



FROM BIOLOGICAL LIMITS TO POLITICAL
PERFORMANCE: FEMALE MASCULINITIES AND THE
GENDERLESS NATURE OF HEGEMONY IN NAOMI
ALDERMAN'S *THE POWER*¹

BİYOLOJİK SINIRLARDAN SİYASİ PERFORMANSA:
KADIN ERKEKLİKLERİ VE NAOMI ALDERMAN'IN
THE POWER ADLI ESERİNDE TAHAKKÜMÜN
CİNSİYETSİZ DOĞASI

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ABSTRACT

This study challenges the biological determinism of political violence by analysing Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) through the lens of Judith Halberstam's concept of female masculinity. By examining the transition from a patriarchal to a matriarchal order, the article argues that the novel's female protagonists do not establish a new feminist ethics but rather reproduce hegemonic masculine codes of domination. Focusing on the commodification of the body, the biopolitical control of the state, and the theological justification of violence, the study posits that political masculinity is a gender-neutral technology of power. The analysis demonstrates that when women seize the means of violence, they inevitably adopt the structural mechanisms of patriarchy. Ultimately, the article concludes that hegemony is defined not by sex, but by

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the performance of sovereignty, revealing power as a construct independent of biology.

Keywords: Female Masculinity, Naomi Alderman, *The Power*, Hegemonic Masculinity, Biopolitics, Political Performativity.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Naomi Alderman'ın *The Power* (2016) romanını Judith Halberstam'ın kadın erkekliği (female masculinity) kavramı üzerinden inceleyerek, siyasal şiddetin biyolojik kökenlerine dair kabulleri sorgulamaktadır. Makale, romandaki kadın iktidarının yeni bir feminist etik yaratmadığını; aksine R.W. Connell'in tanımladığı hegemonik erkeklik kodlarını yeniden ürettiğini savunmaktadır. Çalışma; bedenin metalaşması, devletin biyopolitik denetimi ve şiddetin teolojik meşrulaştırılması ekseninde, siyasal erkekliğin cinsiyetten bağımsız bir iktidar teknolojisi olduğunu öne sürer. İncelenen karakterlerin pratikleri üzerinden, kadınların şiddet araçlarını ele geçirdiklerinde efendinin evini yıkmadıkları, bilakis o evin yeni efendilerine dönüştükleri tartışılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak eser, egemenliğin biyolojik bir yazgı değil, taklit edilebilir bir performans olduğunu ortaya koyar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadın Erkekliği, Naomi Alderman, *The Power*, Hegemonik Erkeklik, Biyopolitika, Siyasal Performativite.

INTRODUCTION

At the intersection of political science and gender theory, a haunting question of whether violence is a biological imperative of the testosterone-driven body, or it is merely a costume worn by power persists. Traditional narratives seduce us into believing the former: that domination is etched into the genetic code of the biological male, while peace and empathy remain the untouchable sanctuaries of the feminine. Naomi Alderman, however, shatters this essentialist comfort zone. In her speculative dystopia *The Power* (2016), she surgically introduces a 'skein' of electrostatic power into the collarbones of women, and in doing so, she does not just write science fiction; she drags the concept of "sovereignty" into a laboratory, strips it of its gendered skin, and dissects it live.

This article posits that the new world order which is constructed in Alderman's novel is neither a matriarchal utopia nor a simple feminist revenge fantasy. Rather, it is a critical staging of what Judith Halberstam conceptualizes as "Female Masculinity".

Alderman's *The Power* sits within a rich lineage of feminist speculative fiction, echoing the cautionary architecture of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* while drastically inverting its gendered dynamics. Recent scholarship has widely debated the nature of this inversion. Alyson Miller (2020) describes it as a problematic inversion of patriarchy, while Tuhin Shuvra Sen (2022) frames it as a speculative mirror to our contemporary political anxieties. Furthermore, Marleen S. Barr (2023) situates the novel within the tradition of feminist science fiction, reading its electrically empowered women as a new type of feminist SF superhero. However, to call it only an inversion or a mirror is to miss the structural nuance. It is not a flip; it is a reproduction. When women in the novel seize the capacity to inflict pain (to electrocute, to rape, to silence) they do not invent a female politics. As the narrative unfolds, characters like the dictator Tatiana Moskalev or the ruthlessly pragmatic Margot Cleary step into the ready-made boots of what R.W. Connell identifies as hegemonic masculinity, a configuration of practice legitimized by the subordination of others (Connell, 2005: 77).

