiliation: The young waiter says; *“... it [is] my fault, must not speak when the President is speaking”* (Alderman 2017: 239). Tunde also knows how this feels due to his perplexing experience with Enuma, which adds a personal dimension to his understanding of the gradually increasing violence on men. As Sen says;

“Tunde’s shocking vulnerability as a man in a speculative matriarchal world order is also a potent reminder to Alderman’s readers about how unjustly and appallingly men naturalise violence against women in our present real world.” (2022, 143)

Tunde’s shock is a reminder of the systemic violence that women endure every day in real life. His first-hand experience is crucial for the narrative because it provides a realistic personal perspective to understand the physical and emotional impacts of exposure to violence due to one’s gender. The lack of such experience and thus the absence of any understanding connected to it leads to a deficiency in empathy for the victims of violence. For example, a male Youtube blogger who reviews *The Power* admits;

“I am also aware that I am a man...and that I might not, at times, be able to see past my gender, so that this novel might be saying things that I’m just not getting. I’m just not understanding, because I’ve been raised in a way, or, my view of the world isn’t allowing me access to those things because of my gender. I’m aware that that could be happening with this novel.” (Roro Reads 2023)

In this excerpt, the YouTube reviewer admits his potential biases due to his gender, leading to his failure to empathise in full sense with women’s challenges. Although Tunde is the only male character who supports women’s uprising because he has a relatively better understanding of women’s historical subjugation by the patriarchy, his actual realization of what kind of treatment women have been through comes gradually as he witnesses that women get more brutal towards men especially in Bessapara.

Two key themes in *The Power* are the broader challenge of fully comprehending experiences outside one’s own gendered perspective and overcoming inherent biases to grasp the full scope of gender dynamics. Despite Tunde’s initial positive and curious stance towards female power, he becomes increasingly aware of the darker side of this power as a result of his exposure to the brutality faced by men. Tunde reports this incident as follows in the draft for his future book:

“‘At first we did not speak our hurt because it was not manly. Now we do not speak it because we are afraid and ashamed and alone without hope, each of us alone. It is hard to know when the first became the second.’” (Alderman 2017: 239)

While Tunde is the voice of women at the beginning, he becomes the voice of men as the power shift gains acceleration, which demonstrates his unbiased and responsible journalistic dedication. As Miller also contends, “[t]his framing—a means of denaturalizing the familiar—both underlines existing cultural and political fault lines

and suggests the potential for new ways of thinking and behaving” (2020: 400). In Alderman’s *The Power*, Tunde’s evolving perspective demonstrates how dystopias can subvert traditional gender roles and provoke reflection on the fluidity of gender by making men vulnerable against women. Moreover, the silence of men about the injustice and violence that they receive from women stems from the knowledge of women’s capacity to destroy. As Foucault suggests;

“[power] operates on the field of possibilities in which the behaviour of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions of possible actions...; it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action.” (2000: 341)

Foucault’s concept of power as shaping the “field of possibilities” explains the men’s silence in *The Power*. Faced with women’s overwhelming capacity for action and destruction personally and on the media, men’s silence reflects their recognition of these constraints. Men start to internalize the possibility that any resistance or complaint might provoke further domination or violence.

In addition to Tunde, there are other media figures in *The Power* who influence public opinion and policy, showing the close connection between politics and the media. As women’s place in the public and political spheres becomes stronger, reporters on TV channels are observed to be on the side of the dominant female politicians, who are like Margot Cleary and Tatiana Moskalev. Tunde prepares a news story about the case of the young waiter and files it with his notes and photos for CNN. He anticipates that they would ask for some cuts and alterations in the story, in which case he would take it to other news providers. However, CNN officials do not find news depicting and acknowledging female violence against men appropriate to show in the media, because it is against the cause of cementing newly established female discourse with media content. Their email shortly says, *“Sorry, Tunde, we’re going to pass on this. Great reporting, pix excellent, not a story we can sell in right now”* (Alderman 2017: 240). Other channels also reject his files, and he realizes he cannot share them online because he is in Bessapara. Moreover, Tatiana Moskalev orders that all internet communication channels be shut down. He decides to flee this country and sends all his files to Nina, one of his colleagues he has worked with and trusted before, saying she must keep them for him until he fetches them back, only to find months later that Nina has published the book under her own name, pretending it is her own work. While he tries to find a way out of Bessapara, the Minister of Justice announces:

“...that each man in the country must have his passport and other official documents stamped with the name of his female guardian. Her written permission will be needed for any journey he undertakes. We know that men have their tricks and we cannot allow them to band together.

Any man who does not have a sister, mother, wife or daughter, or other relative, to register him must report to the police station, where he will be assigned a work detail and shackled to other men for the protection of the public. Any man who breaks these laws will be subject to capital punishment. This applies to foreign journalists and other workers.” (Alderman 2017: 243)

Other strict measures include not allowing taking money or other valuable possessions abroad, not permitting men to drive cars and vote, and requiring foreign male journalists and photographers to be employed by women. These measures are ensured by RSAs, which are the police and military sources, and also all citizens of Bessapara who are told to report anyone who violates these rules to the authorities. These measures indicate that Tatiana Moskalev’s regime becomes increasingly authoritarian and strictly based on gender discrimination, deeply affecting the personal freedoms and civil liberties of men. Tatiana’s measures, particularly in journalism, parallel the policies of many authoritarian and conservative countries. For example, during the period known as the Arab Spring between January and April 2011,

“... people sharing an interest in democracy built extensive networks, created social capital, and organized political action. With these technologies, virtual networks materialized in the streets. As a desperate measure, many states tried to choke off information flows between activists, and the rest of the world.” (Howard, Agarwal and Hussain 2011: 217)

Similar to how Arab countries such as Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Syria attempted to shut down the media to cut communication down, Bessapara—the fictional country of women under Tatiana’s control—controls information flow and communication to suppress dissent, too. In this sense, Moskalev wants to ensure that media devices are not used to spread counter ideology challenging newly-established matriarchal rule. Tatiana Moskalev’s authoritarian measures echo historical precedents where oppressive regimes limit freedoms to strengthen their control. The measure of confining men into the country by restricting their freedom of movement can be interpreted as a vindictive action to take revenge for the previously atrocious treatment of male authorities against women in her country during her husband’s regime.

The lack of media coverage on the severe mistreatment of men by women suggests the suppression of information due to political, cultural, or social reasons. As Tunde flees from his hotel upon the Bessaparan government's restrictions for men, he goes to the rural parts of the country both to protect himself and to document the events. He learns from some men that the worst cases occur in the mountains, where people avoid going for this very reason. He witnesses brutally slain men whose corpses are left to rot where they fell, either as a grim warning to others or because no one cares enough to bury them. As he looks for a shelter and a power outlet, he finds an unused store room in an apartment and charges his phone there. He checks his emails and news and sends emails to some editors. As he waits for replies, he sees news described as "[m]ore and more 'skirmishes', without anyone being willing to call this an outright war" (Alderman 2017: 266). Reducing the events including escalating injustice and violence to mere "skirmishes" emphasizes the reluctance of the media or authorities to acknowledge the severity of the situation for men. This shows that the media, as an ISA, has the power to manipulate public opinion by minimizing the perception of grave injustices through language. Tunde also finds out that he was reported to be dead. For this reason, when Tunde emails his editors, they assume his account has been hacked and dismiss his messages as illegitimate. He is also shocked to see all his work claimed by Nina without his name. As the narrator informs, "*Tunde was mentioned nowhere. She had stolen it from him entirely*" (Alderman 2017: 267). This quote highlights that Tunde becomes a casualty of the very power dynamics he intended to support although he initially seeks to document and promote female empowerment.

Tunde's frailty against matriarchal policies reminds readers of this dystopian novel of the fundamental imbalance of gender relations in the present patriarchal society because they perceive Tunde as a weak man "*in a woman's world sensing the impending perils involved in his interactions with the strong opposite-sex*" (Sen 2022: 143). However, Alderman includes a main male character and exposes him to female violence to demonstrate the arbitrariness and cruelty of power imbalances in gender relations, regardless of the gender of the victim or the offender. As Bourke suggests:

"Every one of us is vulnerable, and we all possess the capacity to be vindictive. A significant number of people, however, purposefully set out to exploit the human propensity to suffering. The infliction of cruelty is a choice." (2007: 6)

Therefore, Alderman's narrative and Bourke's ideas collectively demonstrate that the misuse of power and cruelty are deliberate choices whose impacts have shaped cultures and societal structures by repeating the notion that women are the weaker sex and men have the capacity to dominate.

2.2 Other Mediatic Agents of Matriarchy: Advertisements, Kristen and Tom

Advertisements are also crucial tools that cater to and perpetuate the dominant ideology in a society, functioning as ISAs. Most commercials in the present world are based on “[g]ender stereotypes [that] are general beliefs about sex-linked traits and roles, psychological characteristics, and behaviors describing women and men” (Plakoyiannaki, Mathioudaki, Dimitratos and Zotos 2008: 102). For example, women are shown in domestic roles as the decision-makers of minor problems in the house, whereas men are shown in strong roles such as professionals, drivers, and adventurers. However, in *The Power*, this depiction of women as the weaker sex is subverted in the commercials as women get more social and political power:

“There are now advertisements on hoardings now, with sassy young women showing their long, curved arcs in front of cute, delighted boys. They’re supposed to make you want to buy soda, or sneakers, or gum. They work, they sell product. They sell girls one other thing; quietly, on the side. Be strong, they say, that’s how you get everything you want.” (Alderman 2017: 258)

This excerpt demonstrates that today's patriarchal capitalism is replaced by a system of matriarchal capitalism in the dystopian world of *The Power*. These advertisements subtly convey a message about female empowerment to young women by displaying women as inherently strong while reducing men to objects of desire. Reiterated images of strong women and subservient men in the media cause these constructed traits to become habits over time. As Ross articulates, “[t]he publicity industry works to construct shared notions of the ideal. However, these visions are, to an extent, consumer-led and therefore respond to, as well as shape, gender identity” (2020: 236). While mirroring the new societal structure, the reversal of traditional gender roles in advertisements in *The Power* also actively promotes it because advertisements, used as tools to promote matriarchal ideology, encourage viewers to internalize and emulate these roles.

A noticeable change in the image of females in the media can also be observed throughout the narrative. An important indicator of female dominance in the media is

the case of Tom, a male morning show presenter on TV who works with his partner, Kristen. As a media figure appearing on TV, Tom exhibits a subtle attitude of male superiority at the beginning of the emergence of female power, and this is initially tolerated due to long-standing social norms favouring men, as will be exemplified below. However, this tolerance diminishes as female power becomes more assertive, as a result of which he loses his job and reputation in the media sector.

