

# WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST PATRIARCHAL PRACTICE AS PORTRAYED IN MIRIAM TOEWS' *WOMEN TALKING*

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the patriarchal practices depicted in Toews, *Women Talking* and the forms of women's struggle against patriarchal practices. In discussing the problems stated in this thesis, The theories related to patriarchy and feminism are applied. The patriarchy theory used is Wallby's theory, and the feminism theory used is Kate Millet's radical feminism. These theories are used as the writer's guideline in reveal and describing patriarchal practices and forms of women's struggles in the novel. This research is a qualitative descriptive research with a feminist literary criticism approach. The feminist criticism approach is used because this research focuses on women oppression due to patriarchal practice in the novel. The data of this research is narrative dialogues that reflects forms of patriarchal practices and women's struggles against patriarchal practices. The results of the analysis show that there are three forms of patriarchal practices depicted in the novel namely, male power, and power abuse, limited access of women in education, and oppression on women. To fight against the form of patriarchal practices, the female characters in the novel fight by building self-awareness, becoming androgynous, and reversing the patriarchal system that reflects the radical feminism sparked by Kate Millet. The findings of this study is that the root of the oppression on women is due to patriarchal practices that still occur in society so to fight and be free from patriarchal practice women must have the courage to empower their rights and obtain their freedom, and they must also dare to speak to demand the oppression.

**Keywords:** *Patriarchy, Radical Feminism, Women Struggle*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy is a social system that places men as the main authority in various aspect and dominates all of the aspect of society and leadership. Wallby in (Sultana, 2012: 2) defines patriarchy as a system, structure, and social practice that places men as the main domination and oppress women. Wallby divides patriarchy into privat and public patriarchy. Privat patriarchy is carried out in the household and public patriarchy is a collective response and public views of women. Facio (2013:1) states that the concept of patriarchy itself is not a contribution from feminism theory. The practice of patriarchy occurs in societies that still uphold customs and cultures that regard women as inferior. Patriarchal culture is very inclined to place men dominance in various aspects. De Beauvoir (2014: 15) states that, men are called "*the self*" and women are considered "*others*". Beauvoir's statement indicates that the patriarchal system put the women as "*inferior*" and the men as the "*superior*". As explained by Beauvoir, it can be concluded that patriarchy places a different position on men and women. This domination places women at the bottom of the society. The existence of gender inequality and discrimination in society triggers the birth of the feminist movement to fight and demand equal rights between women and men in all areas of life. Feminism is a social movement that empowers women to realize equal rights and life opportunities equal to men. According to Hannam (2007: 22) feminism can be defined as a recognition of power between the sexes, with women in a subordinate role to men. From this understanding feminism can be interpreted as a dispute between men and women because the position and role of women are

considered lower than men. Therefore, a women condition can be changed by the pressure of women independence. Based on the previous description, there are two research problem formulations are focuses on in this study, namely (1) How is Patriarchal practice described in Miriam Toews' *Women Talking* (2) How do women fight against patriarchal practices in Miriam Toews' *Women Talking*. Related with the problem statement raised, This study aims to (1) To describe the Patriarchal practice reflected in Miriam Toews' *Women Talking* (2) To describe how women fight the patriarchal practice in Miriam Toews' *Women Talking*. There are several previous study related with Patriarchy and women oppression. (Subagiyo, 2022) in his thesis entitled "*Tasha's Struggles against Patriarchy in Jane Green's Straight Talking*" analysis how Tasha struggle against Patriarchy. The purpose of this research is to describe how Tasha face patriarchy. The results found by the researcher are that Tasha dissatisfaction experienced was a reflection of patriarchal mindset reflected in Tasha's mindset, when she always blame the women in Infidelity and then she fought against the patriarchy through her attitude to become an independent, great and modern women so that she would not be look down by men.