So, the crux of our argument lies here: If the hand holding the whip is female, is the whip itself still 'masculine'?

Halberstam offers the theoretical scalpel we need to cut through this dilemma. Masculinity, she argues, must not be reduced to the property of male bodies. It is a semiotic and political technology that can be performed, mimicked, and weaponized by women (Halberstam, 1998: 1). In *The Power*, the skein is less a biological organ and more a tool of what Judith Butler would term the "performativity" of gender (Butler, 2006: 25). The electric jolt does not liberate women from the logic of patriarchy. It inducts them into it.

The violence in the novel is systemic rather than being sporadic. In this sense, Hannah Arendt famously distinguished power from violence, suggesting that "power needs no justification[...] but it does need legitimacy," whereas violence can destroy power but never create it (Arendt, 1969: 52-56). Alderman's matriarchs, however, collapse this distinction. They prove that in a system built on domination, legitimacy is violence. By objectifying the male body through reducing men to 'dildos', victims, and fragile subjects in need of curfew, the female ruling class enacts a perfect parody of the historical oppression they once suffered. Tuhin Shuvra Sen suggests that such speculative fiction mirrors the "here and now" (Sen, 2022: 1); yet, the reflection is not just a mirror, but an indictment.

Eventually, this article frames *The Power* as a bleak cautionary tale about the seduction of structure. The ghost of Audre Lorde haunts every electrocution throughout the novel. As Lorde warned us with devastating clarity: “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 2017: 19). The women of Alderman’s world have picked up the master’s most potent tool, known as hegemonic violence, and found that it fits their hands perfectly. But in doing so, they have not burned the house down or demolish it. They have simply evicted the old tenants and signed a new lease. This paper, therefore, maps the architecture of that house, exploring how political masculinity survives and thrives, even when there are no men left to enforce it.

1. THE BODY POLITIC AND THE EXPROPRIATION OF THE PHALLUS

Alderman locates the epicentre of this global seismic shift not in a manifesto or a political treaty, but in a strip of striated muscle, which is referred to as the skein in the novel. Buried along the collarbone, this organ is described with a physiological precision that grounds the fantastical in the visceral. It is, initially, a biological quirk, yet its function is unmistakably martial. As Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality*, power is not merely a repressive force from above. It is “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate” (Foucault, 1978: 92). In *The Power*, these force relations are literalized. The body becomes the primary site where power is generated, stored, and discharged.

The nature of this power, however, demands scrutiny. At this point, an important question emerges; Is the skein a liberatory organ of the feminine, or is it, in psychoanalytic terms, a biological expropriation of the phallus?

When Roxy Monke, the daughter of a crime boss, first discovers the full extent of her capacity, the sensation is not described as nurturing or defensive, but as an intoxicating dominance. Alderman writes:

One thing’s certain after the sparring matches and practice bouts. Roxy’s got a lot of it. Not just more than average, more than any of the other girls they can find to practise with her. She learns a few things about radius and reach, about how to make it arc and how it works better on wet skin. She feels proud of how strong she is. She puts everything into that (Alderman, 2016: 45).

Following Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, where gender is “a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 2006: 191), the skein allows women to perform the ultimate act of hegemonic masculinity, namely the projection of lethal force. The electricity functions as an extension of the will which is a projectile that penetrates the space of the other. In this light, the electric arc may be considered as phallic. It transforms the female body from a nonviolent being into a weapon

that penetrates. Thus, the biological sex remains female, but the gendered performance of the body shifts dramatically toward the masculine.