The effects of previously dominant male-superior ideology are pervasive in the media at the beginning of the narrative. While the narrator describes the experiences of the main characters, Tom and Kristen occasionally appear in the background, their voices heard on TV as they comment on the latest news. In the early stages of the realization of girls' electrical power, when most people still do not take it seriously, the programme staff bring in marine biologists "*just for fun*" (Alderman 2017: 19) to explain the electricity-generating organisms of electrical eels. Kristen takes the whole thing seriously and claims that electric eels could down a horse, but Tom dismisses them as only good for lighting a Christmas tree and doubts even that, showing his subtle misogyny by trivializing the potential for significant change. He tries to sound skeptical about this power, but he actually treats it as something trivial. His patriarchal mindset represents the resistance of patriarchal cultures to acknowledge female power. The second time Tom demonstrates subtle misogyny is when they invite historians and human biology experts to their programme. The historian explains a historical carving that shows a female image emitting electrical light from her hands. While the historian refers to religious texts referring to Anath, who was a strong and warrior-spirited mythical woman, he says that Anath "... *liked to bathe her feet in the blood of her enemies*" (Alderman 2017: 63). The male staff in the studio laugh uneasily at this information because they do not believe that a female character can be that strong or that merciless, which are typically characteristics attributed to masculinity. On hearing this, Tom asks his colleague Kristen, "*That doesn't sound like much of a beauty regime, now, does it, Kristen?*" (Alderman 2017: 63). Tom's comment on the information in disguise of a harmless joke directed to his female work partner demonstrates Tom's belief that the realm of being powerful does not belong to women but to men, and women would be interested in superficial issues like beauty. According to Tom's patriarchal values, Kristen is next to him on a TV channel not as an equal colleague but as a minor assistant, or even as decoration pleasing to the eye of the audience. As the following quote suggests;

“[i]n men’s act of representation, women are often used as symbols for meanings men want to convey. Women are objectified as the signs that bear specific moral or artistic significance in a world created by men.” (Patnaik 2020: 4)

As Patnaik observes, patriarchal thought defines women as objects that demonstrate the moral or artistic values determined by men and thus deprives women of their agency and intellectuality. Tom’s cynical joke of reducing the power of the historical strong female figure Anath (bathing her feet with her enemies’ blood) to “an inappropriate beauty regime” actually reflects his disbelief in and discomfort about a powerful female figure. His attitude actually suggests that he is subtly frightened of such power, but he tries to dismiss his fear through his jokes undermining female power.

After his subtly dismissive joke to Kristen, Tom goes on to say that even if historical women had electrical power thousands of years ago, the disappearance of it indicates the lack of necessity for women to have power, saying, “Well, now, Kristen, if a power like this existed, maybe we bred it out deliberately, maybe we didn’t want it around” (Alderman 2017: 63). This expression of Tom suggests the deliberate effort and capability of men to suppress female power. As Miller claims,

“[t]he ‘we’ in such a statement is emphatically male, and speaks to a long history of the physical repression of women’s bodies. Questions about the origins of the power are presented within male-dominated discourses represented by those in government, academia, and news journalism, which reveal a search for truth, but more importantly, socio-political efforts to quell the possibility of what might be unironically termed ‘alternative facts.’” (2020: 414)

Tom reflects the tendency of men to undermine and control female power by ruling out alternative perspectives and truths that may grant women equal or higher socio-political status. His desire for control over women is also evident in the fact that he directs the conversation to superficial issues like beauty to trivialize women’s strength. By implying that men are the decision-makers, he asserts that males are superior and have control over female agency. The reason for the long life-cycle of such narratives is partly because of a large group of women’s support for the determinist approach for the given gender order. This approach also found media coverage in the magazines written for and by middle-class women. As Curran suggests;

“[t]hese sought to professionalise home-making by offering a flow of advice about domestic management, supplemented later by tips about how to be beautiful. In their wake followed working-class women’s magazines, and ‘tuppenny bloods’ for girls,

oriented towards romance in which women were defined largely by their relationships to men. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, national newspapers also introduced women's features of a highly traditional kind. Thus, between the eighteenth century and 1918, popular women's journalism gained a significant audience, and defined the central concerns of women as winning and keeping a man, home-making, motherhood and looking good." (2002: 10)

As this quote explains, the media has historically reinforced gender inequality by promoting limited roles for women centered on domesticity and relational identities. Tom's actions echo past trends in media discussed by Curran, which limited women's roles largely to home-making and aesthetics while placing men in roles of authority.

However, there has been a slow but steady change in the tone of media representations of women especially after the 1960s though patriarchal values were still dominant. Nevertheless, as Curran further explains;

"...by the 1980s and 1990s they offered more varied and less stereotypical depictions of women. For example, some young women's magazines offered more liberated definitions of femininity than their predecessors.... Some American films and programmes, popular in Britain, were strongly influenced by the women's movement.... Even the once traditionalist women's sections of national newspapers bore the imprint of feminist debates." (2002: 13-14)

As Curran highlights, the progressive shift in media from the 1980s and 1990s showcases more diverse and empowered representations of women influenced by feminist movements. There is a similar but a more abrupt change in the media representation of women in *The Power*. When the patriarchal ideology is replaced by matriarchal ideology, Tom's comments supporting males' actions are no longer tolerated. This is observed when a terrorist attack at a women's health center and a busy mall is discussed on Kristen and Tom's TV programme. A group called Male Power takes responsibility for the attack, who claim that they did it to protect men's rights. Kristen, "who changes from simpering sidekick to expert" (Ross 2020; 232), is now the more important presenter because of her gender. She says, "I think anyone watching would agree that whoever did this is the scum of the earth" (Alderman 2017: 174). TV also shows the president expressing that "the United States does not negotiate with terrorists and that the claims of this 'conspiracy-theory splinter group' are nonsense" (Alderman 2017: 174). This alignment of the media and governmental perspectives is the result of the societal transformation towards matriarchy in *The Power*. When Kristen asks Tom what he thinks about the terrorist attacks, the narrator

says, “Tom scowls, just a micro-expression, before the practiced face peels over the real one, the smile smooth as frosting on a cupcake” (Alderman 2017, 174). This description shows that Tom is repressing his disapproval of female power as he perceives that his existence transforms from being the more significant male news anchor into a decorative appearance that adds colour to a morning TV programme. While Kristen feels free to express her anger against the male terrorist group using slang (“scum”), Tom is expected to appear on TV smiling and not saying anything against the dominant social group. As Hoyle suggests, there is “*a muted analogue ... where a female news presenter [Kristen] slowly gains control of the show while her male co-host is relegated to lifestyle and fashion stories*” (2017). This is the kind of treatment that Tom directed towards Kristen before the surge of female power, because he is a male member of the previously male-dominant society. Tom cannot hide his feelings and says, “*They [men] want equality, Kristen*” (Alderman 2017: 174). This comment is not deemed appropriate, so Kristen tries to soften the atmosphere while the channel staff cuts the programme. Kristen attributes this “inappropriate” comment of Tom to his personal problems: “*These things happen; problems at home, stress, overwork, health anxiety, money worries—they’ve seen it all, really*” (Alderman 2017: 174). Kristen’s seemingly encompassing and protective attitude towards Tom is a result of the fact that she does not find Tom as professional as herself because he is a male. Alderman uses this narrative to show the negative effects of gender stereotypes that women face today in the media and in other workplaces in general. In the dystopian context of *The Power*, Kristen’s reflection on Tom implies that a news-presenting job is better suited for women because, apparently, men like Tom cannot control their feelings and do not understand the events as they should. Kristen’s comment suggesting Tom’s diminishing role in the media reverses the traditional biases that classify women as less professional. When the commercials are on, Tom explains that the government discriminates against men, and he expresses his anger towards Kristen by saying:

“...fuck you, Kristen, we both know you’ve got this fucking thing, too, and it’s changed you, it’s made you harder; you’re not even a real woman anymore. Four years ago, Kristen, you knew what you were, and what you had to offer to this network, and what the fuck are you now?” (Alderman 2017: 175)

Tom’s utterance, “*you’re not even a real woman anymore,*” shows that Tom attaches patriarchal values to being a woman; and therefore, he still expects Kristen to behave

demurely. His outburst of frustration results from his disappointment at the abrupt reversal of gender roles and shows that clear-cut descriptions of gender roles lead to discrimination. Therefore, Alderman aims to create awareness of the persistent issue of gender bias and the stereotypes connected to it in *The Power*. Tom is fired from his job as a result of this event because his comments blaming the matriarchal government for not protecting men are interpreted as supporting men's terrorist actions. In fact, he is taken out of the league of the media because his view is seen as a threat to the established political system of matriarchy.

In conclusion, the media is one of the most critical agents in *The Power* in overthrowing patriarchy and establishing a matriarchal order in place of it. The changing representations of women in the media in this novel facilitate women's rise to absolute power, promoting them from having subservient roles to dominant ones. As Foucault suggests, this shift occurs due to long "*processes and struggles*" (1978b: 28) and creates a new set of knowledge, or culture, that favors women. The subverted gender dynamics transmitted via media devices in *The Power* highlight the fluid and constructed nature of gender, which Judith Butler names gender performativity. In *The Power*, the idea of gender changes gradually due to repeated acts of women applying their power to men in the media. Tunde is the most crucial media character in this novel because he is the only male perspective who also supports female power, but he eventually falls victim to it. The media as an ISA, as Althusser suggests, illustrates how the media serves both as the reflection of dominant ideologies and as a powerful apparatus for shifting and maintaining these ideologies. The content shown in the media not only reflects ideas about gender according to a given society's dominant ideology as a mirror but also bears a huge potential to reconfigure gender dynamics. As in the example of *The Power*, the patriarchal values observed at the beginning of the narrative dominate the media, too. However, as women assert their power more pervasively, the matriarchal voice in the media overpowers its counterpart. Accordingly, Tunde's positioning and perception of himself as a male member of the society evolves from a stance of inherent dominance towards embracing egalitarian views, and ultimately to feeling suppressed within an increasingly matriarchal world.

CHAPTER III

WOMEN HARNESSING POLITICAL POWER: THE MATRIARCHAL POLITICAL CONTROL OF MARGOT CLEARY

In the dystopian world of *The Power*, the abrupt shift from patriarchy to matriarchy reshapes the political landscape, with characters like Margot Cleary at the forefront of this transformation. In the novel, political institutions become instruments for establishing matriarchy as the dominant discourse, mirroring Althusser's concept of State Apparatuses and their role in maintaining ideology. The political moves of leaders like Margot Cleary and Tatiana Moskalev illustrate how power is exercised and reinforced in a matriarchal social system. Moreover, the way these women navigate their roles challenges traditional gender norms, which will be discussed in the light of Butler's notion of gender performativity in this chapter. This chapter delves into how the intersection of politics and gender in *The Power* not only subverts patriarchal structures but also poses critical questions about the nature of power and identity in a reimagined societal order.

