



## **Patriarchal culture in Madeline Miller's *Circe***

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**Abstract.** This study is about Patriarchal Culture in Madeline Miller, *Circe*. The objectives of the study are to identify and explain the forms of patriarchal culture and the effect of patriarchal culture on the main character, *Circe*. This study utilizes feminist analysis and literary theory approach to unveil the role and influence of patriarchal culture within the novel. Through an in-depth analysis of the main character, *Circe*, this research reveals how ancient Greek patriarchal culture produce the oppression and subordination of women in society. The findings of this research demonstrate that the novel *Circe* creatively reinterprets myths and showcases the vulnerability and strength of women that are sometimes overlooked in ancient Greek mythology narratives. The character of *Circe* is employed to depict women's struggle against patriarchal norms and their quest for self-sovereignty. From the results of analysis, there are two forms of patriarchal culture, namely Private Patriarchy and Public Patriarchy. The patriarchal culture that is still considered normal in this fairy tale has a negative impact on the goddess in many ways. Women lose a lot due to the dominance of men over them. Women are devalued by the powerful gods who also put them in a poor position. As a result of this patriarchal culture, the Goddesses are subject to many misconceptions. These gods believe that women are just there to serve their husbands and procreate, as *Perse* does. The last effect of this patriarchal society is the prevalence of severe physical or psychological violence

**Keywords:** patriarchal culture, marginalize, subordination, stereotype, violence

### **INTRODUCTION**

Knowledge about culture is very crucial because understanding culture is also a step in solving existing social problems. In a society where there are many cultures of hegemony, patriarchy, and discrimination, it is certainly a concern for researchers, especially scholars who specialise in examining culture and language. The beginning of patriarchy arises from various stigmas that have been formed by society for centuries. Perhaps the researcher is able to provide real examples in everyday life where there are some women who do not have the freedom to manage their own lives which can be seen from arranged marriages, low salaries for women in factories, to husband violence against wives. These are the main problems off the importance of discussing patriarchal culture, which has not been deeply understood by some or most people.

This research is a valuable opportunity to voice what women have been feeling for centuries. Starting from stereotypes about the ideal woman to the desire for women to be recognized is a strong reason why the researcher feels that this topic is an urgent topic. This study is certainly the researcher's attempt to fill the gap that has not been done by previous researchers, namely by reviewing novel literary works with a deeper understanding of patriarchal culture. Although there are previous studies that have raised this topic, the researcher tries to present a different and new perspective. In this regard, feminism is one of the distinguished voices that stood against the dominating powers, particularly patriarchy (Sarwar & Fatima, 2022: 338). The novel chosen by the researcher is the New York Times Bestselling Author of *The Song of Achilles*, Circe by Madeline Miller. The novel was published in April, 2018 in New York by Little, Brown and Company and Hachette Book Group. Circe's fantasy, fiction, Greek mythology, and historical themes are interesting to research. Moreover, feminism and patriarchy are hot topics illustrated by Miller throughout the storyline.

In the novel *Circe* by Madeline Miller, the main character, Circe, has a father named Helios. Furthermore, Circe's father, Helios, presides over a court that is unmistakably patriarchal, as evidenced by the fact that she is not permitted to participate in court proceedings, unlike her brother Aeetes (Macmillan, 2020: 8).

In this context, the proposed research aims to examine examples of patriarchal culture depicted in Madeline Miller's *Circe* and their effects on the main character, Circe. The story in the novel highlights the influence of patriarchal culture on Circe's life, including the limitations imposed on her as a woman within her father's court. The novel illustrates how Circe must confront patriarchal power structures and struggle to find her own voice and power. She has to face the stereotypes and social expectations imposed on women within that culture. Throughout her journey, Circe discovers strength and builds her own identity beyond patriarchal constraints.

Through this research, it is hoped that insights will be gained into how Circe interacts with the patriarchal society surrounding her, how such influence shapes her character, and how she defies stereotypes and limitations. By examining the portrayal of patriarchal culture in the novel, this research will provide a better understanding of the dynamics of gender power and the struggles of female characters in finding their voices within patriarchal cultural contexts. With the various reasons above, the researcher is encouraged to conduct a study entitled, "Patriarchal Culture In Madeline Miller's *Circe*". The analysis is divided into two parts. They are the forms and effects of patriarchal culture.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Feminist Literary Criticism**

Attention has been brought not only to male supremacy and privilege but also to an almost invisible and presumptive male-centeredness public life and discourse by the feminist insistence on a focus on women's subordination, discrimination, and experiences of marginalization. Men's involvement in this type of work is often viewed as uncomfortable by feminists and they are considered weaklings by mainstream society. They are attacked on all sides. An effort is made to make them feel special and proud, as people who stand out and make a difference (Hawkins et al., 2013: 16).