This shift results in a rapid inversion of the fear economy. For centuries, women's existence in public spaces has been defined and controlled by the potential threat of male violence. Alderman masterfully flips this script to transfer its ownership. Tunde, the male journalist who chronicles this transition, provides a chilling testimony to the objectification of the male body. While walking down a road in Bessapara, he encounters a woman who is looking at him directly, he notes a terrifying realization that men are not the protagonists of this story anymore. They are the things that happen to the protagonists.

Don't be afraid. The only way to defeat this is not to be afraid.
But the animal part of himself was afraid. There is a part in each
of us which holds fast to the old truth: either you are the hunter
or you are the prey. Learn which you are. Act accordingly. Your
life depends upon it (Alderman, 2016: 218).

Tunde clearly articulates the passive role women have been assigned throughout history here and lays bare the shattering of the untouchable and unquestionable nature of the male (and masculinity). It has become fragile, penetrable, and even killable.

The novel's description of this change supports Halberstam's assertion that masculinity is a technology rather than a biological inevitability (Halberstam, 1998: 25). When women in the novel begin to rape men, which shocks the reader as a disturbing recurrence in the text, they are not expressing a suppressed female desire. Instead, they are utilizing the 'master's tools' to replicate the master's crime. Alderman does not shy away from the grotesque reality of this power. During the protests in Delhi, while women were searching Tunde to check whether he was carrying a weapon, the text reveals the dark irony of power: "There are maybe thirty women watching this now. Any one of them could kill him with a single blow. In for a penny" (Alderman, 2016: 172). This line echoes Arendt's distinction that "violence is distinguished by its instrumental character" (Arendt, 1969: 46). The women do not need the man's consent. They only need his submission.

Therefore, the rise of the skein does not herald a new ethics of care often stereotypically associated with matriarchy. Instead, it exposes the bleak reality that biological essentialism is a lie. Give a subject absolute power over life and death what Foucault called the *droit de glaive* (right of the sword), and that subject will construct a patriarchy, regardless of their chromosomes. The skein is not a feminist gift, but it is a tool that allows women to occupy the position of the oppressor.

2. THE ARCHITECTURE OF FEMALE MASCULINITY: FROM THE BODY TO THE STATE

If the skein establishes the capacity for violence, the political arena is where that violence is choreographed into authority. Judith Butler famously argued that gender is a “corporeal style”, an act which is both intentional and performative (Butler, 2006: 190). In the novel, leadership seems to become the ultimate drag performance. The novel’s two central political figures, Tatiana Moskalev and Margot Cleary, do not invent a new matriarchal way of governance. Instead, they hijack the existing semiotics of the ‘Strong Man’, proving Halberstam’s thesis that masculinity is a free-floating technology, available to anyone ruthless enough to seize it.

Considering Tatiana Moskalev, the former First Lady of Moldova (later named as Bessapara in the novel), her ascent to power is paved with the classic bricks of a patriarchal coup when she murders her husband. Yet, the brilliance of Alderman’s characterization lies in Tatiana’s subsequent transformation. She does not rule as a mother of the nation. She rules as a warlord.

Tatiana, ruling the newly named Bessapara, adopts the aesthetics of the autocrat. This onomastic choice is highly symbolic; historically, the Bessi were a fierce Thracian tribe known for their martial prowess and resistance to imperial Rome, with Bessapara serving as one of their chief settlements (Hornblower and Spawforth, 2012: s.v. “Bessi”). By claiming this ancient, warlike lineage, Tatiana discursively anchors her new female-led empire in a deep-rooted history of aggression and sovereign defiance. At one point, observing the shifting tides, the narrative voice notes a chilling reality: “The only wave that matters is the wave you ride. She is not the wife of the President anymore. She is the President” (Alderman, 2016: 114). But she is more than a president. She is a performance of dominant female masculinity. Halberstam defines this form of masculinity not as a negation of femaleness, but as a specific, aggressive claim to power that “refuses the legitimacy of male domination” by becoming the dominator itself (Halberstam, 1998: 9). Tatiana surrounds herself with men she humbles, turning them into decorative pets, a direct inversion, and thus a reproduction of the trophy wife trope. Her regime is not a subversion of the phallic order. It turns out to be the phallic order in high heels.

