

Female Emancipation amidst Religious Patriarchy in Tara Westover's *Educated*: A Feminist Literary Analysis

Emansipasi Perempuan di Tengah Patriarki Religius dalam *Educated* Karya Tara Westover: Analisis Sastra Feminis

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Abstract

This study investigates the underexplored representation and contestation of religiously grounded patriarchal systems in contemporary feminist literary studies, focusing on memoirs. It analyzes mechanisms of women's oppression and forms of female resistance in Tara Westover's *Educated* through qualitative narrative analysis of key episodes, including domestic violence, educational mobility, and religious indoctrination. Employing Sylvia Walby's framework of patriarchal structures alongside Mary Daly's critique of androcentric theology, the study identifies two central modes of patriarchal control. First, domestic patriarchy is embodied by Tara's father, Gene, whose religious authority governs family behavior and restricts access to education and external institutions, illustrating how religious doctrine enforces hierarchical gender relations within the household. Second, Tara's resistance emerges through her pursuit of academic achievement and financial autonomy, marking a gradual disengagement from domestic control and a redefinition of her subjectivity. Her intervention in her sister-in-law's experience of domestic violence further exemplifies a shift from compliance to active moral agency. The analysis expands Walby's model by revealing how religious ideology sustains domestic patriarchy even as women engage with broader social institutions. This article contributes to feminist literary criticism by illuminating the complex interplay of religious indoctrination and familial patriarchy in *Educated*, and by framing education as a situated form of resistance within patriarchal religious contexts.

Keywords: *Resistance; Education; Religious Patriarchy; Patriarchy; Emancipation*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi dan perdebatan yang kurang dieksplorasi mengenai sistem patriarki yang berlandaskan agama dalam studi sastra feminis kontemporer, dengan fokus pada memoar. Penelitian ini menganalisis mekanisme penindasan perempuan dan bentuk perlawanan perempuan dalam karya Tara Westover, *Educated*, melalui analisis naratif kualitatif terhadap episode-episode kunci, termasuk kekerasan dalam rumah tangga, mobilitas pendidikan, dan indoktrinasi agama. Menggunakan kerangka kerja struktur patriarki Sylvia Walby bersama dengan kritik Mary Daly terhadap teologi androsentris, studi ini mengidentifikasi dua mode utama kontrol patriarki. Pertama, patriarki domestik diwakili oleh ayah Tara, Gene, yang otoritas religiusnya mengatur perilaku keluarga dan membatasi akses ke pendidikan serta institusi eksternal, menggambarkan bagaimana doktrin agama memperkuat hubungan gender hierarkis di dalam rumah tangga. Kedua, perlawanan Tara muncul melalui upayanya mengejar prestasi akademik dan kemandirian finansial, menandai pelepasan bertahap dari kontrol domestik dan redefinisi subjektivitasnya. Intervensinya dalam pengalaman kekerasan dalam rumah tangga yang dialami oleh ipar perempuannya lebih lanjut menggambarkan pergeseran dari kepatuhan menjadi agen moral aktif. Analisis ini memperluas model Walby dengan mengungkapkan bagaimana ideologi agama mempertahankan patriarki domestik meskipun perempuan terlibat dalam institusi sosial yang lebih luas. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada kritik sastra feminis dengan menerangi interaksi kompleks antara indoktrinasi agama dan patriarki keluarga dalam *Educated*, serta dengan menggambarkan pendidikan sebagai bentuk perlawanan yang kontekstual dalam konteks agama patriarki.

Kata kunci: *Perlawanan; Pendidikan; Patriarki Agama; Patriarki; Pembebasan*

INTRODUCTION

Literary works function not only as aesthetic expressions but also as cultural texts that reveal the social and ideological structures shaping human experience. Among various genres, memoir occupies a distinct position because it intertwines personal narrative with broader social realities, allowing readers to see how individual subjectivity is formed within specific historical and cultural contexts. Memoirs often dramatize the tensions between personal agency and the external forces that constrain it, making them especially relevant for feminist literary studies that examine how gendered power operates in everyday life.