Although women's representation in the political area varies across nations and geographies, it is generally correct to assert that women face cultural and structural barriers preventing them from holding higher positions in political roles. Structural barriers in political decisions, such as ineffective quota laws for female candidates (Paxton and Hughes 2014: 166) and a lack of resources to ensure higher numbers of female candidates, pose significant obstacles for women in rising to higher political positions. As Paxton and Hughes further suggest,

"Women are underrepresented in politics. Simply turning on the television to a summit of world leaders, a debate in the British Parliament, or a UN Security Council meeting reveals few female faces. Women make up half of the population of every country in the world. But the worldwide average percentage of women in national parliaments is only 20%. Of the more than 190 countries in the world, a woman is the head of government (president or a prime minister) in only 13. Women are 15% of ambassadors to the United Nations and 17% of the world's cabinet ministers." (2014:

1)

These figures are also supported by Clancy and Austin, who say, “[w]omen currently serve as the head of government in just 13 of the 193 member states of the United Nations. And fewer than a third of UN countries have ever had a woman leader...” (2023), which proves that the political situation of women has remained almost the same between 2014 and 2023. In *The Power* by Naomi Alderman, two female characters represent women’s place in politics. However, they are also under male hegemony before discovering their power. The mayor of an unnamed US city, Margot Cleary, is subordinated and subtly scorned by the governor and her superior, Daniel Dandon. Similarly, Tatiana Moskalev holds no real power in the profoundly misogynistic country of Moldova, serving merely as a symbolic figure—an ornamental extension of her dictator husband’s authority—until his sudden death shifts the political dynamic in her favour.

As will be mentioned in the following parts of this chapter, one so-called reason why Margot Cleary is not deemed as a leader is that she is a mother, and she cannot balance familial and political responsibilities. At the beginning of the narrative, traditional gender roles often prioritize domestic responsibilities for women over leadership ambitions. A deeply ingrained, long-standing cultural perception across many regions associates women’s primary role with motherhood and emotional tranquility rather than public life or political engagement. For example, according to the following passage, an anti-suffragist male Senator in the American Parliament once said,

“Whether the child’s heart pulses beneath her own or throbs against her breast, motherhood demands above all tranquility, freedom from contest, from excitement, from the heart-burnings of strife. The welfare, mental and physical, of the human race rests, to a more or less degree, upon that tranquility.” (Flexner 1919: 309, as cited by Millett 2000: 72)

As this quote illustrates, bringing the motherhood issue forward is a subtle manipulation to exclude women from politics although this rhetoric seems to favour women’s well-being and that of society in general. This rhetoric reinforces the idea that women are inherently unsuitable for roles other than domestic ones.

While *The Power* explores a reversal of traditional gender dynamics, it ultimately reveals that the possession of power—regardless of gender—reproduces the same systemic injustices and hierarchies found in patriarchal structures. Therefore, female rule does not bring a better world for all in *The Power*, either. In the real world,

too, men are not always the sole enforcers of patriarchy. Instead, all participants in capitalist systems, especially the financially well-off, contribute to sustaining it, as power and privilege are maintained through economic and social hierarchies that cut across gender lines. As Jessa Crispin argues in *Why I Am Not a Feminist*, patriarchy is not merely a system that restricts women but a broader structure through which the powerful maintain their privileged status by controlling and oppressing the less powerful. Misogyny, like racism or homophobia, is a form of discrimination that emerges from patriarchal structures. As long as individuals—regardless of gender—can circumvent the burdens of patriarchy through economic means, such as purchasing childcare, healthcare, or domestic services, they remain indifferent to the oppression faced by those who are financially disadvantaged under patriarchal norms. Thus, both male and female participants in a patriarchal system perpetuate its injustices by engaging in decision-making roles within political spheres, further marginalizing women (2017: 56-57). Crispin's observation implies that the root of the problem lies in the pleasure derived from power by its holders, irrespective of their gender, and at the expense of those who lack power. As Crispin further suggests,

“Now that women are raised with access to power, we will not see a more egalitarian world, but the same world, just with more women in it. ... [W]e have replaced gender and race with money and power. Now you can buy your position in society rather than have to be born with the right genetics. Now that we have access as women, women in positions of power are much less likely to attempt to dismantle this system of inequality. Power feels good. Capitalism feels good. It gives you things, as long as its boot is not on your neck.” (2017: 57-58)

Similarly, in the dystopian world of *The Power* by Alderman, women quickly adapt to the comfort of having power and thus ignore the injustice that patriarchy causes. Margot Cleary and Tatiana Moskalev also use the political power that their electrical power provides them in the direction of their interests and those of the patriarchal system. As Alderman says in an interview, “*Men and women, morally, tend to be about the same*” (PBS NewsHour). For this reason, even though the patriarchal system is replaced by patriarchy, previously patriarchal systems of oppression just swap the victimised group, putting men in disadvantaged positions. As Nussbaum suggests, one might expect that “*... the women who find themselves possessed of real power in real numbers for the first time, quite possibly, all of human history, would be just as corrupted by it as any man before*” (2017). In parallel with Nussbaum's observation,

it is clear that female characters in *The Power* usurp the perks of the institutions they represent when they discover their electrical strength.

Before Margot gains her electrical power, she feels the subtle oppression of her superior and her rival, Daniel Dandon, on her shoulders. As Lum says, “*Margot Cleary’s mayoral career is plagued with negative criticism from Daniel Dandon, who does not see her as a partner in governance but as an incompetent subordinate*” (2023: 8), because *The Power* portrays a political landscape in which women are not accepted as crucial figures in governance even if they achieve political power legitimately. When the news about electrically charged teenage girls spread, Daniel strongly advises that Margot should close the schools to protect everyone. Although Margot does not comprehend the seriousness of it and thinks of such news as fake, she agrees to do so to avoid liability in case negative consequences occur because of teenage girls using their power. She does it to protect herself from Daniel’s criticism. In the novel, her thinking is described as follows,

“She’s [Margot’s] going to look like an idiot, going along with this. It has to be a stunt for a TV show. She’ll be the shit-for-brains, the mayor who closed the schools of this major metropolitan area because of a fucking practical joke. But if she doesn’t close them and something happens ... Daniel will get to be the Governor of this great state, who warned the Mayor, who tried to convince her to do something, but all to no avail. She can practically see the tears running down his cheeks as he gives his interview via live feed from the Governor’s Mansion. Fuck.” (2017: 19)

This description captures the political manipulation and power play between Margot and Daniel Dandon. Margot recognizes her insecurity as a female player in the game of politics because either decision she makes could serve Dandon’s ambitions. If she closes the schools, she risks public ridicule. However, if she does not do it, and something goes wrong, Dandon will exploit her failure to elevate himself by making her seem incapable of making politically correct decisions. Therefore, this scene highlights the opportunism of male figures like Dandon and Margot’s vulnerability within a male-dominated political system.

The rivalry between Daniel Dandon and Margot Cleary can be interpreted as a parody of the 2016 U.S. presidential election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. *The Power* was published in the USA in 2017. As Read comments, the US

nation had to deal “...with a ‘pussy-grabbing’⁷ misogynist in the highest political office, and [in the USA] a new horrific exposé of a male mogul’s serial abuse [seemed] to land on the front pages every week” (2017). Before the election, Trump, an impenitent misogynist, accused Clinton of “*playing the woman card*” to appeal to female electors and said, “*I call her ‘crooked Hillary’ because she’s crooked, and the only thing she’s got is the woman card. That’s all she’s got...it’s a weak card in her hands*” (Zezima 2016). Trump suggests that she does not have the necessary skills to be in politics by claiming to speak only targeting Clinton; however, he extends this criticism to all women. Even if he said that he would have a team of women among his top advisors when he is elected, his comment shows a patriarchal male politician’s disbelief in the fact that a female candidate’s qualities as a leader can transcend her gender and that her leadership can appeal to every citizen’s needs. In the novel, Margot Cleary’s initial caution regarding Daniel Dandon stems from her recognition of his sense of superiority over women in political leadership roles. Margot is acutely aware of his patronizing behaviour and resistance to women challenging the established political order. Therefore, she is strategically careful in her interactions with him before she realizes her electrical power. When Margot acquires the electrical power and rapidly gains control of it, she also gains the confidence to challenge Daniel.

Margot Cleary has a critical governmental role as the Mayor; however, she is aware of the covert gender biases against women in positions of power. For example, Margot learns that her daughter Jocelyn has electrical power when Jocelyn is involved in a school fight and is sent home that day. Media members gather in front of Margot’s house because it is revealed that the Mayor’s daughter also has the much-disputed girl power. Margot’s electrical power is awakened by her daughter Jocelyn while she tries to show her mother the extent of the painful and extraordinary feeling. Margot enjoys the sense of power and feels that she is “*enough all by herself*” (Alderman 2017: 25). This is a transformative moment of female self-empowerment and independence and reflects her evolving identity as she realizes her capabilities. However, she knows that the patriarchal-minded men in politics are not ready for or tolerant of women’s potential with such power, so Margot and Jocelyn do not tell anyone about Margot’s

⁷The phrase “pussy-grabbing” comes from a 2005 recording where Donald Trump, during his presidential campaign, was heard saying, “*When you’re a star, they let you do it,*” referring to grabbing women by their genitals without consent. This caused widespread outrage and was seen as a sign of his disrespect for women. Trump later called it “*locker room talk*” (Fahrenthold 2016).

new power. Upon learning from the circulating information that older women can have it too, government officials in the USA decide to test all female government employees for possession of electrical power. Daniel Dandon says this test “... *includes the Mayor’s office, Margot. No arguments. ... you can’t have someone employed in government buildings who can do that. It’s like walking around with a loaded gun*” (Alderman 2017: 63). Daniel seeks to control women because their newfound electrical power disrupts the existing patriarchal structure, threatening his political and social influence. Alyson Miller argues that regarding the female body as a “loaded gun” is “*an inherently phallic descriptor... provoking male fears of destruction as realized by figures such as the monstrous feminine and the femme castratrice*” (2020: 414). Therefore, for Daniel, losing political authority to women equates to the erosion of all the powers that men in patriarchal societies are granted as a birthright by patriarchy. Furthermore, implementing tests on women to detect electrical power and not allowing those with power to work in “[c]ertain positions involving contact with children and the public... [which are] mandated as unsuitable by the Governor’s office” (Alderman 2017: 66) are intervention on female body and punishment for simply belonging to the female gender.

In *The Power*, one of the deepest fears of men is the possibility that their importance in the society will diminish because their biological role in reproduction is limited. The specific concern is that just one man can impregnate many women, and this makes most men obsolete. On a TV programme it is discussed that men,

“...commit the great majority of crimes. Men are less intelligent, less diligent, less hardworking, ...and they are a drain on the resources of the country. Of course we need them to have babies, but how many do we need for that? Not as many as women. Good, clean obedient men, of course there will always be place for those. But how many is that? Maybe one in ten.” (Alderman 2017: 278)

Similar to the way women’s autonomy is devalued in political arguments like abortion laws, the need for having as many men as women is questioned in the novel, suggesting that most men could be made redundant. As Yebra argues, “[t]he male body is thus disciplined to fulfil the reproductive needs of the regime only as long as it meets the requisites usually demanded of women by patriarchal societies” (2018: 74-75). Alderman almost reverses the situation of women in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and forces it in the face of patriarchy. By placing men in a position reduced to reproductive

function and deemed unnecessary, Alderman's dystopia exposes the imbalance in gendered power relations through role reversal.