Simply put, the radical-feminist view of patriarchy is that males are oppressors who work hand in glove with the establishment. However, this theory of patriarchy is flawed because it ignores the fact that males are also adversely impacted by the system. For instance, this theory does not account for the power disparities between a middle-class

white lady and a poor black male in the US. How to keep the lens off intersectionality and continue to take into account discrimination on the basis of religion, (dis)ability, caste, class, etc. is a significant difficulty while theorizing patriarchy (Hawkins et al., 2013:22).

Before the researcher explains more about patriarchy, there are some key elements of patriarchy (Hawkins et al., 2013: 22):

1. Hierarchies of power relations;
2. Male figure/logic of authority;
3. Production and reproduction, through acts, performances;
4. Systemic dimensions with various incentives and disincentives, rewards and punishment for different types of behavior.

### **Patriarchy**

Patriarchy, according to Walby (2011), is “systematically structured gender inequality” that can take either a private or public form. Throughout history, women have consistently borne the brunt of overwhelming societal pressures and expectations, grappling with instances of violence, enslavement, and discrimination. This subjugation knows no bounds, permeating various aspects of life, including race, culture, and religion. According to Sultana (in Fauzia & Rahayu, 2019), patriarchy pertains to the dominance of males in both public and private realms. Their subordination is enforced by those in power, through legal systems or physical coercion, hindering their pursuit of freedom and equality (Wahyono, 2021). There are two types of patriarchy. There are private patriarchy and public patriarchy

#### **1. Private Patriarchy**

Private patriarchy is defined as a condition that takes place in the domestic sphere where the head of the family directly manages the women. Private patriarchal violence, such as “honor killings”, “collective suicide”, hate speech, sex traps, cancelled communality, and twice eviction (Rahman & Anwar, 2022: 279).

#### **2. Public Patriarchy**

Women's dominance, exploitation, and expropriation occur collectively under public patriarchy. Rape, forced marriage, and kidnapping were examples of public patriarchal violence.

### **Gender**

Fakih (2008: 13) notes in his analysis that there are various manifestations or forms of gender inequality, including violence, negative stereotype formation, economic marginalization the process of economic deprivation, political subordination or the assumption of insignificance, and subordination. The effects of gender inequality are described in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

#### **1. Marginalization**

Marginalization reduces the significance of women's contributions to national development is undermined and overlooked pushes them out of the center of economic, social, and political life.

#### **2. Subordination**

Subordination is the degradation of one sex over the other. The systematic dominance of women by males (or vice versa) is known as gender subordination. A power relationship is one of subordination. Power may be categorized into four different types: power over, power over, power to, power with, and power within. Having responsibilities in all three

job domains—reproductive, productive, and community management and governance—represents a heavy responsibility. A person's participation in any of these areas, sometimes unintentionally and sometimes excessively, reduces the amount of time they have for themselves and the activities they truly want to accomplish.

### 3. Stereotype

Gender stereotyping is when a set of positive or negative roles, features, and qualities are applied to all members of a social group depending on sex.

### 4. Violence

Various types of violence against women include physical, psychological/verbal, and sexual violence. An example of physical violence is abuse, psychological/verbal violence is intimidating behavior, and sexual violence is rape.

## METHOD

In conducting research, a method or the right way to study an object is used. A chosen research method in literature is based on the researcher's consideration of the form, content, and characteristics of literary works being studied. Literary research is divided into two parts, namely quantitative research and qualitative research depending on the material. In this research, qualitative research methods are used. Qualitative research is an approach that focuses on in-depth understanding and appreciation of a subject, rather than relying solely on numerical data. It involves studying concepts and phenomena through empirical observations and exploring the interactions between them. The analysis method in this research is content analysis method. Basic implementation of the content analysis method is interpretation, meaning that this method gives attention to the content of the message. Therefore, the content analysis method is carried out in documents that are dense in content. Feminist literary criticism in the research of Madeline Miller's novel "Circe" evaluates the work through feminist theory to give due respect to female authors and characters. The data are taken entirely from Madeline Miller's book *Circe*. The data to be analyzed are collected by using the steps below: a) Reading and understanding the novel; b) Looking for information relating to the topic of analysis from other sources; c) Identifying the data relating to the topic analysis; d) Classifying the data based on the problem statement, the form and the effect of patriarchal culture.