Tara Westover's *Educated* (2018) provides a compelling site for such inquiry. The memoir portrays a young woman raised in a fundamentalist Mormon household where religious doctrine and patriarchal authority intersect to regulate women's behavior, limit access to education, and define gendered obligations within the family. While *Educated* has been widely discussed as a narrative of academic achievement and personal resilience, less attention has been given to how the text exposes the mechanisms through which religious patriarchy shapes female subjectivity and how resistance emerges within these structures. The memoir complicates the familiar trope of "education as liberation" by illustrating that intellectual mobility does not immediately dissolve the psychological effects of patriarchal control, particularly when that control is justified through religious beliefs.

This study therefore investigates how patriarchal religious authority operates in *Educated* and how the memoir represents a woman's struggle to negotiate identity, autonomy, and resistance. By combining Sylvia Walby's theory of domestic patriarchy with Mary Daly's radical feminist critique of androcentric theology, the analysis aims to illuminate the underexplored interplay between religious indoctrination, familial power, and women's emancipation in contemporary autobiographical writing.

Female emancipation has been an important theme in literature, especially in memoirs. Through memoirs, women writers share their life stories and show how they deal with social pressures, including those caused by patriarchal systems. Memoirs give women a space to speak honestly about their feelings, thoughts, and personal struggles. At the same time, these stories help raise awareness about the wider injustices that many women face. In literary analysis, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* exemplifies the intricacies of women's struggles against gender inequality and the quest for identity (Lahinda, Hampp, & Lolowang, 2023). Furthermore, Lazar (2007) emphasizes through feminist discourse analysis that literature functions as a powerful medium for women's emancipation, enabling personal narratives to challenge and resist patriarchal social structures. Thus, the representation of female emancipation in memoirs not only documents individual experiences but also contributes to shaping public discourse surrounding women's rights, agency, and freedom.

On the other hand, efforts toward women's emancipation are often hindered by the strong influence of religious patriarchy, which is deeply rooted in many social and cultural traditions. In many cases, religious institutions play a big role in maintaining gender inequality through patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings. Kariuki (2024) explains that while there are no theological or traditional restrictions against women in church leadership, the main barrier comes from the patriarchal cultural norms that view women as subordinate. Religious systems can support male dominance when their teachings are interpreted without considering equality. Despite this, many women in traditional religions find ways to push back and change their roles. Preston (2003) explains that reinterpreting religious teachings in a more open and inclusive way can help women gain more power and freedom within these systems.

Feminist literary criticism often identifies religious patriarchy as a structure that sustains gender inequality by legitimizing male authority through sacred discourse. Sylvia Walby (1990) conceptualizes patriarchy as a system organized across several structures, including the family and wider social institutions, and distinguishes between private patriarchy, which concentrates control within the household, and public patriarchy, which operates through institutions outside it. Mary Daly (1973) critiques the androcentric foundations of religious belief, arguing that representations of a male God reinforce women's subordination and shape their internalized sense of inferiority.

This study employs Walby's framework to analyze how *Educated* depicts domestic religious authority as a form of private patriarchy and how Tara's entry into formal education reveals tensions in the shift toward public patriarchy. Daly's radical feminist theology is used to interpret the memoir's portrayal of religious discourse that constructs gendered moral hierarchies and internalized obedience. By integrating these perspectives, the article aims to show how *Educated* not only illustrates the operations of religious patriarchy but also exposes the limits of both Walby's and Daly's models when applied to contemporary memoir. Specifically, the text reveals how patriarchal control persists even when women move into public spheres and how religious ideology continues to shape subjectivity after physical separation from the family.

Kurnianto (2016) uses Sylvia Walby's patriarchal theory to see how female characters in the novel *Garis Perempuan* by Sanie B. Kuncoro experience marginalization and oppression. Her research shows that oppression of women occurs in a structured manner through six patriarchal systems, namely paid work, household work, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state. These interrelated systems create a social environment that oppresses women, limiting their ability to express opinions and make decisions independently. The results of this study confirm that patriarchy does not only occur in relationships between individuals but also as a systemic force that exists in broader social, cultural, and religious structures. In addition, criticism of patriarchy in religious institutions is also discussed through Mary Daly's theory, which explains how religious symbols and structures reinforce male dominance over women.