Second previous study was conducted by (Kartika Sari, 2021) in her thesis entitled "*Women as Burden in Patriarchal Society in Nadia Hashimi's One Half from the East*" (2021) analyzes the reason women became "Bacha posh" used theory Patriarchy and gender discrimination. The result of this research found that In Afghanistan, they believed that having a son was a gift and it was a shame if women did not have a son. Therefore, Afghan families raised their daughters like boys to help the family work outside home. The girls dressed like boys and helped the families economy. She found that Afghanistan still applied patriarchal society where all aspect of life were controlled by man.

Although several studies on Patriarchy in the novel have been carried out by previous researchers, the writer found that neither of them discussed the form of feminism movement against patriarchy. Therefore, the writer wants to study Patriarchy and Feminism movement reflected in the novel using theory of radical feminism.

## 2. METHOD

In this research the writer uses Sociology of literature, using feminist literary criticism. Feminist literary criticism is about women writers and how women are portrayed in literary works, in relation to men and society, then feminist literary criticism is included literary criticism that combines various perspective of literary criticism such as, expressive (Female author), Mimetic (How women are

portrayed in literary works in relation to men and environment society) charted by Abrams. M. H, (2006).

This research is a qualitative research focuses on analysis and description. Creswell, (2014: 4) states that qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures. Qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs. This method also emphasizes description and analysis.

To obtain the data the writer act as the observer who collect, analyze and interpret the data. The step in collecting the data of this research is reading the novel more than once to get deep understanding, Underlining the data based on the focus discussion and after that Clasifying the data based on the topic of this research. The data analyze in this study is monologue, narrative and quotation from the novel. After understanding the content of the novel the writer applied several step in analyzing the data, such as Describing the patriarchal practice in Miriam Toews' *Women Talking*, Describing and explaining how women fight against the patriarchy in Miriam Toews' *Women Talking* then the last step is Making a conclusion based on the analysis and presenting the findings.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Patriarchal Practice Described in the Novel *Women Talking*

Walby in (Sultana, 2012: 2) patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. The concept and theory of patriarchy is essential to capture depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women's subordination, and can be developed in such a way as to take account of the different forms of gender inequality over time, class and ethnic group." Wallby in (Sultana, 2012: 9) has identified six patriarchal structures, namely household production, paid work, the state, male power, sexuality and culture.

According to Millet, oppression on women by men is caused by male power through patriarchy. Sexual politics can be seen as the result of the hegemony of patriarchal policy towards the behaviors and role status where men had guaranteed to be more superior than women (Millet, 2000:26).

##### 3.1.1 Male Power and Power Abuse

As Millet's view in the theory of *Sexual Politics* that the oppression of women is caused by the existence of male power through patriarchy where men hold a superior role in society. Male domination in society results in marginalized and oppressed women, as in the following quotation:

After this, Peters together with the elders decided to call in the police and have the men arrested – for their own safety, presumably and taken to the city. The remaining men of the colony have gone to the city to post bail for the imprisoned attackers in the hope that they will be able to return to Molotschna while they await trial (Toews, 2018: 5).

From the narrative above, it can be described that Peters as the leader of the colony has the main authority and power over decisions regarding the colony. Peters and the elders send the perpetrators of the rape of women in their colony to the city jail. The reason behind their sending the men to the city Jail is not for justice for the women but as a trick to protect the perpetrators. This shows that there is protection for male perpetrators of rape from Peters as the leader of the colony. It is clear that there is a patriarchal system depicted from the scene above in which Peters prioritizes men and protects them rather than defending the women. Here Peters has ultimate authority and has the right to decide how to punish the men. He sends them to the city prison as a way to protect the perpetrators. Then, the other men in Molotschna collect bail to quickly return the perpetrators back to Molotschna. The perpetrators of rape clearly receive support and protection. In Molotschna the position of men is very important so that Peters and the other men provide protection and prioritize the perpetrators rather than thinking about the situation of the women who become the victims of rape. Peters' way of protecting the perpetrators is a form of male domination and male power in society. Peters uses his power and strength as colony leader to protect the perpetrators.