Another astonishing figure in the novel is Margot Cleary, the American face of this new hegemony. If Tatiana is the chaotic warlord of this new world order in the novel, Margot is the cold bureaucrat of violence.

Different from Tatiana, Margot’s strategy is insidious. She initially markets herself through the non-threatening, nurturing lens of motherhood just like a ‘Mama Bear’ protecting her cubs but she uses this maternal camouflage to build

militarized training camps. These camps, called ‘the North Star Girls’ Camps’, are not safe spaces. They are the source of a new army. Alderman here exposes the terrifying adaptability of hegemonic masculinity. R.W. Connell reminds us that hegemonic masculinity is not just about brute force. It is about “the organization of private life and cultural processes” to sustain dominance (Connell, 2005: 77). Furthermore, she constructs what Louis Althusser (1970) famously termed an ideological state apparatus, utilizing these camps not just for physical training, but to internalize and normalize the new hegemony through structured education and propaganda. Margot perfects this definition and institutionalizes the electricity.

In a crucial debate in the novel, Margot drops the mask. When pushed by a male opponent, she doesn’t appeal to equality. She unleashes the threat of force, silencing the room not with logic, but with the visceral promise of pain. Her internal monologue reveals the intoxicating nature of this change: “It doesn’t matter that she shouldn’t do it [...] It matters that she can. And she does” (Alderman, 2016: 84).

This moment reveals the death knell of the ‘feminine’ politician. Margot proves that in the game of realpolitik, there is no gender. There are only the hammer and the nail. By establishing a state apparatus that segregates and curfews men for their own safety, Margot enacts what Foucault would call a *biopolitical seizure* (Foucault, 1978: 140). In the nation of Bessapara, this exercise of power transcends Foucault’s biopower, entering the realm of Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics. Mbembe defines sovereignty as the power to dictate who may live and who must die, creating death-worlds where populations are reduced to the status of the living dead (Mbembe, 2019: 92). By stripping men of legal agency and reducing them to biological resources, the regime constructs a death-world where the state exercises the ultimate right to define the killability of the male subject. In doing so, she becomes the State, and the State, historically and structurally, wears the pants. Therefore, both Tatiana and Margot illustrate a grim conclusion that to lead in a world built on violence is to become, functionally and performatively, a man.

If the individual body is the site of the spark, the State is where the fire is organized. Max Weber defined the state as the entity laying claim to the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force (as cited in Arendt, 1969: 35). In *The Power*, the newly formed nation of Bessapara does not dismantle this monopoly. Instead, it perfects it. The borders are sealed, the guards are militarized, and the governance is absolute. This is not the ethics of care that cultural feminists might have predicted. It should be regarded as a war machine.

The novel suggests that the State is an inherently masculine apparatus. When women inhabit it, they do not soften its edges. The apparatus hardens them.

Foucault's concept of *biopower* which is defined as the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations (Foucault, 1978: 140) reaches its zenith here. The men of Bessapara are not seen as the real citizens but a kind of livestock. Their passports are cancelled. They are forbidden from driving and curated for breeding. This turns out to be a regime of phallic patriarchy, which is an oxymoron that Alderman renders terrifyingly plausible.

But where there is compression, there is explosion. The structural emasculation of men in the novel births a reactionary movement that mirrors our contemporary Manosphere and Incel subcultures with uncanny precision.

This reactionary vacuum is filled by UrbanDox, an anonymous demagogue who appears in the novel and weaponizes the digital sphere to mobilize disenfranchised men. He preaches that men are the true victims, urging them to reclaim their natural dominance through terror.