Similarly, by mandating tests for women in government positions, Daniel misogynistically aims to curtail their autonomy and maintain male dominance under the pretext of ensuring public safety and order. Albeit mistakenly, Daniel thinks that they could contain the power of fifteen-year-old girls; however, he grasps that “[t]he thing is that they can wake up this power in some of the older women. It raises questions” (Alderman 2017: 63). Here, Daniel's fear is beyond the physical damage that women can cause with their power; yet, his fear concerns the possibility of women's mobility towards higher positions in society and politics. As Mechkova et al. agree, women's opportunities in politics are jeopardized by patriarchal corrupt actors who appropriate women as “‘window dressing’ to legitimize rule where in reality male patrons continue to dominate policy decisions” (2022: 19). For leaders like Daniel, women going beyond the window—such as Margot becoming his rival for the governorship—and getting a solid position in politics are a threat. Daniel wishes to maintain the status quo, where Margot is his subordinate and he is the chief decision-maker. With a woman in the office, it creates the illusion that there is gender equality in politics, but in practice, men like Daniel know that men are supposed to be at the wheel—a patriarchal norm they enjoy. However, the shift of power balances between genders shakes his self-perceived image of being an overlord of women. As Miller also agrees,

“...anxiety about ‘grown women’ [in *The Power*]...most suggests the potential for revolution, a recognition, perhaps, of how those with long-term experiences of engrained cultural inequality would push for the most radical change.” (2020: 414)

This demonstrates that Daniel fears losing his political influence, which he holds primarily due to his gender, as women gain power over men with the rise of their electrical abilities. Daniel's fear surfaces so obviously that he says, “*They should shoot those girls. Just shoot them. In the head. Bam. End of Story*” (Alderman 2017: 85). His comments reflect a desperate attempt to suppress the societal shift that threatens his authority and highlights his fear of becoming obsolete because of the rise of women's physical and political strength, which subvert the existing gender hierarchies.

In *The Power*, the patriarchal mindset posits that the advance of women's electrical power is an unfortunate aberration from the male-dominated societal order, or “the normal,” which necessitates prompt correction. This narrative is conveyed to

the citizens of Margot's city by downplaying the female power as a temporary but perilous anomaly. As the Mayor, Margot affixes her signature on a photocopied leaflet sent across the city, which advises girls to abstain from electrical power, simply giving the message, "... *abstinence. Just don't do it. It'll pass*" (Alderman 2017: 64). The information on the leaflet reassures the populace that this disruptive phenomenon will soon be eradicated as quickly as an injection against it is found. Despite her official stance and participation in distributing this message, Margot does not subscribe to this view. However, she has to conceal her power from Daniel so as not to harm her political ambitions in the near future. Abstinence and a near-future cure are the ideas and wishful thinking of Daniel Dandon, who represents the patriarchal mindset. As Roschman observes, the call for abstinence echoes the attitude of the conservative American government about female sexuality, and "*its echo of evangelical purity language*" (2021: 16) is obvious. One of the main characters, Roxy, also mentions similar sexual politics in England while talking to Allie as in the following:

"...d'you know what they are teaching girls in school in England? Breathing exercises! No kidding, bleeding breathing. Bleeding 'keep it under control, don't use it, don't do anything, keep yourself nice and keep your arms crossed,' you know what I mean? And like, I had sex with a bloke a few weeks back and he was practically begging me to do it to him, just a little bit, he'd seen it on the internet; no one's going to keep their arms crossed forever." (Alderman 2017: 102)

What is framed as pastoral care in England, as described by Roxy, and in Margot's city reflects an abstinence culture that discourages women from exploring their sexual potential—a theme symbolized by the fictional organ, the skein, in *The Power*. In fact, the call for abstinence is a desperate patriarchal desire to contain the female power by demonizing the female body. Men like Daniel regard female power as an illness, an abnormality that is "*as upsetting for the girls to use ... as it is for their victims*" (Alderman 2017: 64), as noted on the leaflet. This official line sent to the citizens of Margot's city demonstrates the discursive use of power by labelling the female power as upsetting for both the receiver and the practitioner. This message is a political tool for controlling society according to the dominant ideology. Verbal control of discourse is as powerful as implementing physical force because it creates consent among individuals by encouraging them to rationalise the imposed actions. As Althusser explains,

“...in order to exist, every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce. It must therefore reproduce:

- 1. the productive forces,*
- 2. the existing relations of production.” (2014: 233)*

Here, Althusser actually refers to the production and maintenance of raw materials, goods, services, labor power and the demand to sustain economic activities. Applying this concept to patriarchal ideology, society must reproduce both the productive forces and the existing relations of production that suppress women to maintain its structure by reinforcing gender hierarchies and promoting beliefs and practices that subordinate women. This reproduction occurs through ISAs like family, education, media, and religion, which are all tools of politics instilling and normalizing male dominance in gender relations. Thus, the continuous production and reinforcement of patriarchal ideology are essential for the ongoing existence of the social formation that relies on women’s suppression to sustain its economic and social systems. As Althusser also acknowledges,

“...the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class ‘in words’.” (2014: 236)

As this explains, the reproduction of labor power also requires the internalization of submission to the dominant ideology through power holders’ endeavours to justify and articulate the dominant ideology “in words.” This means that patriarchal ideology is reinforced through language and discourse, ensuring that both the oppressed and the oppressors legitimize male dominance verbally and culturally. It can be observed that “[t]he accepted ideologies of the pre-power culture are used as a justification for further oppression” (McDevitt 2022: 4). In Margot’s city, the ideological narrative serves as a form of symbolic repression, aiming to mould public perception and curb the potential uprising of female empowerment. By framing the female power as both distressing and abnormal, the patriarchal authority leverages both discourse and policy to maintain social order. This illustrates how control over ideology through verbal messages can be as effective as physical enforcement in sustaining hegemonic power.

Language reflects a certain ideology in *The Power* as it is a key mechanism in reiterating gender roles and contributing to gender performativity that naturalize gender roles dictated by society. However, Alderman disrupts this pattern through Margot's bold language towards Daniel, subverting traditional gender norms and undermining patriarchal power. As the pressure of patriarchy on Margot's shoulders disappears upon her realization of her physical leverage, she is no longer flustered by Daniel's presence in the office, even when he explains they will test women for the presence of electrical power. It is evident in how she makes fun of him while they discuss seriously. The following conversation is an example of this situation:

"It's a problem."

'We all know it's a problem.'

'...'

'We've got no way to know whether anyone in this room can do it.'

'We know you couldn't do it, Daniel.'" (Alderman 2017: 62)

By saying Daniel cannot use electrical power, Margot subtly mocks him, indirectly asserts her dominance, and undermines Daniel's authority. Her newfound confidence and sense of control allow her to be no longer intimidated by Daniel or the constraints of patriarchy. This moment of change apparent in Margot's communication with Daniel highlights that men's previous position of power in politics has diminished in the face of the evolving societal structure. Language serves as a potent mechanism through which misogyny is perpetuated and gender discrimination against women is normalized. For instance, it remains a prevalent practice in many societies—including those often considered more egalitarian, such as European and American nations—to depict women as inherently less capable in domains traditionally associated with the public sphere. As Balirano explains,

"The thorny relationship between language and gender-based violence has often had significant implications on the understanding of human relationships. If language has the power to reflect the complexity of human life more than any other form of communicative channel, it must necessarily also play a fundamental role in redetermining gender balance by altering the way we and others perceive and interpret the world around us. ...Language, in particular, is one of the most powerful means through which sexism, gender discrimination, harassment and the objectification of women are perpetrated and reproduced." (2023: 61)

Balirano explains the subjugation of women through language in a patriarchal society. However, Alderman flips the traditional gender bias in *The Power* by having Margot

question Daniel's competence specifically because he is a man. This redirects the typical misogynistic language towards men, and thus, attaches a gender-based incapability onto men. Margot's new way of speaking towards patriarchy ties into Butler's idea that gender is not something we are born with but something we perform that is shaped by society's norms. This change in how Margot talks reflects how behavior is taught and expected by the world.

Margot's ability to control her electrical power during the test that detects women with electrical power marks a turning point in her political confidence and assertiveness. She exercises excellent control over her body, prevents her electrical power from revealing itself, and thus, successfully keeps her secret. As a result, she is cleared to maintain her governmental responsibilities. This outcome reinforces her confidence in dealing with Daniel and makes her bolder in confronting him with criticism and harsh realities. In contrast, Daniel's fragile political skills become evident when he is discussing with Margot about what could be done to solve the "problems" caused by girls using their electrical power. Rather than acknowledging his incompetence in how to deal with the spread of girls' electrical power, he shifts blame onto others, especially to Margot, as observed in the following excerpt:

"Daniel says, 'I try, I really try, always to have something positive to say, you know, but just' — he lets the pages slip from his hand, fall across the table — 'your people haven't given me a single thing I can use here.'"

...

"I know it's not your fault," says Daniel. "You're understaffed, under-resourced—we all know you're trying your hardest in difficult circumstances—but this just isn't something we can use." (Alderman 2017: 70)

This conversation explores the government's strategies to counter the rise of electrical girls, hoping there could be some "*potential for any future reversal. (The potential is nil)*" (Alderman 2017: 70). Daniel's reaction reveals his insecurities as he gradually realizes that the once unquestioned male dominance in politics is being dismantled. Margot realizes Daniel's latent despair concealed under his blames, and boldly interrupts his talk, "*sharp like the knock at a door*" (Alderman 2017: 71). She adopts this attitude because she can better see their equal position and understand that his superiority is an illusion based on his gender. The following excerpt from the novel illustrates Margot's newly-acquired boldness against patriarchy and her disdain for it:

“Don’t waste my time with this, Daniel...You and I both know that no one has an answer yet. If you’ve got a great idea, let’s hear it. Otherwise...”

She lets it dangle. Daniel opens his mouth as if to say something and then closes it again. ...

‘I didn’t think so,’ she says. ‘Let’s work together on this one, OK, buddy? No sense throwing each other to the wolves.’” (Alderman 2017: 71)

Margot asserts her authority and exposes his vulnerability by saying she is not surprised that Daniel has no useful idea, which clearly signals the shift in power towards patriarchy. Her casual language, such the use of “buddy,” reflects her newfound confidence and disdain for the patriarchal order. This suggests that she now sees men as equals, if not lesser, in this changing reality. Although a little restraint is evident in her attitude towards Daniel, her inner thoughts, as described by the narrator, reflect that she enjoys her power to the full:

“It doesn’t matter that she shouldn’t, that she never would. What matters is that she could, if she wanted. The power to hurt is a kind of wealth....Margot is thinking about her future. You’re gonna pump my gas someday, Daniel. I’ve got big plans.” (2017: 71).

This passage reveals Margot’s growing recognition of her newfound power as she interrupts Daniel’s speech with confidence, and picturing Daniel pumping her gas in the future in her mind reflects her satisfaction with the reversal of roles and her anticipation of control over the system that once oppressed her. This mirrors Foucault’s assertion that

“[p]ower relations are exercised, to an exceedingly important extent, through the production and exchange of signs; and they are scarcely separable from goal-directed activities that permit the exercise of power..., or that, to enable them to operate, call on relations of power (the division of labor and the hierarchy of tasks).” (2000: 338)

Margot’s realization that she holds a dominant position against Daniel aligns with Foucault’s understanding of how power operates within hierarchical structures. The hierarchy, previously favoring men like Daniel, is now being redefined. Margot’s dominance is expressed through her casual dismissal of Daniel’s authority, illustrating the way power relations shift and reveal the illusory nature of the previously accepted social order, much like how Foucault explains the exercise of power through social structures such as the hierarchical division of labor.