Referring to Wallby's patriarchal structure that male power and domination have caused oppression to women, it is clear that the narrative above describes patriarchal power where Peters who is the leader of the colony, and the elders from Molotschna have domination in society. They make decisions that prioritize the male perpetrators of rape. This allows the perpetrators to receive protection from their leaders. It clearly describes that there is different treatment for men and women. They even prepare guarantees so that the perpetrators would return immediately. Women are not even given the opportunity to defend themselves and get justice.

And when the perpetrators return, the women of Molotschna will be given the opportunity to forgive these men, thus guaranteeing everyone's place in heaven. If the women don't forgive the men, says Peters, the women will have to leave the colony for the outside world, of which they know nothing. The women have very little time, only two days, to organize

their response (Toews, 2018: 5).

The quotation above is an ultimatum from Peters to women to forgive the men for the assault and harassment they have done to almost all women in Molotschna. Peters even states that if the women do not forgive the men they would not get to heaven. This shows that there is patriarchal religion in which Peters as the leader of the colony makes religion as the reason for exploiting Molotschna women. Peters makes religion as a reason to help the men to get forgiveness from the women. It means that Peters threatened the women that if they do not forgive the perpetrators after they return from the city prison they have to leave the Colony. Peters' action shows that there is the relationship between patriarchy and religion. Peters as the religion leader uses his authority in the name of religion to make distinction and defend men and to legalize the women to let them not get justice. Patriarchal culture often becomes a system that makes men as the main authority in any aspects. Women do not have the same rights and opportunities even though they are often the aggrieved party in patriarchal practices. It can be seen from the previous actions, there is a difference in position between men and women.

### 3.1.2 Limited Access on Women in Education

Patriarchal practice also differentiates education rights for women and men. There are privileges that men get and women do not get. In the patriarchal view, women are considered weak, and they are also considered to only have an important role in household chores and taking care of children and husbands so they do not need to get an education.

In terms of education, men are often prioritized and given special privileges in the public sphere and women are always responsible for household duties. The limited rights in education can be seen in the following quotation:

He finally said he would allow me membership providing I renounced my parents (in spite of one being dead and the other missing) before the elders and was baptized into the church and agreed to teach the boys basic English and simple math in return for shelter (the aforementioned shed) and three meals a day. I told Peters I would be baptized and would teach the boys (Toews, 2018: 12).

From the narrative above, Peters gives August the opportunity to become the member of the colony with the requirement that August has to teach English and mathematics to the boys. Peters is clearly privileging men in terms of educational rights. It shows the difference in rights of education between women and men in Molotschna. As explained before that in patriarchal practice men have privilege and special rights which is not given to women. Peters prioritizes men's rights to education. Women in the Molotschna colony are not given equal rights in education so they cannot read and write. Only men in the colony earn the right to education. Education is a human right and all people have the right to education without regarding their gender. However, in reality patriarchal culture has limited the right to education for women. The Molotschna women also explain that they do not have the right to read which is a reflection of the existence of a patriarchal system in their colony.

None of the women will be able to read what you write, Saysona, but we will keep it here in the hayloft as an artifact for others to discover (Toews, 2018: 45).

The narrative above reflects that women in Molotschna do not get equal rights to obtain an education, causing them to be unable to read and write. Colony women only have to work and take care of the household. Peters as the leader of the colony only give education rights to the boys and hopes that these boys will build a business for the colony outside the colony. This illustrates the existence of gender inequality in the realm of education. Women in Molotschna do not get the same right in access to education. Only men in Molotschna who can study and women are forced to work. The women at the Molotschna speak only the low German spoken in their colony.

Meanwhile, the boys are taught English and Spanish, the language of their neighboring colony at school.

### 3.1.3 Oppression on Women

The practice of patriarchy causes women oppression and make women as second class and the parties who are always disadvantaged in society.

Greta Loewen sighs heavily. She says that although we may not have been treated worse than animals, and that in fact, Molotschna animals are safer than Molotschna women, and better cared for. (Toews, 2018: 35).

We are women without a voice, Ona states calmly. We are women out of time and place, without even the language of the country we reside in. We are Mennonite without a homeland. We have nothing to return to, and even the animals of Molotschna are safer in their homes than women we are (Toews, 2018: 49).