UrbanDox smiles. 'There are a lot of men out there who are worried about where this thing is heading, my friend. Some of them are weak, traitors to their gender and their people. Some of them think the women will be kind to them. But a lot of them know the truth. We haven't had to go begging for money' (Alderman, 2016: 170)

His rhetoric is a direct echo of the grievance politics found in today's anti-feminist forums. As R.W. Connell notes, when hegemonic masculinity is challenged, it often retreats into 'protest masculinity', which is a reactive form of identity constructed through aggression and nostalgia for a lost order (Connell, 2005: 111). In the novel, men like Tunde find themselves navigating a world where their very existence is pathologized. The terror they feel is not just physical but ontological. What Tunde hears from UrbanDox during his interview with him is enough to confuse Tunde. In this new economy, men are destitute.

UrbanDox frowns, like this is the most obvious thing in the world. 'They'll only keep the most genetically healthy of us alive. See, this is why God meant men to be the ones with the power. However bad we treat a woman - well, it's like a slave' (Alderman, 2016: 172).

Alderman's sharpest critique, however, is hidden in the margins quite literally. The novel is framed by a correspondence between a fictional male author, 'Neil Adam Armon' (an anagram of Naomi Alderman), and a senior female writer named 'Naomi'.

This meta-fictional layer serves as the final nail in the coffin of biological essentialism. Neil, writing thousands of years after what the novel offers as the 'Cataclysm' (the rise of women), sends his manuscript to Naomi, seeking her patronage. His tone is mostly submissive, apologetic, and desperate for approval.

Naomi's response, on the other hand, is dripping with condescending benevolence. She suggests that his book about men's rights is a quaint, niche genre what she dismissively calls 'men's literature' or 'boy books'. She writes to him:

Anyway! Looking forward to this! I think 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, 2016: 11).

The significance of this exchange lies in its banal cruelty. Naomi patronizes Neil exactly as male editors have patronized female writers for centuries. She mansplains history to him. This reversal proves that the condescension we associate with mansplaining has nothing to do with being biologically a man. It has everything to do with being the one holding the pen and the power. Audre Lorde's warning is thus realized in full here. The house has not been dismantled. The furniture has simply been rearranged, and the new landlords are just as arrogant as the old ones.

In the novel, the character of Allie, who introduces herself as Mother Eve, colonizes a far more insidious territory, namely the collective unconscious. In any hegemonic structure, physical violence requires metaphysical justification to sustain itself long-term. As Michel Foucault notes, power is most effective when it is internalized as truth, infiltrating the subject until "it touches the body" directly (Foucault, 1978: 153). Allie performs this function precisely in the novel. By rewriting religious dogma to align with female physical superiority, she demonstrates that female masculinity is not limited to secular governance. It can, and indeed must, construct its own theology.

Allie's transformation from an abused foster child to a messianic figure begins with a voice in her head that guides her to power. What is striking about this internal monologue is its strategic cynicism. The voice preaches leverage rather than preaching peace. It gives directions about how to gain dominance over the other women and strategies to overcome her stepfather and even police forces. When Allie begins to curate her new religion, she operates less like a saint and more like a brand manager for a new deity. She realizes early on that "the shape of the power is always the same; the shape of the world is always the shape of the power" (Alderman, 2016: 33). By recognizing that theology is merely a reflection of the prevailing energy source, Allie understands that she does not need to invent a new morality. She simply needs to invert the gender of the oppressor (Schiwy, 2007).

In her sermons, Allie enacts a theological coup by deconstructing the patriarchal logic of the past millennium. She argues that men have shaped God in their own image solely to justify their earthly rule. Addressing her audience, she

posits that the traditional scriptures were a fraud, claiming that “they said God was a man... so that men could be closer to God than we could ever be” (Alderman, 2016: 112). The symbolic weight of this transformation is already present in the character’s original name. Allie functions as a linguistic precursor to the ultimate patriarchal signifiers of the divine, echoing both ‘Allah’ (Gibb et al., 1960: s.v. “Allāh”) and the ‘Alpha’, before she formally re-christens herself as Mother Eve. Through this naming, Alderman illustrates how the seizure of power begins with the colonization of language itself. Instead of dismantling this anthropomorphic projection to reveal a genderless divinity, Allie reproduces the very essentialism she critiques. She declares that “God is She” (Alderman, 2016: 132), asserting that the power to give life and the power to take it away are two sides of the same divine coin. Yet, this *She* is not a benevolent earth mother or a symbol of pacifist feminism. She is a wrathful, jealous deity who sanctions violence against men as a holy act, effectively putting the new phallus into the hands of a Goddess.