The illusiveness of power dynamics, as analyzed through Foucault’s lens aligns with Butler’s argument that gender itself is not an inherent identity but a performed

construct, continuously shaped and reshaped within these evolving power relations. Judith Butler's ideas about the lack of origin in the formation of gender provides a firm ground for Alderman's dystopia. As Butler suggests,

"[g]ender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness." (2002: 178)

Butler's explanation of gender being constructed aligns with Millett's ideas about the arbitrariness of gender. In *The Power*, Margot's actions illustrate how power is not inherently tied to masculinity, but rather constructed and reinforced by societal norms. Just as the idea of gender is produced through repeated acts, the association of political power with masculinity is maintained through continuous reinforcement of patriarchal structures. Margot's rise to political authority undermines this link, revealing that political power is not naturally masculine, but something that can be claimed and reshaped by women as well.

Although she initially keeps her power a secret, Margot admits to her daughter Jocelyn's irregular electrical ability, which led to an altercation that briefly hospitalized a male classmate at school. She and Jocelyn join a pre-produced TV program presented by Tom and Kristen (previously mentioned in Chapter 2). The reason to appear on this TV show is to appeal to the emotions of the public and legitimize electrical power. The narrator describes, saying,

"Jos has been preparing for this with her mom for more than a week now. She knows what to say. Her mouth is dry. She's a trooper; she does it anyway."

'It was scary' she says. 'I hadn't learned how to control it. I was worried I could have really hurt him. I wished... I wish someone had shown me how to use it properly. how to control it.'

There are tears starting in Jos's eyes. They had't rehearsed that, but it's great. The producer zooms right in, angling camera 3 to catch the glisten. It's perfect. She's so young and fresh and beautiful and sad." (2017: 87)

With Jocelyn explaining in tears that she was also scared because of hurting someone unintentionally, Margot knows that it will ease the public's fears and shift the narrative in their favor. By presenting her daughter as a vulnerable and empathetic figure, Margot strategically humanizes the electrical power in front of the audience, and makes it seem less like a threat and more like a misunderstood ability. This moment is

crucial for Margot as it helps her gather public support and further consolidate her political influence by playing on the emotions of viewers and normalizing the existence of female electrical power in society.

Margot performs this scenario on TV with Jocelyn to introduce her idea of establishing girl concentration camps, aiming to teach them how to use their power more effectively. She uses Jocelyn to make the idea seem more appealing, portraying it as both necessary and not dangerous. Her choice of language is rehearsed, bearing a politician's assertive intonation, as Alderman writes, "*Assertive. Effective. Short sentences. A numbered list. Just like on Buzzfeed*⁸" (2017: 88). She makes sure that it is easily digestible for everyone with her simple but assertive language. Margot manipulates public sentiment and institutional control through this emotional TV appearance, creating a softer ground for introducing her idea of establishing a girls' training camp. As a subtle and clever political strategy, she frames her own daughter's lack of control over her power as a societal problem that needs to be acknowledged and swiftly addressed because she says, "*[i]t's too late now to try to cure it; we need new ideas*" (Alderman 2017: 89). Margot explains her strategy to handle this situation in the following excerpt:

"One: set up free spaces for the girls to practice their power together. A trial first in my metropolitan area and, if it's popular, state wide. Two: identify girls who have good control to help the younger ones learn to keep their power in check. Three: zero tolerance of usage outside these safe spaces." (Alderman 2017: 88)

Through this strategy, Margot positions herself as both a reliable protector and a solution provider. This approach allows her to frame the idea of a specialized camp for girls not just as a training center but as a necessary institution for societal safety and the advancement of young women with electrical abilities. She uses the third point to reach a compromise with the public to accelerate putting this plan into action.

Another persuasive tool that Margot uses is religion to ensure control and compliance with her plan while positioning herself as both a moral authority and a protector of societal interests. Margot's use of religion reflects Althusser's concept of ISAs, where institutions like religion function to maintain the dominant ideology. To appeal to the religious values of the audience,

⁸ Buzzfeed is a social media platform that offers short, easily consumable content to quickly capture the user's attention. Margot's choice of language while she is introducing her plan to establish NorthStar camps is also capturing and optimized for an average TV audience.

“Margot cynically deploys the Bible as a politically strategic intertext, indicating the popularity of Biblical messaging with American voters and suggesting that politicians often use Biblical intertext for political gain without necessarily believing the Bible’s messages.” (Roschman 2021, 18).

Margot’s use of the Bible shows how religion becomes an ISA in a matriarchy where it helps reinforce the power shift. The verse Margot quotes from the Bible is the following: *“The highest among us aren’t always the wisest, and the older generation isn’t always the best to judge what’s right”* knowing that *“[q]uoting the Bible [is] a winning strategy”* (Alderman 2017: 88). This biblical verse serves two purposes: Firstly, she subtly says that it is time to give up on the old and traditional ways in politics and accept women’s power. Secondly, she frames her plan for the girls’ camps as progressive and necessary, even if it deviates from traditional expectations. Margot uses this quote strategically to imply that the younger generation should be entrusted with shaping the future, albeit not without her guidance and control. Therefore, she uses the religious values of the audience to cater for her initiative.

Margot’s idea of girls’ training camps outrages Daniel because it is a bold move that subverts patriarchy. He tries to reassert his power in the office by yelling at Margot in the following excerpt:

“How fucking dare you? ... So you do this? National TV? Promising to roll the thing out state wide? If you remember, Margot, I am the governor of this state and you are just the Mayor of your metropolitan area.” (Alderman 2017: 89)

Daniel’s outburst is an attempt to belittle Margot and reassert his dominance by reminding her of her lower rank, but this tactic reveals his insecurity in the face of her growing power. He further demoralizes her, saying no one will fund this thing and that using public money for *“terrorist operatives [and for] some fucking jihadis”* (Alderman 2017: 90) is unacceptable. Daniel’s reaction stems from his realization that Margot’s idea *“gives concrete political form to what is currently articulated as fearful about women in public culture”* (Kelly 2016: 92), as he understands that her growing influence is a direct challenge to his own control. Yet Margot remains unmoved. Furthermore, right after the TV appearance, both parents and investors quickly show support by enrolling their daughters in the camps and backing Margot’s initiative. This rapid response reflects the accelerated rise of matriarchy, as people adapt to the irreversible change by sending their girls to training camps.

Margot's girls' training camps function as ISA, as defined by Althusser. Like schools, they serve to instill societal norms and reproduce power structures. Althusser states, "...the school...teaches 'know-how,' but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice'" (Althusser 1971: 236). Similarly, Margot's camps prepare girls to wield power within the new matriarchal order and reinforce the newly shaping matriarchal ideology. By enrolling their daughters, parents also contribute to the shift in power and thus accept the new societal framework the camps represent.

Margot benefits from the advantage of female sexuality as a political tool. Her training camps in *The Power* are used as both an ISA within power dynamics, and they illustrate how physical and social attributes—such as the girls' electrical abilities—are utilized to sustain and reinforce female authority within the emerging matriarchal order. As Foucault suggests,

"[s]exuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it... Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies." (1978b: 103)

Foucault explains that sexuality isn't something that opposes power but can be shaped and used as a tool within power structures to achieve political or social goals. Margot Cleary uses the girls' electrical abilities to build a new political system reinforced by a female army, functioning as an RSA. Like Foucault's idea, Margot uses sexuality as a strategic tool by deploying the NorthStar girl army to Bessapara and improving her political relations, and also benefitting from the financial gain as one of the major stakeholders of the NorthStar. These help establish her authority and reverse the traditional patriarchal control.

Margot's establishment and success with the NorthStar Girls Training Camps allow matriarchy to exert greater influence on society through an institutional entity of the state that functions as both a school and an army of girls. Alongside Mother Eve's matriarchal religion, the NorthStar Camps mark a crucial step in the rise of matriarchal politics. As the ideology of a discourse penetrates civil organizations, the need for coercion to maintain order diminishes thanks to the consent given by the subjects of the ideology.

Margot Cleary gradually rises to political power as a female politician who seems to promise a utopia for women, yet her actions foreshadow the emergence of a new form of control. The original intention to found the NorthStar girl camps is to legitimize young women's electrical power and to empower them, yet these camps also initiate state intervention into what fundamentally symbolizes and promises the sexual autonomy of teenage girls. This duality reveals Margot as a complex figure who, despite her intentions, may reinforce patriarchal control rather than genuinely empower women. Margot's daughter's appearance on national TV parodies the experience of a teenage girl in American evangelical society who expresses remorse over engaging in sexual experiences before they are socially accepted. She mourns for using her power, which signifies her sexuality, and in doing so, she harms a boy and experiences psychological distress herself. This scene reflects the common abstinence rhetoric prevalent in conservative patriarchal societies.

In contrast, Jocelyn's appearance on national TV presents an opportunity for her to assert her agency and demonstrate that women can also embody aggression. This aggressive stance subverts traditional gender norms, challenging the entrenched notions of femininity. Through Jocelyn, Alderman highlights the absence or presence of a skein as a powerful metaphor for the constructed nature of gendered power. By reversing patriarchal dominance and establishing matriarchal control over societal hierarchy, *The Power* underscores how material and symbolic aspects of the body—such as the skein—become political instruments. This sudden shift of power thanks to the female skein mirrors the historical role of the phallus as a marker of patriarchal power. As Nazik observes,

“...skein bears a similar capacity to phallus: when one speaks of having/wielding a skein, one is aware that this act is related to a woman. Such a reversal of the gender roles through an analogy between the phallus and skein needs to be noted as another example of how material and social aspects of human body that determine the power relations are mutually constructed.” (2022: 34)

This quote underlines the function of the skein as a potent symbol of gendered power and shows that societal hierarchies are rooted in material and symbolic constructions of the body. Jocelyn's aggressive action of hospitalizing a boy with her electrical power, which is a matriarchal replacement of the phallus, disrupts conventional expectations of femininity. Judith Butler further emphasizes the constructed nature of gender, stating:

“If sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is ‘before,’ ‘outside,’ or ‘beyond’ power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself.” (2002: 40)

Butler situates gender within the dynamics of power. Jocelyn’s aggression challenging traditional gender norms illustrates the potential for subversion within patriarchal structures.

While Margot Cleary’s actions may appear to empower women, they also risk perpetuating a new form of patriarchal control. Conversely, Jocelyn’s aggressive assertion of agency serves as a critical challenge to traditional gender norms, demonstrating the complexity of empowerment and control in contemporary society. This complex dynamic invites a deeper exploration of how both male and female identities are shaped within the broader framework of societal power dynamics.