From the narrative above it is clear that there are differences in position and treatment between men and women. Male dominance in Molotschna has led to various types of oppression on women. Women are treated like animals and women are assaulted using sedatives given to animals, namely cows anesthetic. They are even attacked every night in their homes. Referring to Greta Loewen's statement that the animals in Molotschna are safer than the women of Molotschna, this proves that the existence of women in society is not that important, and are often used as objects of violence and degraded by men. Another female character Ona, states that they are women without voice, without a language of their own, they are Mennonite women without a homeland, and again that the animal in Molotschna is safer than the women. The statements suggest that the Molotschna women experience oppression. They live in colony but they do not know the language of their own country, do not have the opportunity to voice all the injustices they experience and they are not safer and animal are more guarded than the women in Molotschna.

## 3.2 Women Fight against Patriarchal Practice in Women Talking

(Thomas et al, 2013: 44). Radical feminism views men who control women too much as part of basic oppression. The oppression on women is part of patriarchal culture. This view sees that the relationship between women is the source of the problem because of patriarchal ideology.

Radical Feminism says that in patriarchal society men are the cause of oppression of women because of the division of roles and status between women and men. So Radical Feminism is a feminist movement to help women fight patriarchal practice. Radical feminism also aims to fight against violence and oppression of women.

### 3.2.1 Building Self Consciousness

Millet, (2000:77) views that in order to fight for patriarchal society, women must be aware of their situation both in society and at home. Being self-aware as women and demand equality with men to gain autonomy are forms of struggle to achieve equality, dignity and rights.

Salome interrupts. We're not members! She repeats. We are the women of Molotschna. The entire colony of Molotschna is built on the foundation of patriarchy (translator's note: Salome didn't use the word "patriarchy"—I inserted it in the place of Salome's curse, of mysterious origin, loosely translated as "talking through the flowers"), where the women live out their days as mute, submissive and obedient servants. Animals. Fourteen-year-old boys are expected to give us orders, to determine our fates, to vote on our excommunications, to speak at the burials of our own babies while we remain silent, to interpret the Bible for us, to lead us in worship, to punish us! We are not members, Mariche, we are commodities. (Toews, 2018: 104)

The quotation above describes self-awareness in Salome's character. She realizes that the Molotschna women have lived on a patriarchal basis. They have to become obedient and cannot speak to defend themselves and also have to live under constant pressure and orders from the men of the colony. She realizes that they are not treated as members of society but as commodities. The quotation above shows that Salome is aware of the position of Molotschna women that they have lived under the control of a patriarchal society and must always be obedient. She begins to realize that there is gender inequality within the Colony that distinguishes the rights between men and women. There is a position where men is more important and controls the Molotschna women. Women in Molotschna do not have the same place as men. There are gender restrictions and control from Colony men which causes women to experience injustice. The patriarchal system at Molotschna has restricted women's rights. If Molotschna women want to obtain the same rights as men, they must be aware of their position and condition in society.

Would it be beneficial, before we list the pros and cons of staying and fighting, to establish what exactly we are fighting for? Mariche quickly responds: It's obvious we're fighting for our safety and for our freedom from attacks! (Toews, 2018: 47).

The quotation above shows the self-awareness of Mariche. She states that they must fight for their safety and freedom from assault. Mariche realizes that as human beings they have the right to fight against all forms of injustice that they experience. They have the right to safety and they have to fight for it. Mariche realizes that while living in the colony they have been attacked and there is no

safety for the women so they need to fight for their rights as humans to be free from all attacks that harm and oppress women. Women must be aware of their situation, gain rights and fight against any forms of injustice. Mariche realizes that as women they have to fight and choose for themselves what is the best for their lives. They must also have freedom in society and make the best choices for their lives as women.

### 3.2.2 Showing Androgynous Character

Radical feminism also encourages women to be androgynous. Based on the concept of the theory of '*Sexual Politics*', Tong (2009) stated that in order to change the system and boundaries of sex/gender, women must have the courage to be feminine and masculine or show androgyny characters.