The religious critique theory developed by Mary Daly explains how religious institutions, especially in the Abrahamic tradition, play a role in maintaining the patriarchal system that oppresses women. In her book *Beyond God the Father* (1973), Daly criticizes the symbol of the male God who is considered the main symbol of patriarchal power that justifies male domination over women's bodies, minds, and spirituality. Until now, Daly's thinking is still an important basis in feminist theology and is often used in contemporary research. Coblenz and Jacobs (2018) emphasize that Daly's thinking remains relevant to re-examining the religious structure that makes the oppression of women seem normal, as well as to understand how women's resistance to patriarchal views can be considered an act of liberation in a religious context. This framework is very useful for analyzing *Educated*, a memoir that tells the life of Tara Westover in a fundamentalist Mormon family.

Many studies have discussed Tara Westover's book *Educated* with various approaches. Weisel-Barth (2019), for example, looks at it from a psychoanalytic perspective, especially the complex relationship between father and daughter, and how that relationship affects Tara's development. Her father is depicted as a very strict and suspicious figure, who also believes that women are inferior. Because of this, the family atmosphere becomes very closed and tightly controlled. Meanwhile, Jadoon, Kamran, and Sarfraz (2020) focus more on discussing the experiences of Western women related to gender roles, especially how the patriarchal system shapes women's identities and limits their freedom, both in the family and society. They say that *Educated* is not only Tara's personal story, but also a depiction of women's struggles in seeking freedom and identity amidst strong patriarchal domination.

According to Gao (2022), the female character in *Educated* is depicted as being under strong pressure from the social environment and patriarchal values, especially when she tries to pursue education and make decisions for her own life. Gao sees that education is not just about gaining knowledge, but also an important step for women to fight against various social constraints that have limited their freedom of movement and choices. On the other hand, Blumberg (2022) also highlights how education in the memoir *Educated* plays a major role in reshaping Tara Westover's identity, while creating a distance between her and the cultural values that her family has believed in. Through her life story, Westover shows that the process of understanding oneself and finding personal strength is often born from inner struggles and difficult life experiences in a restrictive environment.

In addition to feminist and psychoanalytic approaches, several studies have also examined moral values in *Educated*. Pratiwi, Jayantini, and Pratama (2023) used Stanton's (1965) conflict theory and Linda and Eyre's (1993) moral value theory to investigate how Tara Westover's experiences, both internal and external, shaped the moral values she developed. Values such as courage, independence, discipline, and respect not only emerged because of the conflicts she experienced but also developed during the process of searching for identity that Tara went through. This study concluded that Tara's life experiences showed profound inner changes, where her struggles with family and environmental pressures became a path for her personal and spiritual growth.

Several scholars have examined *Educated* through psychoanalytic, feminist, and moral-philosophical lenses, emphasizing themes such as self-identity formation, trauma, and gendered oppression. Jadoon et al. (2020) and Gao (2022) explore Westover's negotiation of selfhood and autonomy, while Blumberg (2022) highlights the memoir's critique of gender roles within conservative family structures. Other studies address the empowering role of education or the psychological consequences of familial control. Although these works offer valuable insights, they tend to frame patriarchy primarily as a social or psychological phenomenon, without examining in depth how religious discourse functions as a tool of patriarchal legitimacy and authority within the family.

Studies that touch on religion in *Educated* often treat it as background context rather than as an active mechanism shaping female subjectivity and regulating behavior. Few analyses have systematically combined feminist theories of patriarchy with critiques of religious ideology, nor have they explored the memoir's narrative strategies for depicting resistance against religiously sanctioned gender hierarchies. This gap is significant because *Educated* portrays patriarchy as inseparable from

the family's religious worldview, making it necessary to analyze how faith-based narratives reinforce or challenge gender norms.