Along with institutionalizing female power and gaining financial benefit as one of the stakeholders of the NorthStar Camps, Margot Cleary places significant emphasis on this school-like girls’ army to help her own daughter Jocelyn regulate her power and align with other girls of her age. Jocelyn is portrayed as a misfit with her inconsistent electrical ability, which upsets both Margot and Jocelyn herself. Margot sends Jocelyn to a NorthStar day camp both to help her learn how to control her power and to show the public that,

““NorthStar Systems are one of the most well-respected companies in the world. ... would I send my own daughter to a NorthStar day camp if I thought they were anything other than a force for good?”” (Alderman 2017: 149)

As the excerpt suggests, Margot leverages NorthStar Camps to publicly endorse their credibility. However, as a politician who emphasizes the need for order, she thinks that Jocelyn’s anomaly makes her look weak among her peers, which is also not a desirable feature for the daughter of a politician running for the Senate. Margot wants to become the governor partly for Jocelyn as it would make things easier for her daughter, such as funding some research into the irregularities of electrical power and how to heal them. For example, when her assistant Alan asks her why she badly wants the position of governor,

“Margot thinks of Jocelyn shaking when her power switches off, and how no one can tell them what’s wrong with it. She thinks of how much faster she’d be able to get things done as Governor, without Daniel standing in her way.

‘For my daughters’, she says. ‘I want it to help Jos.’” (Alderman 2017: 151)

As this excerpt shows, while Margot displays a parent’s protective instinct, she is more concerned with making sure her daughter conforms to the expectations of the new matriarchal order, particularly by developing a strong, consistent skein.

Margot’s desire to make Jocelyn like other girls of her age also resonates with the patriarchal control over sexualities that do not align with societal expectations. In the new social order that Margot helps build, girls are expected to be strong with their skeins, which replaces the phallic organ in the patriarchal order. Jocelyn is bothered by her insufficient control over her skein as other girls at school mockingly call her “pzit” (Alderman 2017: 233) to highlight her weakness of electrical power. For this reason, “... *she is also often considered abnormal or weird among her peers—not wholly accepted as a woman*” (Frosie 2020: 18) in a society where the presence or absence of skein and the degree of its power define one’s gender, entailing the social expectations connected to it. Jocelyn starts a relationship with a young boy called Ryan, who has a skein, too. Ryan’s skein is a weak one, yet it is there, and it is unexpected. The presence of a skein gives Ryan a feminine quality because it has been a signifier for femininity. Jocelyn meets Ryan in a private online chatroom “*for ‘deviants and abnormals’*” (Alderman 2017: 153) because they were both “*looking for people like them. Weird people. The people in whom the thing hadn’t taken right, one way or the other*” (153–154). Jocelyn’s inability to wield her power, combined with her interest in Ryan, puts her into the category of queerness. Alderman explains that “*Jos quite likes girls. She quite likes boys who are a bit like girls*” (154). In this way, although Alyson Miller suggests that *The Power* “... [fails] to acknowledge how the machinations of power are imbricated with questions of race and sexuality” (2020: 399), Alderman, at least, attempts to challenge the patriarchal expectation that women adhere to heteronormativity and question societal norms that define acceptable expressions of femininity. By also describing Margot’s disapproval of Jocelyn’s relationship with a deviant boy, Alderman highlights the patriarchal residues in Margot’s attitude as a politician who does not tolerate queerness. This suggests that the dystopian world in *The Power* does not portray a better version for individuals because matriarchal politics continues to otherize individuals who do not conform to the mainstream societal expectations. Therefore, Margot’s wish to “help Jos” could also be interpreted as a traditional politician’s self-assumed right to “correct” the deviants in a society by interpellating them according to the dominant or the desired

ideology. Deviations from the traditional roles are suppressed through fear and control to maintain the status quo.

Margot Cleary hides her electrical power for the first couple of years, yet she continues to solidify her powerful presence in her political career as a result of the confidence that comes with it. Meanwhile, she also gets divorced. Five years before the great gender war, what Alderman names as “the cataclysm,” she and Daniel become rivals when they both run for the office of governor. While preparing for the live TV broadcast on which Daniel and Margot are to present their future plans in case they are elected, Daniel’s assistant Morrison tries to encourage Daniel, saying, “*Mr Dandon, Daniel, sir, you’ve got this. ...You’re the incumbent... This belongs to you already*” (Alderman 2017: 165). Although he refers to Daniel’s present position as the governor, this quote suggests that this political position belongs to Daniel because he is a man, subtly implying that such an important political duty inherently belongs to the male territory. Daniel’s team taps onto the lack of qualities of a woman that make her unfit for the post. As the narrator describes,

“The other guy is a gal, almost ten years younger than Morrison’s candidate, hard-edged and hard-nosed, and they’d pushed her in that in the weeks of campaigning. I mean, she’s divorced, and with those two girls to raise, can a woman like that really find time for political office?” (165)

By emphasizing her divorce and her responsibilities as a single mother, Daniel’s team exploits stereotypes about women. These stereotypes suggest that a woman should maintain her domestic and caregiving roles and thus should not seek success, especially in politics, because her traditional role as a mother already jeopardizes her ability to balance personal and public responsibilities and makes her unfit for high positions in politics.

Daniel continues to hit Margot by criticising her initiative of NorthStar camps, saying, “*And those subsidies—your own figures show that they are completely out of whack. ... In fact, your policy is not only out of whack, it’s forty years old*” (Alderman 2017: 167). He passively but aggressively attacks Margot’s subsidies, which are part of her broader agenda to strengthen the emerging matriarchal system and foster female empowerment. He suggests that Margot’s political and financial decisions are excessive, mismanaged, and outdated, and thus not promising any progressive solutions. Margot’s anger is stimulated by his consecutive accusations, and she can barely keep herself from hitting him with a jolt. As the narrator explains,

“... everyone can see what she is trying not to do. Everyone except the candidate” (167). Margot’s internal conflict while she is trying to maintain her composure and avoid confirming stereotypes of women as overly emotional or reactionary is evident here. However, she cannot control herself anymore when Daniel crosses a critical line by saying,

“‘Of course, we can’t expect you to understand what this means for hard-working families. You’ve left your daughters to be raised by NorthStar day camps. Do you even care about those girls?’” (167)

This is the very moment that Margot loses her composure, as her personal life and motherhood are being used against her. She slightly zaps him on his ribcage, just enough for the viewers to notice. Stunned by the electrical shock, Daniel tries to articulate some words to no avail before the moderator cuts to the commercials. Margot, however, is more shocked than Daniel and realizes that her action cannot be undone. As the narrator says, Margot’s team “... run[s] a smooth campaign. Margot Cleary looks tired. Wary. She apologizes more than once over the next few days for what happened, and her guys give her a good line to play” (169). Although her confidence against Daniel shows a steady increase from the first time she was electrically empowered and onwards, this suggests that there is a resemblance between Margot in the beginning years of matriarchy and Neil, who lived 5000 years after matriarchy started. Neil is described as a “timid, apologetic, and frustrated” man (Costa 2018) in his correspondence with the editor Naomi. For example, Neil says, “Anyway, sorry, I’ll shut up now. ... Thank you so much (*emphasis original*) for this. I am so grateful you could spare time” (Alderman 2017: ix-x). After Naomi sends another notice that she has finished reading his draft, Neil responds again, saying,

“Thank you, first of all, for taking the time and trouble to read the manuscript. I was afraid it was practically incoherent—I’m afraid I’ve lost all sense of it... Oh God, I don’t know. Now I’ve written that, I feel more uncertain than I did before.” (Alderman 334-335)

As these excerpts demonstrate, Neil does not feel sufficiently confident in front of a female superior and feels that he has to comply with the more powerful in the matriarchal order and not be a nuisance for women. Similarly, Margot, at first, does not feel completely free from the constraints of the dominant norms of the patriarchy. Thus, she feels responsive to the voters, who mostly still comply with dominant patriarchal norms. However, while Margot truly regrets her behaviour, “Daniel takes

the high ground” (Alderman 2017: 168), suggesting that he can keep cool and is good at managing conflicts, unlike his female opponent. His team emphasizes the misogynistic “...cultural narrative that insists on the inherently irrational nature of women” (Miller 2020: 416). The polls also suggest that Daniel is on the rise for the upcoming election. Voters say, “No, they can’t imagine voting for her because people are, in general, appalled by Cleary” (168). However, it turns out that people like to see demonstrations of power and what a leader is capable of doing. On the day of the election, Margot wins because voters think, “You know what, though, she’s strong. She’d show them” (169). Despite its shocking effect, Margot’s display of authority makes her strength visible for voters. They equate visible power with good leadership because it provides a sense of security for them. As Foucault argues, “[p]ower exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures” (2000: 340). For this reason, Margot’s display of aggressiveness is interpreted as her capacity to act decisively—though despotically—and reassures voters that she is capable of imposing order and maintaining stability with her commanding power. This is because such behaviour for a leader is permissible according to the still-present patriarchal social structure that associates visible strength with leadership and stability.

Margot’s initial responsiveness to the public firstly by hiding her power from everyone and secondly by apologizing repeatedly for what she has done to her male opponent using her sexual power shows her compliance with traditional, submissive female behavior expected by patriarchal norms. Margot’s remorse for her aggressive actions fades as her ascent to power makes her bolder. She transforms into a fearless leader who embodies patriarchal authority under a matriarchal guise. Soon after the election, Margot thinks, “... she needs to ask for forgiveness, still, for the thing that brought her to office. She’s wrong” (169). The narrator suggests she’s the governor now because of the power demonstration live on TV and that Margot is, at first, still sorry and responsible for her action. However, by suggesting that “she’s wrong,” the narrator foreshadows the kind of politician she is to become in the following years. As her political position and her shares in the NorthStar company provide her with more political and financial power, Margot’s apologetic and submissive behaviour completely diminishes because she does not feel constrained by males any longer. Her

rise to power marks an important cornerstone where men are formally stripped of their political and cultural power.