Klaas maintained his gaze on me. Your responsibility are here in Molotschna, he informed Salome. I'm well aware of what my responsibilities are, said Salome. I'm not talking to you. Be quiet, Klaas said again. But you have been talking to me. You have just told me what my responsibilities are, haven't you? (Toews, 2018: 116).

The quotation above is a conversation between Salome and one of the colony's men, namely Klaas. The conversation above illustrates the existence of an androgyny character in Salome, namely a masculine character, when she boldly answers Klaas. Salome shows her androgynous character through her actions and she proves that women do not always have to be obedient and silent, Salome's character breaks the perception of the division of character and status that women are considered weak and obedient. The quotation above proves that women can fight and not just stay silent following what men say.

Salome's reputation in the colony is that of a fighter, an instigator. She doesn't react calmly to authority and is often engaged in a battle of wills with other colony members over the slightest of things (Toews, 2018).

The quotation above illustrates that Salome has a masculin character. Known as a warrior woman and instigator in the colony, Salome is fearless and disobedient to authority. She fights back

when she experiences injustice. Salome's character shows that the perception that women are always considered as weak, obedient, and stupid creatures can be broken. As a woman, she can fight and does not have to follow the male rule in the colony. The character of androgyny in Salome is a reflection of radical feminism to fight the oppression of women because of the control and power of men and status differences in society based on the gender system.

### 3.2.3 Reversing Patriarchal Culture

Patriarchal ideology always places women as subordinates and limits women's rights as human beings. Therefore, to eradicate the system of gender inequality in this society is to destroy the patriarchal system itself, as mentioned in the following quotation:

My name is August Epp-irrelevant for all purposes, other than that I've been appointed the minute-taker for the women's meeting because the women are illiterate and unable to do it themselves (Toews, 2018: 2).

Instead I simply agree to take the minutes, of course- I have no choice other than to agree because I would do anything for Ona Friesen (Toews, 2018: 3).

The quotation above illustrates a change in the patriarchal system. August is a teacher who is asked to teach the boys of the colony but he easily becomes part of the witness meeting of the women and are asked for writing down the results and ideas of the women. This quotation shows a reversal of the patriarchal system where women have ideas and their ideas are center in the meeting and August is only the secretary. August is in charge of writing every meeting of the women to be used as evidence for their children and grandchildren. August love for Ona makes him obedient and stupid. This means that the women also reverse the patriarchal system that views women as obedient and useless and stupid. They reverse the view by showing their intelligent through their idea to build their faith and future.

The schoolhouse must display a map of the world so that we can begin to understand our place in it. A new religion, extrapolated from the old but focussed on love, will be created by the women of Molotchna (Toews, 2018).

From the quotation above, there is an illustration of the strength and intelligence of women in thoughts. Ona has given a statement and make revolution to develop the intellectuals of Molotchna women and reflects the spirit of leadership and respect are not only belong to men. Women are even able to give revolution by creating a new religion that can protect them from violence and oppression. This shows the change and elimination of the patriarchal system which considers women as weak, stupid and passive. This quote is a reflection of radical changes in society by dismantling the patriarchal system that degrades and discriminates women by building and creating a new revolution that fights for women rights and equality the same as men.

## 4. CONCLUSION

After finding and Analyzing the patriarchal practice and forms of women Struggle in Miriam Toews' Women Talking. The writer provides some conclusions. After analyzing the data, the writer conclude that the root of women oppression in society is due to the patriarchy. In Women Talking there are three patriarchal practice describe such as, Male Power and Power Abuse, Limited Access on Women in Education, and Oppression on women. This three practice of patriarchy that limit women movement in society. The existence of this patriarchal practice encourages women to fight and achieve their freedom and rights as human beings. Female characters in the novel fight for patriarchal practice. First, Building Self-Consciousness, Showing Androgynous Character, and Reversing Patriarchal Culture. The form of women's struggle in the novel is a reflection of the feminism movement which is Radical feminism convey by Kate Millet.

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