This study fills this gap by applying Sylvia Walby's model of patriarchal structures to examine domestic religious control and by using Mary Daly's radical feminist theology to interpret the memoir's representation of androcentric belief systems. Through this theoretical combination, the study investigates how *Educated* exposes the role of religious discourse in sustaining patriarchy and how the narrative portrays education as a situated practice of resistance

This article asks: (1) How does *Educated* represent religiously sanctioned patriarchal control within the family? (2) In what ways does Tara's pursuit of education function as feminist resistance and transformation? The study aims to analyze how religious discourse legitimizes patriarchal authority in the domestic sphere and to examine how the memoir depicts education as a pathway to resistance and self-emancipation.

This study makes an original contribution to feminist literary criticism by being, to the researcher's knowledge, the first to apply Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy and Mary Daly's religious criticism simultaneously to *Educated*. It offers a thorough examination of women's resistance to religion-based patriarchal domination and demonstrates how both theoretical frameworks can work synergistically to uncover the complex interrelationships between religious ideology, family control, and women's emancipation. Through this approach, the study not only deepens understanding of the mechanisms of patriarchy in the memoir but also highlights the transformative role of education as a pathway to freedom.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method. Narrative analysis is applied because *Educated* presents experiences of oppression and emancipation through its plot, narrative voice, and point of view. These elements require attention to the shape of the story as a whole, not just to individual sentences or discursive units. With this method, the text is examined carefully to describe how religious patriarchy appears in the memoir and how the protagonist responds to it through various forms of resistance.

The object of this research is Tara Westover's memoir *Educated*. The analysis draws on Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy and Mary Daly's critique of religious domination. Walby's ideas help identify how patriarchal control operates in both domestic and community settings, while Daly's perspective guides the interpretation of religious teachings, language, and practices that legitimize male authority. This memoir is chosen because it provides clear and vivid examples of patriarchal structures in a fundamentalist Mormon family and portrays the author's struggle toward self-emancipation.

The corpus of this study consists of narrative episodes that highlight the intersections of gender, religion, and power. These include scenes involving religious instruction, domestic violence, and Tara's attempt to pursue education. The selected chapters and moments are those that most explicitly show the dynamics of control and the protagonist's efforts to challenge them. The primary data come from dialogues, internal reflections, descriptive passages, and key events portrayed throughout the memoir.

Data were collected through close reading. Relevant excerpts were marked and organized based on how they show patriarchal control or acts of resistance. The analysis followed three steps: first, identifying episodes that reflect domination and resistance; second, coding these episodes using categories informed by Walby's patriarchal structures and Daly's critique of androcentric religion; and third, interpreting these coded findings to understand how the memoir constructs religious patriarchy and how Tara's journey reveals a process of feminist resistance and personal transformation.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This subsection examines how *Educated* constructs a system of religiously sanctioned patriarchy within the Westover household and how this system shapes the daily lives, choices, and identities of the women in the family. It focuses on three interrelated forms of control: (1) Gene Westover's use of Mormon fundamentalist ideology to justify paternal authority over education, gender roles, and household decision-making; (2) the internalization of patriarchal beliefs by Faye Westover, which manifests in her compliance and silence; and (3) the reproduction of patriarchal violence through Shawn, whose abuse illustrates how dominance is passed down and normalized within the family structure. Together, these components reveal how familial, religious, and gendered power converge to restrict Tara's autonomy and reinforce a multilayered system of patriarchal domination.

1. Systemic Domestic Violence as Religious Patriarchy

a. Paternal Divine Authority and Doctrinal Control

In the memoir *Educated*, the construct of religious patriarchy is formed in a complex way through the strong influence of the father figure, Gene Westover. Gene uses Mormon religious ideology as the main tool to control and organize all aspects of his family life. He assumes not only the role of a father but also acts as the representative of God's will within the household, making his decisions appear as divine commands that cannot be challenged. His strict interpretation of Mormonism places men as the ultimate authority in both religious and domestic spheres, while women, particularly daughters, are positioned in a submissive role.