This theological masculinity becomes most potent in how Allie exerts what Foucault would call ‘pastoral power’, the power of the shepherd over the flock, which demands absolute obedience in exchange for salvation. In this sense, there appears no difference between the patriarchal symbol of God and Allie’s new Goddess. The gender of the creator changes but the rest remains the same. Allie validates her authority through the infliction of pain, which she reframes as a miraculous gift. In one of the novel’s most chilling sequences, she demonstrates her ability to manipulate the skein not just to kill, but to control the nervous systems of others.

Jocelyn’s skein is twitching; it’s just because she’s excited. It’s working now better than it ever has, it’s been so good since Mother Eve cured her, and now she knows why that happened, why God made that miracle for her. It was for this. To save her from this bad man, trying to kill her (Alderman, 2016: 145).

She uses her cure over her followers, but this is administered through a jolt of agony that forces submission. By turning torture into a sacrament, Allie blurs the line between saviour and tormentor, proving Halberstam’s thesis that when the oppressed seize the tools of the oppressor, they do not liberate the structure. They merely occupy it.

Allie’s methodology, in addition, reveals the ultimate hollowness of her Divine Right. She explicitly instructs her nuns to rewrite the Bible, ordering them to “change the wording” (Alderman, 2016: 256) where necessary to ensure the text supports the new matriarchal order. This editorial ruthlessness suggests that religious texts are only political manifestos subject to revision rather than being divine mandates. Allie does not discover a new truth, but she constructs a new lie.

Her Mother Eve persona is a drag performance of the Prophet, complete with miracles, menace, and a rewritten liturgy. In the architecture of this new world order, she provides the mortar that holds the bricks of the police state together, which is the conviction that the violence they use as an instrument is necessary as well as sacred. In summary, Allie proves that a religion built on the superiority of one sex over another is structurally incapable of producing peace. It can only produce another version of the clash, regardless of whether the deity is addressed as Father or Mother.

The final conquest of any hegemonic power is not the territory, but the timeline. Once the body is subdued by the skein and the soul is colonized by the new theology, the remaining task is to overwrite the past. Gayatri Spivak's concept of epistemic violence, which is the destruction of non-Western ways of knowing by colonial powers, finds a chilling parallel in Alderman's novel (Spivak, 1988). The colonizer here is the female regime, and the indigenous knowledge being erased is the history of patriarchy itself. Alderman creates a meta-fictional frame narrative that envelops the main story, consisting of letters exchanged between Neil Adam Armon and Naomi. Through these correspondences, the reader witnesses the ultimate triumph of female masculinity, which explains the reduction of male history to speculative fiction genres.

The dynamic between Neil and Naomi is a clear example of passive-aggressive domination. As mentioned previously, Neil is keenly aware of his precarious position in a female-dominated publishing industry. He presents his manuscript, which tells the true story of how men once ruled the world as a novelization based on controversial archaeological theories. Naomi's response is devastatingly patronizing. She does not ban his book, but she dismisses its premise with gentle amusement. She writes to him by implying that men could never have sustained the level of violence required for patriarchy.

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! I don't have to tell you how much I enjoy that sort of thing. I'm sure you remember. I'm practically on the edge of my seat (Alderman, 2016: 11).