As Margot plunges into international politics, we observe her actions become as corrupt as the present patriarchal politics. Her most important political contact in the narrative is with Tatiana Moskalev. She invites Margot to Bessapara to negotiate the USA's support for Bessapara in its war against the male troops of Awadi-Atiff, the former President of Saudi Arabia. Awadi-Atiff's male army is situated in the North of Bessapara, referred to as North Moldova. Tatiana says, "*All we want... is American dream, right here in Bessapara... We want to live freely, to pursue our own way of life. We want opportunity. That's all*" (Alderman 2017: 221). Margot responds that she could make sure their independence is supported and that her country receives humanitarian aid military forces for keeping the peace, but the US government, "*... can't be seen to interfere in a war between North Moldova and Bessapara*" (221). Yet Tatiana asks for assurance that Margot Cleary votes against any negative decisions regarding her country in the UN Security Council. While Margot tries to maintain her composure in her political stance and says she cannot promise her full support of the US, Tatiana comes up with an intriguing offer, saying that she wants to employ NorthStar girls as her private army. Tatiana wants to harness a stronger army, as one form of an RSA (Repressive State Apparatus) described by Althusser, to consolidate her rule. Tatiana's offer changes Margot's politically neutral attitude. The narrator describes Margot's thoughts about this offer in the following excerpt:

"It's worth a lot of money. Even more if they win the war with the North and seize the Saudi assets. Acting as a private army here would take NorthStar exactly where they want to go. The board would be very happy to continue their association with Margot Cleary until the end of time if she could pull this off." (Alderman 2017: 222)

This demonstrates a female politician's potential to reveal her willingness to compromise her politically ethical values for personal gain. Moreover, NorthStar girls are made to use an illegal substance called the Glitter to enhance their electrical power, and Margot knows it. Roxy is the head of the mafiatic organization that controls the flow of this substance worldwide from Bessapara. Anti-matriarchal men allies such as Urbadox claim on the Internet that,

"... the real reason the US army is stationed where she [Margot] is, in the south of Bessapara, is because they are protecting the supplies of Glitter. Keep everything orderly, so Margot Cleary can arrange her shipments of Glitter from organized-crime

syndicates to NorthStar, who sell it back to the US army at a marked-up price.”
(Alderman 2017: 258)

As this shows, Margot enters into a world of crime and corruption by aiming for personal financial gain, allowing NorthStar girls to use this illegal substance, and condoning its illegal trade. She also makes her daughter Jocelyn use the Glitter “*for her condition*” (259), suggesting that Margot gives it to her for her skein abnormality. When Ryan tells Jocelyn about the studies showing the serious adverse effects of the substance, and asks her if she knows whether her mom has “*made a deal with the drug cartel,*” (259) Jocelyn says, “*I don’t believe that, if she had the opportunity, she wouldn’t*” (259). However, she tells that to Ryan while she looks at the piles of unused stashed packs of Glitter under her mattress. Therefore, she knows that her mother is involved in something, but she does not want to give away important information about her mother’s business, and she also probably wants to protect her mother’s name. This suggests that a matriarchal utopia is not attainable. Her deal with Tatiana and her connection with illegal actions demonstrate that the female-led politics replicates similar flaws as the patriarchal one. As Roodbeen suggests,

“The power has corrupted them [Margot and Tatiana] and makes them behave equally to the men when they were in power. The agency that they have been given and have actively taken is something they never want to give up, and so far the fear of losing that power drives them into a corner, just like it drove Daniel Dandon to the idea of killing all the girls.” (2020: 29-30)

This illustrates a powerful politician’s potential and willingness to compromise in moral and ethical values and be involved in systematic corruption, which are traditionally associated with patriarchal rule. Alderman associates politically influential women with the corruption of power to highlight the complexities surrounding power dynamics. Regardless of gender, those in power can easily be drawn to corrupt practices in order not to lose authority.

As a result of Margot’s perceived dominance, a reversed reproduction of gender relations that positions women as the dominant force can be observed in the novel. This is because Margot rapidly adapts to political and cultural dominance, which she owes to her privileged position as a woman in the emerging matriarchy. While Margot is in Bessapara to negotiate politics with Tatiana, she flirts with a young man, and her feeling of superiority is obvious when

“[l]ater, in the hotel, she buys a couple of drinks for one of the junior guys from the American embassy in Ukraine. He’s attentive—well, why wouldn’t he be? She’s going places. She rests her hand on his firm young ass as they ride the elevator together up to her suite.” (Alderman 2017: 224)

Margot actually commits what can be considered an assault against the young man in this context. However, her casual and possessive gesture of touching the young man suggests her dominant position and control over the man, which gives her self-confidence thanks to the perceived superiority of female gender. Although the young man’s perspective is not included in the narrative, it is implied that Margot derives her self-confidence and audacity both from her political position and from being a member of the privileged gender group.

Moreover, when Tunde interviews Margot Cleary. As Tunde and other male reporters ask her questions, Margot thinks to herself that all the reporters are very good-looking. Particularly about Tunde, she thinks:

“It’s amazing how—amongst all the talk about his relaxed and accessible style—no one mentions that Olatunde Edo’s videos have been such a hit because he’s handsome as hell. He’s half naked in some of them, reporting from the beach in just Speedos, and how is she supposed to take him seriously now, when she’s seen his broad shoulders and narrow waist and the rolling landscape of obliques and delts, glutes and pecs of his firm ... shit, she really needs to get laid.” (Alderman 2017: 219)

This shows that the patriarchal male gaze that objectifies and subordinates women is replaced by the matriarchal female gaze. Margot treats Tunde as a sexual object rather than a successful journalist. Tunde’s transition from the embodiment of the male gaze to empathizing with men’s vulnerability reflects the shift in normative gender expectations.

Margot continues to rise in political and financial power and reputation thanks to her influence on the US president and her shares of the NorthStar Girls training company. Even when Tatiana Moskalev dies as the result of an alleged suicide (actually orchestrated by Mother Eve’s electrical ability, which she uses to control people’s minds and muscles), Margot Cleary continues the business with Mother Eve, who takes over the presidency of Bessapara. In fact, Margot’s hunger for power grows as she gains more power. As described in the novel, “[s]he is an important person now. She has the ear of the President. Senator Cleary cannot be disturbed” (Alderman 2017: 322). As suggested by the narrator, Margot enjoys being in charge and becomes

hungry for more power in order to hold onto it. However, Margot pays a huge price for her ambition. Her daughter Jocelyn gets severely wounded as a result of a big fight with Darrell⁹ when she wanders around in the woods in Bessapara exploring the Glitter factory. The wounds are so serious that it is impossible for her to heal back to health. Devastated by the news, Margot wants to stop all the damage caused by the war of power; however, she realizes that the system has got out of control and impossible to be taken back without chaos. At this point, paralleling the voice's reminder to Mother Eve "*to own the place so they can't take it from [her]*" (Alderman 2017: 46), Margot tells herself, "*[t]here is only one way, and that is to blast it entirely to pieces*" (323). As these quotes from the novel illustrate, the transition from patriarchy to matriarchy does not happen without drastic changes leading to destruction. It suggests the oppression of men in order to maintain women's superiority. In this way, Alderman suggests that the feeling that power gives to its holders is intoxicating. Therefore, gendered power systems are corrupt because they sustain cycles of control and violence.

In conclusion, the character of Margot Cleary in *The Power* represents the political domain in a dystopian matriarchal setting. Alderman first highlights women's political challenges through this character because of today's patriarchal mindset. While she is initially a female politician subtly oppressed by her patriarchal-minded male counterpart, Daniel Dandon, she gradually breaks the chains of patriarchy and embraces her true power. She does not reveal her power for 5 years because she is aware of the risks of acting early to show the patriarchal world her electrical power. Meanwhile, her growing self-confidence against Daniel Dandon secures her a firm place in politics. As mentioned earlier, politics functions as an ISA that maintains matriarchy as the dominant ideology in Alderman's dystopia. However, Margot descends into corruption as the story unfolds, as exemplified by her alliance with the despotic female ruler in Eastern Europe, Tatiana Moskalev, and her alleged illegal affairs of providing NorthStar girls with a drug-like substance called the Glitter to enhance their strength.

⁹ Darrell is Roxy's brother. Roxy's skein is transplanted to him by a fatal procedure of skein removal surgery ordered by their father Bernie Monke. Yet Roxy survives this painful surgery by fleeing the scene, albeit losing her skein to his brother.

Margot's trespassing of moral boundaries to secure her solid political position illustrates the corrupted nature of holding absolute power and how such power can transform even well-intentioned leaders. She oppresses men and marginalized groups, such as sexual minorities, as suggested by her attitude towards her daughter Jocelyn and her sexually deviant boyfriend, Ryan. While she convinces Jocelyn to make her skin stronger with Glitter and sends her to NorthStar Girl Camps to make her learn how to control her electrical power, she manipulates circumstances to frame Ryan as a terrorist so that he and Jocelyn are kept apart. This inversion reveals Alderman's critique suggesting that replacing one dominant group with another does not dismantle oppression but reaffirms it in a new form.



CONCLUSION

This thesis has discussed the intertwining of religion, media, and politics to show how they help uproot the patriarchy and establish matriarchy as the dominant system of social control in a dystopian setting. By focusing on the reversal of gendered power, this thesis has highlighted Alderman's aim of illustrating "*the anger and terror women currently face*" (Cooke 2018: 4) and holding a mirror to the patriarchal societies where men oppress women. The exaggeration of female power exerted on men positions *The Power* as a feminist dystopian work which scrutinizes the inequality of power division between men and women and identifies misogyny as a pervasive societal malady. In the novel, the emergence of the skein in females marks the beginning of the societal change towards matriarchy. At the onset, many, especially men, think of the female power coming from their skeins as a temporary affliction or as an abnormality because male dominance is deemed as an unquestionable and unchangeable norm. However, as more women have the electrical power and wield it against men as a response to the systematic violence by men, the general perception favouring male dominance shifts towards matriarchy. This shift reveals the fragile and arbitrary nature of patriarchal norms and gendered violence.

Religion in *The Power* is one of the primary tools for legitimizing matriarchy, which depicts how sacred narratives can be reshaped to sustain systemic change. Mother Eve becomes the prophet of the matriarchal religion, which emerges as the most significant ISA catalyzing the shift in society in favour of women. Aligning with Althusser's concept of ISAs, *The Power* demonstrates the use of religious doctrines and institutions for the justification and perpetuation of the newfound female dominance over men. Reconfiguring the God figure as a female, referred to as She with a capital initial, provides a spiritual ground to validate the superiority of women and their divine right to lead humanity. This sudden change in patriarchal religious thought highlights the artificially constructed formation of religions according to the

dominant ideology. In this way, Alderman undermines the appropriation of women as lesser beings by religions throughout history and in today's world. Thanks to Mother Eve, who “... *does ultimately succeed in dismantling the palace of patriarchy*” (McDevitt 2022: 8), Alderman portrays the fragility of the inherently patriarchal nature of religions by engaging in Butler's theory of gender performativity, suggesting that the perceived superiority of the male gender is because of reiteration. A woman in *The Power* replaces the concept of a traditionally male religious leader, and Neil and Naomi's correspondence 5000 years later shows that the origin of God being female has been forgotten, and it is accepted as an unquestionable norm as a result of centuries of repetition. While Mother Eve shows a conscious performance of a religious leader – more specifically, Jesus – Naomi, the editor, is unaware of her performance. This is because Mother Eve was brought up according to patriarchal religious teachings, which she adapted to the matriarchal religion she founded. However, Naomi was born into the long-established matriarchal religion. The performativity in the future reflection of gender roles in *The Power* also aligns with what Foucault suggests in the following excerpt;

“... [T]he mechanisms of power ... [take a] capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.” (1980: 39)

Foucault reflects on the invisible inscriptions of the culture on genders and suggests that gender roles, shaped by power mechanisms, subtly infuse into people's daily lives. As a result, they shape identities and social hierarchies under the guise of divine ordinance. Therefore, the contrast between Mother Eve's conscious adaptation and Naomi's unconscious repetition of societal norms highlights the recurring loop in systems of power, which become invisible over time.