One of the most significant ways Gene enforces this patriarchal authority is through his control over education, which he frames not as a personal choice but as a religious obligation. His belief in the spiritual dangers of formal education led him to systematically limit his children's access to knowledge and intellectual freedom. Gene strictly forbade his children, including Tara, from attending public school like other children. Together with his wife, Faye Westover, he chose a homeschooling method that aligned with his personal interpretation of religion and anti-government ideology. For him, educational institutions were tools of the state to alienate children from God.

The impact of this educational restriction goes beyond mere learning loss. It hampers Tara's intellectual and social development while deepening her economic and cultural dependence on Gene as the primary authority figure in the family. In this way, Gene acts not only as an authoritarian father, but also as an agent of religious patriarchal construction, using religious dogma as a tool to maintain and reinforce male dominance within the family structure.

"Dad said public school was a ploy by the Government to lead children away from God. 'I may as well surrender my kids to the devil himself,' he said, 'as send them down the road to that school'" (Westover 2018, 5)

This quote illustrates how Gene uses religious ideology as a mechanism of control over his children's education. The rejection of public schools is not solely for educational reasons, but also based on the belief that the institution is a tool of the government to distance children from their religious values.

From Walby's framework, this scene illustrates how the family operates as a key structure of private patriarchy, where the father's authority directly regulates access to education and restricts girls' movement into the public sphere. Her model clarifies that Gene's control is not merely personal but part of a patterned system in which men monopolize resources and decision-making. Daly's perspective adds a different layer: she highlights how religious discourse and the symbolic elevation of male authority as divine legitimize such control. Gene's claim that public schooling is spiritually corrupt shows how religious language is mobilized to naturalize paternal dominance. Taken together, Walby helps identify the structural mechanism of restriction, while Daly explains the ideological legitimation behind it. This combination reveals that Tara's exclusion from formal schooling is sustained not by a single form of patriarchy but by intersecting structures and religious narratives that mutually reinforce one another.

b. Domestic Gender Roles and Women's Economic Dependency

In addition to control over education, Gene Westover's patriarchal dominance is also reflected in his harsh views on gender roles, especially regarding women's work outside the home. Gene displays a very firm attitude, even compared to the rural society in which they live, that a woman's place should be in the home.

"A woman's place is in the home,' he would say every time he saw a married woman working in town." (Westover 2018, 26).

This statement shows how Gene reinforces domestic restrictions for women, which Sylvia Walby argues are part of the domain of paid work in a patriarchal system. Patriarchal control is maintained by limiting women's participation in the public sphere of work, thus creating continued economic dependence on men. Furthermore, through Mary Daly's critique of religion, it is seen that religious ideology is used to justify and normalize the systemic subordination of women. Gene not only propagates patriarchal values, but also dresses them in claims of religious morality, as if women's domestic roles are divine will. As a result, Tara is raised in an environment that limits her freedom to explore life roles outside the narrative of domestic obedience and service to her father's authority.

The continuation of patriarchal control in the Westover family can also be seen in the role of Tara's mother, Faye Westover. Even though Faye has the ability to be independent, she is deeply influenced by her husband's strict religious beliefs that place men as the main decision makers. Gene not only holds authority over the household but also shapes his wife's role according to his own views about independence and suspicion toward the government.

"Mother didn't want to be a midwife. Midwifery had been Dad's idea, one of his schemes for self-reliance." (Westover 2018, 15).

This quote shows that Faye's personal desires are ignored in order to fulfill Gene's decisions, even in determining her profession. In addition to not trusting educational institutions, Gene also does not trust hospital doctors so he asks his wife to become a midwife to avoid government dependency. This reflects the patriarchal mode of production, namely when women's work is exploited and directed by men to strengthen their dominance. Faye's role as a midwife, although it seems empowering, is not actually her own choice, but rather comes from Gene's desire to prioritize independence from the government.

"Doctors and pills,' Dad said, nearly shouting. 'That's their god, and they whore after it.'" (Westover 2018, 33).