Once the data has been gathered, they are analyzed by the following steps: a) Interpreting the classified data based on the problem statements; b) Analyzing the classified data and relating them to the theory used; c) Organizing the analysis; d) Concluding the result of analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Patriarchal Culture in Madeline Miller's *Circe*

Traditional communities continue to be deeply rooted in patriarchal society. Numerous tales illustrate how the social structure is dominated by men, just as it was in Greek mythology. Numerous tales exist concerning masculine Greek Gods who oversaw the lives of other Goddesses. The Goddess or women gradually lose influence in the social order as a result of the laws and treatment of the Greek Gods. A daughter of the Titan Helios is the subject of the novel *Circe* by Madeline Miller. *Circe* is born as the result of the union of Helios and his nymph bride Perse. When *Circe* is born, a horrible event happens in Helios' opulent palace. *Circe's* narrative goes on until she is an adult. Over hundreds of years, patriarchal civilizations have created spiritual and secular reasons for

this inequity, making it appear natural and the way the world works (Jensen, 2021:2). In doing so, the researcher distinguishes two kinds of patriarchy illustrated by the novel. There are private patriarchy and public patriarchy.

### 1. Private Patriarchy

In *Circe*, there are quite a few quotes that are a form of private patriarchy. Private patriarchy boils down to the household. Furthermore, private patriarchy is found at the beginning of *Circe*, life which shows that Circe's existence, since she is born has never been considered by others. This is part of the patriarchal cultural system described by Miller where even in a household setting, a child who is not treated well by other family members is discriminated against as a result of the private patriarchy in the family environment. The following is a quotation from the novel that illustrates private patriarchy.

The strong influence of patriarchal culture in the ancient Greek era can be seen from the dominance of men in controlling private and public areas. This can be seen when the novel *Circe* explains the characterization of the character Helios who dominates the women by assuming they are all willing to satisfy his lust and all women are attracted to him. The following is a quotation from the novel that explains the dominance of men over women in the domestic setting.

In a strong patriarchal culture, men's decisions dominate the family, especially the children who have fathers who adhere to a strong patriarchal culture. Helios as Circe's father, who likes to control all family decisions, is evidence of private patriarchy within the family. Helios is proud when he can arrange his daughters with whom they marry. This arranged marriage is clear evidence of private patriarchy, which is an illustration of the weak opinion of women in social construction. Thus, women must obey whatever the head of the family decides. This fact is proved in the quotation below.

"Your father-" he said, stumbling a little, for speaking of Helios always unnerved him. "He will choose a husband for you?" "Yes" I said "What sort of husband?" "I thought I would weep. I wanted to press against him and I say I wished it could be him, but my oath stood between us. So I made myself speak the truth, that my father sought out princes, or perhaps a king if he were foreign (Miller, 2018: 26).

### 2. Public Patriarchy

According to Sylvia Walby (Walby, 1990), public patriarchy is just one aspect of patriarchal culture as a whole. Public Patriarchy highlights the patriarchal society that emerges in a larger conversation.

However, in public patriarchy, the position of women in the state and government is very weak and sidelined or even considered the other. In *Circe*, the character Perse, Circe's mother and Helios' spouse, is portrayed as fulfilling traditional gender roles within a private patriarchal setting. She serves her husband Helios, tending to plants and fulfilling biological duties, while receiving protection in return. This depiction reflects the unconscious adherence to patriarchal culture deeply rooted in the lives of the Greek Gods. The position of women, who are victims of patriarchal culture, are not given the right to speak in public. Therefore, the women in *Circe*, who are the goddesses, are seen in the same way as they are depicted in the real world, very submissive, and silent.

"The room brightened, and my father came. On his face was a look like hammered bronze. Our eyes followed him as he strode to the dais at the room's front. The rays from his

crown speared every shadows. He stared out over us. "I have spoke with Zeus," he said. "We have found our way to an agreement." (Miller, 2018: 57)

Furthermore, public patriarchy is seen when violence is committed by men against women who are weak or who live alone. Women's subordinate position in the patriarchal cultural order makes them frequent objects of crime. In the novel, Circe, who lives alone due to estrangement from her family, is physically abused by abusive and irresponsible men. The words 'jam' and 'choke' are verbs that exemplify the acts of violence illustrated in the novel.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, the conclusion gender. The researcher has discovered the forms of patriarchal culture. Public and private patriarchy are the two forms of patriarchal culture discussed in the first section. The eternal dominance of the Gods over the Goddesses is based on these two forms. Discrimination against women is exacerbated by the influence of public patriarchy on their role in society. Private patriarchy is the next form of patriarchy. The housewife position is a female-only one in this form. Women lose a lot as a result of men's dominance over them. The dominant Gods' strength pushes the weaker Goddesses to the periphery. The nymphs, who receive feats from the Gods above them, are one of them. Circe is likewise ordered to be sent to an island for attempting to oppose the system. Women are devalued by the powerful gods who also put them in a poor position. The Goddesses hold a minor place in the world of the Gods due to their lack of strength. As a result of this patriarchal culture, the Goddesses are subject to many misconceptions. These gods believe that women were just there to serve their husbands and procreate, as Perse did. Patriarchal society leads to severe physical and psychological violence. Circe and other Goddesses in the novel experience both types: Circe faces sexual assault threats from spared sailors but is later rescued by nymphs who have also suffered sexual abuse.

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