The most essential point about religion taking a matriarchal shape is that it does not function in isolation. It also penetrates into politics and thus eases the transition of governance from patriarchy to matriarchy by creating consent. Mother Eve's endorsement of Tatiana Moskalev, the ruthless female leader of Bessapara, provides Tatiana with a divine validation for her brutal political regime. This alliance reflects the historical role of religion in justifying authoritarian rule, suppressing any possible dissent while gaining the consent of the masses using their spiritual values. Mother Eve's influence on politics is so significant that she disposes Tatiana by killing her and

ultimately takes control of Bessapara. Yet, her influence is not merely limited to Bessaparan politics, as she is in a close and strategic relationship with the American governor, Margot Cleary. Together, they shape world politics and ignite the Cataclysm after realizing *“that the solution is a nuclear Armageddon, the only means through which old paradigms might be defeated, and something begun anew”* (Miller 2020: 429). As Miller suggests, their realization of the only solution being a nuclear Armageddon by burning everything down to assert matriarchy underlines the radicalness of both Mother Eve and Margot and the close relationship of religion and politics, functioning as both Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses in maintaining a particular ideology.

Another primary tool that plays a vital role in aiding the shift towards matriarchy is the media, through which new narratives normalizing female dominance and redefining societal expectations are disseminated rapidly. The impact of the media in *The Power* is showcased through the only major male character, Tunde. As a young Nigerian black man, he is familiar with the patriarchal mindset of conservative African societies, and he is also partly of the belief that men are hierarchically superior to women. However, as the following excerpt suggests,

“Tunde, who is 21 when the book opens and comes of age in this bold new world, goes from flirting with a woman by calling himself her ‘master’ in his first appearance to holding a deep fear in his body everywhere he goes: There will come a time when a woman will attack him, and he will not be able to escape.” (Grady 2021)

Tunde’s identity as a journalist and his experience as a man reflect the profound transformation in societal power dynamics. Tunde’s journey from a position of casual, assumed superiority to one of vulnerability highlights the rapid reversal of gender roles.

Before matriarchy becomes a replica of patriarchy dominating one gender group, he can understand women’s struggle for revenge because his black identity is associated with being subjected to discrimination by the superior white patriarchal communities. This is because he is familiar with subordination by a superior social class. As he witnesses women standing up against the patriarchy’s atrocities against them, *“he is so glad he shouts for joy”* (Alderman 2017: 59) alongside women. His video that shows a young girl jolting an abusive man is one of the first videos shaking firstly social media and, subsequently, the TV through CNN. For this reason, he takes on an adventure of journalism because *“[h]e knows...that this thing is going to take*

the world and everything will be different” (59). He documents the rise of matriarchy and makes the world hear women’s voices in countries like Saudi Arabia, India, and Bessapara (former Moldova) through his social media account and the videos serviced to CNN. The choice of such countries by the Alderman is especially significant as these countries are notorious for their maltreatment of women. The reaction of women is thus more decisive in these countries, so when the news about the intense responses of women putting cities on fire and quickly killing men creates a massive effect around the world thanks to Tunde.

The media helps shape matriarchal politics in *The Power* by publicizing critical information. For example, Tatiana Moskalev, who notices the effect of the media devices and Tunde’s journalism in particular, gives away the secret details on Awadi-Atiff, the overthrown leader of Saudi Arabia, whose male troops congregate in the North of Moldova to fight against the female groups in Moldova and later in his native country. She does this to trigger Tunde’s journalistic aspirations and get him to disclose Awadi-Atiff’s plans, finally preventing the resurgence of male dominance after his secret plans are revealed by Tunde’s photographs and videos serviced to CNN.

Through Tunde’s journalism, *The Power* delves into the corruptibility of power, regardless of gender. This is evident as Tunde perceives the destructiveness of female power when matriarchy becomes the absolute norm, and female characters begin to use their electrical power not just for liberation but increasingly for subjugation. He witnesses atrocities operated by women in the mountains of Bessapara, to which he flees from the oppression of Tatiana’s government. He records and writes down his experiences and sends them to one of his female colleagues, but later finds out that she betrays him by publishing his work under her name. This suggests that matriarchy produces the same cycles of oppression by the patriarchy that it set off to dismantle. As Grady explains,

“As The Power goes on, we start to see more and more women using their power not just to strike down the wicked, or even the obnoxious, but also just for kicks: Because they have power, and other people don’t, who’s to stop them? We see packs of women harassing men, and increasingly graphic sexual assaults of men.” (2021)

Tunde, too, not only witnesses increasingly brutal acts against men but also falls victim to the matriarchal shift he initially appreciates and spreads with his efforts. The harassment of men is increasingly normalized in the media as well, as the changing nature of Kristen and Tom’s morning program also exemplifies. While Kristen is

portrayed as a window dressing at the beginning of the narrative, when the female electrical power is still considered a temporary ailment, she becomes the primary host of the TV programme. Tom loses his influence on the audience with the surging matriarchy. When he comments that men's violent actions against women should not be assessed as terrorism because they only want their rights back, he commits professional suicide, losing his job in a prime-time TV programme. The increasing appearance of female reporters in the media who speak in favour of women contributes to the establishment of matriarchy as the new societal norm. This aligns with Althusser's categorization of media as an ISA. By consistently portraying new social norms to the masses, the media disseminates the dominant ideology and reinforces it by shaping individual consciousness. Therefore, both Tunde's experience throughout the matriarchal power shift and the portrayal of the changing roles of Kristen and Tom in the media exemplify the fragility of gender norms as imposed by society.

The Power also portrays a dystopian setting where politics is shaped according to matriarchal dominance, exemplifying the interplay between gender and political leadership. As women consolidate their dominance in every aspect of social life, they also assert their power in political institutions. Tatiana Moskalev, as the despotic female leader of Bessapara, parodies the patriarchal leaders of today who push women into the margins of their societies through subjugation because she enforces rigid laws restricting men and condoning violent behaviour on men. Margot Cleary, who becomes an influential governor in the USA by outdoing her biggest rival, Daniel Dandon, provides a more detailed description of how politics is shaped according to matriarchy in *The Power* because she is one of the four central characters whose perspectives shape the narrative. At first, during her Mayorship, her feeling of subordination by the Governor, Daniel Dandon, is evident from how she controls her actions and language against Daniel. However, when her daughter electrically empowers her, she gradually breaks through the chains of patriarchy and climbs up the ladders of social and political hierarchy. Yet, she does not immediately reveal it, but enforces her power through the self-confidence that her electrical power gives her. This is demonstrated by the way she deals with the conflicts between her and Daniel. She starts to respond in a more carefree fashion in her language. She even hurts Daniel live on TV and fears losing the election for her violent behaviour. However, she wins the political position despite her overt violent action. Schonewille argues that,

“[a]s the novel progresses, victimhood moves from the private into the public eye, and narratives of survival are shared through the women’s uprising. Margot, as Mayor Cleary, becomes misogynistic, selfish, and intrusive. She no longer embodies the mom who wishes for gender equality but becomes a political vessel that acknowledges and accepts violence and murder as a tactic to gain power.” (2018: 14)

This is very significant as it shows the society’s predisposition to support those with power no matter how corrupt the leaders could be. Thus, it suggests that the intoxicating and often corruptive influence of power can be observed regardless of gender, and it reflects societies’ long-standing bias towards powerful, assertive, and dominant figures. Therefore, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, the problem is about how power is exercised rather than which gender exercises it. One of the most significant decisions made by Margot Cleary to institutionalize matriarchy is the formation of military camps called NorthStar Girl Camps in the USA. These camps function mainly as an RSA since they formally train girls to use their electrical power more efficiently and thus use it on citizens officially to maintain matriarchal order. Consequently, *“[h]er leadership role of the NorthStar training camps and seat on five Senate committees offer her political influence on a global level, creating conflicts of interest”* (McDevitt 2022: 7). Also, Margot is involved in an immoral political and financial deal with the mad dictator of Bessapara, Tatiana Moskalev, who asks for the NorthStar Girls in her countries’ war against Awadi Atiff’s male army. Margot also collaborates with Roxy Monke, the young mafia leader who provides an illegal substance called Glitter, which enhances the power of NorthStar girls. The narrator explains Margot’s real motive by saying, *“[t]here is a bonus in her contract if NorthStar deployments around the world top fifty thousand women this year. The bonus will buy her a private island”* (Alderman 2017: 327). As McDevitt also agrees, *“[Margot] is [perhaps] the most corrupt of all of the viewpoint characters by the end of the novel”* (7). Therefore, Margot’s collaboration with a despotic leader and mafia organization and being motivated by financial and political power demonstrate that the same level of corruption is possible in any gendered political system.

All in all, Alderman creates a dystopian world where the subjects of oppression shift from women to men. However, her aim in doing so is to draw a detailed picture of women’s situation today by parodying patriarchy in the form of matriarchy and highlight the various impacts of misogyny as a result of patriarchal societies’ gender norms taking the oppression of women for granted. Drawing on the perception that “...

either you are the hunter or you are the prey” (Alderman 2017: 265), *The Power* reverses the male-female dichotomy. By doing so, the novel provides a vivid description of the dangers that have become women’s reality throughout history. Alderman tries to encompass all areas of social life to depict how ideology and power relations enter our lives and shape our perceptions consciously or unconsciously. This shift in gender balance highlights the fragility of gender roles and societal norms that perpetuate them.

The correspondence between Neil and Naomi the editor reveals the performativity of gender as we observe that oppression and subordination to women have become a reality for men, which mostly go unquestioned in the future when matriarchy has been the norm for 5000 years. Yet, Naomi Alderman does not describe this new order as a solution to the problems caused by patriarchy and its byproduct, cultural misogyny. As Nussbaum questions,

“If you can completely upend the foundations of human civilization and yet end up at exactly the same place, then isn’t there a greater flaw at work? Is there another way, or do there always have to be winners and losers, strong and weak, powerful and powerless?” (2017)

Alderman effectively reveals the flaws of gendered social structures by depicting matriarchal religion and politics, media favouring women, and money controlled by women. Though *The Power* does not propose an alternative form of society where neither gender is oppressed, it profoundly contributes to the feminist dystopian genre through its deconstruction of established patriarchal norms oppressing women. Furthermore, although Naomi the editor represents the future form of matriarchal men in authority, her willingness to understand Neil’s work and get it published suggests a meaningful collaboration between men and women, and thus a hopeful outlook on future gender dynamics which do not oppress any gender. Ultimately, *The Power* invites readers to reflect on the fluidity of power structures and the implications of dominance and absolute power granted to the members of one gender in any form.

This thesis offers a detailed account of the ways matriarchy is established and maintained in *The Power* by Alderman as the dominant cultural and political system in a dystopian setting. *The Power* has been studied widely with *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood. However, it could also be studied with the feminist dystopian novels written by other feminist authors that are mentioned in the introduction of this thesis. There is a particular resemblance between Alderman’s *The Power* and Sheri S.

Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* in terms of their stories and the main themes of power and gender because both narratives create a dystopian world where women take the control by overpowering men. In this respect, further studies focusing on these two novels could surely contribute to the field of feminist dystopias. In addition, although Naomi Alderman attempts to include the experiences of women from different social, racial, religious, and sexual backgrounds, how well she has achieved intersectionality can be studied in the future studies about *The Power*.



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