This quote confirms Gene's strong opposition to medical and modern institutions, which he views as contrary to his religious values. From Mary Daly's perspective, this illustrates how religious doctrine, interpreted and enforced in a patriarchal manner, is used as a tool to justify the rejection of a system beyond male control. Gene not only monopolizes the role of decision-maker, but also creates a narrative that anything outside his authority is heretical. In this context, religion is not a spiritual space, but rather a mechanism of domination that limits women's independence and controls their bodies and choices through fear and moral doctrine.

c. Familial Complicity and the Silencing of Women's Voices

Faye's decision to remain silent in the face of conflict and violence within her family reflects the deep internalization of patriarchal values. As a mother, she is caught in a dilemma between her instinct to protect her children and the pressure to submit to her husband's authority. When Tara becomes a victim of verbal and physical abuse by her brother Shawn, Faye does not intervene or offer protection. Her emotional and moral absence reveals not only the constraints imposed on her autonomy but also her failure to fulfill a maternal role that challenges patriarchal norms. Her silence is not simply a lack of action, but a form of compliance shaped by years of social and religious conditioning.

Faye's inaction reinforces the patriarchal structure within the family, positioning her not just as a victim but also as a complicit figure in maintaining male dominance. By normalizing violence and allowing the abuse to go unchallenged, she upholds the power hierarchy that privileges men's authority over women and children. Her silence becomes a mechanism through which patriarchal values are sustained and passed on to the next generation, illustrating how the internalization of these values actively reproduces the very system that oppresses her and her daughter.

"I turned to Mother, waiting for her to add her voice to mine, but she was silent. Her eyes fixed on the floor as if Dad and I were not here. There was moment when I realized she would not speak, that she would sit there and say nothing, that I was alone." (Westover 2018, 285).

From Mary Daly's perspective, Faye's choice to remain silent is not simply a personal weakness but a result of a systemic cycle in which women are positioned as passive supporters of the patriarchal order. Despite Faye's ability to fight back and defend her child, she chooses to remain silent, which ultimately reinforces her husband's dominant position. Furthermore, this decision makes Tara feel completely subjugated in her struggle. Faye's chosen silence reflects how the patriarchal order not only controls women's bodies, but also silences their voices and wills. In this context, silence is not a form of neutrality, but rather a passive contribution to the perpetuation of male power in the family and the normalization of domestic violence.

d. Patriarchal Violence and the Inheritance of Male Power

Patriarchal violence in the Westover family does not only come from the father figure but is also perpetuated by one of his sons, Shawn. As Tara's brother, Shawn, who should be an older brother who can protect his younger sibling, often commits verbal and physical violence. He makes Tara's body and dignity the object of humiliation, degrading her both through ridicule and brutal actions. This violence does not arise spontaneously but rather becomes part of a pattern of power relations that is allowed to grow in their family. Under a strong patriarchal culture, Shawn feels he has the right to subdue Tara and treat her however he wants. This certainly would not happen if the family, especially the father and mother, were able to provide protection for their children.

"He grabbed a fistful of my hair, a large clump, his grip fixed near the root to give him greater leverage, and dragged me into the bathroom. I groped at the door, catching hold of the frame, but he lifted me off the ground, flattened my arms against my body, then dropped my head into the toilet." (Westover 2018, 110).

The violence does not stand alone but is part of a patriarchal system that legitimizes male power over women's bodies. Domestic violence is one of the main structures in patriarchy that restrains women through fear and control. Shawn not only uses physicality as a tool of repression but also language to control and demean Tara's identity.

"Shawn had a gift for language, for using it to define others. He began searching through his repertoire of nicknames. 'Wench' was his favorite for a few weeks." (Westover 2018, 176).

Through these actions, Shawn places women as subordinate figures, even in sibling relationships. This phenomenon shows that patriarchal violence can be inherited and normalized in the domestic space, creating a circle of power that is difficult to break without awareness and resistance. This circle is further strengthened because Tara's parents choose to justify Shawn's behavior and ignore the violent experiences their daughter has experienced. Instead of being protectors, they actually contribute to perpetuating a culture of silence and justification for violence.