By framing male dominance as a biological impossibility, she enacts a profound epistemic violence. She uses the nature of men (as constructed by her society) to deny their historical agency. Spivak's epistemic violence is here manifested as the administrative ability to classify truth as fiction. By relegating the history of patriarchy to a novelization or a niche genre of speculative fantasy, Naomi does not just doubt Neil; she strips his ancestors of their historical reality. This genre-fication of male history serves a strategic political purpose. It ensures that the previous world order is perceived not as a lost historical fact, but as an

evolutionary impossibility, thereby silencing the subaltern male voice before it can even articulate a claim to the past.

This erasure becomes even more palpable in the novel's depiction of future archaeology. Alderman gives descriptions of some artifacts from our present time that have been unearthed and misinterpreted by future female scholars through the end of the novel. These scholars, blinded by the dominant ideology of their own time, cannot conceive of a past where men were warriors or leaders. For instance, when analysing a dig site containing American military gear, the historians do not interpret them as weapons of war. They make an estimation that these are some sort of sexual fantasies for women.

I know you're going to tell me that ancient excavations have found male warrior figures. But really, I suppose this is the crux of the matter for me. Are we sure those weren't just *isolated* civilizations? One or two amongst millions? 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, 2016: 278).

This is not merely a mistake. It reveals a systematic reordering of truth. The artifacts are stripped of their martial function and re-coded into being unconfessed fantasies of 'women fetish', just as traditional male historians have historically relegated female artifacts to the realm of fertility or decoration.

Furthermore, Neil's attempt to reclaim this history is met with the specific ridicule reserved for conspiracy theorists. When he suggests that men might have been soldiers, Naomi disagrees with evolutionary psychology arguments that mirror exactly the arguments used against women today. She claims that men would naturally seek protection, not conflict with their lack of a skein and their physical vulnerability. She asks, "Why would a man fight? It makes no evolutionary sense" (Alderman, 2016: 274), effectively using the language of science to naturalize a political hierarchy. This moment reveals the circularity of power/knowledge that Foucault warned against. The regime produces the science that proves the regime is inevitable.

The tragedy of *The Power* is thus complete in these final pages. The reader realizes that the horror such as the rapes, the wars, the electric torture they have just witnessed will not be remembered as a warning. It will be forgotten. It will be

buried under layers of academic jargon and condescending sympathy. By denying men even the memory of their former cruelty, the matriarchy denies them their humanity. They are reduced to “sexy props” in the grand drama of history (Alderman, 2016: 275), irrelevant footnotes in a narrative written entirely by the victors. This, Alderman suggests, is the truest violence. To scream the truth into a void where the very language needed to understand it has been abolished.

As mentioned earlier, the State regulates violence and the Church sanctifies it. Another fact that reinforces this situation is that the Market commodifies it. The analysis of hegemonic masculinity within *The Power* would be incomplete without examining the intersection of capitalism and criminality as the fourth pillar of this dystopian architecture. This domain is represented by Roxy Monke, the illegitimate daughter of a London gangster, who embodies the raw, transactional nature of power. Through Roxy’s narrative arc, Alderman exposes a terrifying reality that transcends gender. According to Alderman, violence, when unchecked, inevitably transforms into currency. In this new world order, the female body is not merely a political subject. It becomes a biological factory, and its output, pain in other words, is the most valuable product on the global exchange.

Different from Tatiana or Allie, Roxy understands the physics of power in its crudest form. Her journey illustrates that the skein is not only a biological organ but a transferable asset, which is a form of natural capital that can be exploited. This becomes evident through the proliferation of Glitter, which is a drug synthesized to enhance the electrical discharge. The existence of such a substance signals the birth of a necro-economy, where the capacity to hurt is bottled, marketed, and sold to the highest bidder. As Mbembe argues, in a necropolitical order, the body is treated as a disposable site for the extraction of power (Mbembe, 2019: 80). The black-market harvesting of skeins from unwilling donors represents this predatory extractivism, where biological capacity is turned into a liquid asset. Roxy’s loss of her skein is a manifestation of a system where the right to exist is secondary to the market value of one’s capacity for violence. Roxy, navigating this underworld, realizes that “the power to hurt is a kind of wealth” (Alderman, 2016: 172). By equating voltage with value, she demonstrates that the new matriarchy is just as susceptible to the predatory logic of late capitalism as the patriarchy it replaced.