"Shawn always said you picked the fights, and I guess I wanted to believe that, because it was easier. Because you were strong and rational, and anyone could see that Shawn was not." (Westover 2018, 271).

Based on the description, the construction of religious patriarchy in *Educated* is deeply systemic, sustained not only by the father's position as a self-appointed divine authority but also by the mother's quiet compliance and the son's learned patterns of violence. Using Walby's structural framework and Daly's insights on religious legitimation, the narrative shows that religion operates less as spiritual guidance and more as a tool for maintaining male dominance and silencing women's autonomy. This reading highlights something that earlier studies have not emphasized: the particular way paternal religious absolutism, maternal silence shaped by years of conditioning, and fraternal aggression work together to reinforce the same hierarchy. Taken as a whole, this dynamic illustrates how patriarchal control in the memoir is not simply imposed from above but is reproduced through everyday interactions within the family, allowing it to persist across generations.

2. Education and Financial Autonomy as Emancipatory Practices.

a. Education as a Break from Household Patriarchy

Tara's decision to pursue formal education was the first step in the process of resistance against the patriarchal structure that was deeply rooted in her family. Tara's father strongly opposed the education system because it was considered a form of government influence that distanced children from religious values. In her father's view, sending children to public school was the same as handing them over to evil forces. In this case, Tara's father positioned himself as the absolute authority in the family, in accordance with the concept of household patriarchy put forward by Sylvia Walby, where male power dominates the domestic space and oppresses women. Resisting this pressure, Tara secretly prepared for the American College Test (ACT), and was finally accepted into Brigham Young University (BYU) at the age of 17. By choosing to go to school and continue her higher education, Tara not only rebelled against her father's orders but also tried to free herself from the passive role that had been imposed on her.

b. Financial Independence as Material Autonomy

Through education, Tara not only gains knowledge, but also access to opportunities that free her from dependence on her family, especially her father. One real manifestation of her independence is when she successfully obtains a scholarship. The scholarship is a form of recognition of her intellectual capacity, and also a tool to free herself from her father's domestic patriarchy. This reflects the transition from private patriarchy to public space, where women have a major role in expressing their will without male intervention. Education allows Tara to build authority over her own choices, and create distance from her father's control. Her reflection makes this change clear:

"I had believe the money would be used to control me... for the first time when I said I would never again work for my father, I believed it." (Westover 2018, 206).

Here, financial independence is not merely practical support; it is the condition that allows Tara to act on decisions she previously could not enforce. Money, which she once associated with coercion, becomes a means of self-direction and a marker of her withdrawal from her father's authority.

Seen through the lens of the research questions, this moment shows how patriarchal control in *Educated* is upheld not only through religious discourse, but also through material dependence that reinforces spiritual obedience. Tara's scholarship demonstrates how education functions as a form of resistance: it provides the economic base needed to challenge both paternal authority and the religious justification behind it. This analysis highlights a configuration that has been understudied, namely how financial autonomy reorders the relationship between religious obedience, family power, and women's agency.

c. Solidarity and Ideological Break Through Education

Building upon her personal emancipation, Tara's resistance against patriarchal structures does not stop at her own liberation, but also expands when she begins to realize the need to defend other women who experience similar oppression. One important turning point is when Tara witnesses violence experienced by her sister-in-law, Shawn's wife, Emily. At first, she was unable to take action against what happened. The awareness of the passive role she once played became a reflective moment that changed Tara's attitude to dare to speak up and act against injustice. This shows that Tara's struggle is not only for herself, but also a form of solidarity with other women who are trapped in the patriarchal system.

"What was needed—what Emily needed—was a woman emancipated from pretense, a woman who could show herself to be a man. Voice an opinion. Take action in scorn of deference." (Westover 2018, 264)

This transformation is not only personal but also ideological. From Mary Daly's perspective, such actions represent a radical break from patriarchal indoctrination. Tara's actions in defending Emily reflect her transformation from a silenced woman to an agent of change. She refuses to continue playing the role inherited from the patriarchal family structure, and instead chooses to oppose injustice through real action. According to Daly's theory, Tara's actions can be understood as a form of recreating the identity of a sovereign woman free from male domination. Thus, the process of emancipation experienced by Tara is a form of resistance to the system that has oppressed her.