The novel takes this commodification to its most grotesque extreme with the harvesting of skeins. In a perverse twist on organ trafficking, wealthy men (and powerless women) begin to pay for the surgical implantation of skeins cut from the bodies of donors, often unwilling ones. The essentialist argument that women are naturally more peaceful collapses here entirely under the weight of market demand. The female body is reduced to a resource, a mine to be stripped. When

Roxy herself falls victim to having her skein surgically removed by a jealous male rival, the narrative brutalizes the concept of biological destiny. The text describes the loss not just as a physical mutilation but as a bankruptcy: “She is nothing. She is a distinct lack of something [...] She is a space where a thing should be” (Alderman, 2016: 302). This void is not spiritual. It is the void of the dispossessed. Read through Halberstam’s framework, Roxy’s biological mutilation strips her of her masculine currency, violently exiling her from the hegemonic order she once helped enforce. Here, Audre Lorde’s warning resonates with devastating clarity: the master’s tools, in this case, the commodified violence of the skein, will never dismantle the master’s house. They merely circulate among new masters. The market for pain knows no gender. It only knows profit and extraction.

Roxy’s trajectory forces a confrontation with the labour of violence. Unlike the other leaders who distance themselves from the wet work, Roxy is a labourer of death. Unlike others, she is the one who takes action and uses direct violence. She breaks fingers and stops hearts with her own hands. Yet even she eventually questions the sustainability of this economy. Observing the chaos around her, she notes that “it’s a spiral. You get a bit of power, you want more. You get a bit of money, you want more” (Alderman, 2016: 256). This feedback loop mirrors that the power does not satisfy a need, but it creates a new hunger.

Roxy represents the failure of the meritocracy of strength. In a world where power can be stolen, bought via black-market surgery, or chemically enhanced with a medication, the idea of a natural order is a myth. The skein is revealed to be just another technology of dominance, no different from a gun or a bank account. By showing men attempting to buy their way into this biological elite, Alderman suggests that the ultimate allegiance is not to sex, but to status. The market for pain and violence disregards gender. It only values profit. Thus, the revolution in *The Power* does not liberate the body from the chains of production, but it simply retools it to produce a deadlier commodity.

3. CONCLUSION

As the electricity of Naomi Alderman's dystopian world flickers, the comforting myths of essentialist feminism burn to ashes. *The Power* serves as a brutal corrective to the utopian longing that assumes a world ruled by women would be inherently more peaceful, nurturing, or just. Through the trajectories of the characters analysed above, the novel demonstrates that the architecture of oppression is not genetically coded into the Y chromosome. It is, rather, a structural inevitability of absolute power itself. By analysing these figures through the lens of Halberstam’s female masculinity, this study has argued that the violence witnessed in the novel is not a betrayal of womanhood, but a successful

performance of sovereignty. These female characters in *The Power* choose to become successful rulers rather than giving up on being women.

The novel's ultimate revelation is terrifyingly simple. Power and dominance do not belong to any specific gender. It only has a shape. And historically, that shape has been masculine. When the women in the novel step into the void left by men, they let the void shape them. They adopt the phallic tools of the state, the church, and the market without hesitation. The skein essentially functions as a biological mandate for fascism, proving that biology is not destiny but merely weaponry.

Therefore, Alderman's work compels us to abandon the binary question of 'Men vs. Women' and confront the deeper, more uncomfortable reality of 'Human vs. Hierarchy'. As long as the definition of political success is predicated on domination, the gender of the ruler is irrelevant. A matriarchy built on the bones of men is simply a change of management.

Ultimately, *The Power* leaves us with a haunting silence of Neil's erased history and the silenced screams of Tunde's terror. It warns us that dismantling the master's house requires more than just stealing his tools. It requires a rejection of the desire to be the master. Until that ontological shift occurs, the current flows, the bodies pile up, and the nightmare of history repeats itself, only this time, with a different hand on the switch.

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