Beyond physical and economic liberation, Tara begins to reshape her internal world, her way of thinking, believing, and understanding. All her efforts and years of study have yielded one privilege: being able to see and experience more truths than her father had given her. In addition, she also uses these truths to build her own thinking. Through education, Tara begins to free herself from the narratives that limit her understanding and begins to reconstruct her identity based on experiences and knowledge that she chooses herself. This process is an important step in freeing herself from the patriarchy that controls not only her body and role, but also her mind and how she views the world.

"Everything I had worked for, all my years of study, had been to purchase for myself this one privilege: to see and experience more truths than those given to me by my father, and to use those truths to construct my own mind." (Westover 2018, 304)

Tara actively challenges the patriarchal structure in her family through educational efforts and struggles to gain financial and intellectual independence. This resistance not only frees her from her

father's control, but also forms an awareness of the importance of defending other women who experience similar oppression. This process leads Tara to true emancipation, namely the freedom to determine life choices and build her own identity outside the limitations of patriarchy that have so far shackled her. Thus, Tara's struggle illustrates the transformation from subordination to an agent of change in an effort to achieve women's freedom. Tara's story exemplifies how education can be a radical act of resistance in a patriarchal context, transforming not only individual lives, but also inspiring broader social consciousness and action.

These two subchapters demonstrate a clear dialectic between the entrenched patriarchal structures in Gene Westover's household and Tara's conscious resistance to them. Sylvia Walby's theory illustrates how patriarchal domination operates through interconnected structures such as household production, paid labor, the state, and violence—all of which are evident in Gene's control over education, employment, and family decision-making. Tara's journey directly challenges each of these structures. By pursuing formal education, she breaks free from the patriarchal model of household production. By gaining financial independence, she breaks free from economic subservience. And by speaking out against violence, she challenges its normalization.

Mary Daly's critique of religion deepens this analysis, showing that Tara's resistance is not simply a rejection of family authority but also a spiritual and ideological break with the religious narrative that legitimizes male dominance. Tara's emancipation is thus both personal and structural; it is a disruption of the system in which religion and patriarchy combine to suppress women's agency.

DISCUSSION

This study examines how *Educated* portrays religiously rooted patriarchy and how Tara Westover's pursuit of education becomes a form of emancipation. Using Sylvia Walby's framework of patriarchal structures and Mary Daly's critique of religious male authority, two main findings emerged: first, the text depicts a distinctive pattern of religious patriarchy shaped by the father's spiritual authority, the mother's compliance, and the brother's violence; second, Tara's steps toward education, financial independence, and intellectual autonomy form a sustained resistance to these forces.

The evidence from the memoir shows that patriarchy in the Westover household is not limited to the father's dominance, but operates through a network of roles and expectations. Gene's belief that he carries divine authority aligns with Walby's idea of patriarchal control in the home, where women's choices are restricted through religious justification. The mother's silence and accommodation illustrate how women can be drawn into maintaining these structures, even unintentionally. The brother's violence reflects another dimension of patriarchal power, showing how control is enforced through fear and physical force. Together, these elements show how the memoir represents patriarchy as a system that works through habit, belief, and family dynamics rather than a single authoritarian figure.

Tara's resistance develops through her entry into formal education, her growing financial independence, and her effort to rebuild her sense of self. Going to university disrupts the private patriarchal system she grew up in, moving her into a space where new values and possibilities become available. Her scholarship marks an important turning point because it removes the financial dependence that once tied her to her father's authority. Beyond these material changes, Tara begins to rethink her identity on her own terms, drawing on experiences and knowledge that were previously denied to her. Through Walby, this can be understood as a shift into forms of public patriarchy, where women negotiate power and autonomy in education and work. Through Daly, it becomes clear that Tara is also breaking away from the religious logic that once shaped her obedience.

This study contributes to existing work on *Educated* by highlighting how religious patriarchy in the narrative operates on several levels at once. Previous studies have often focused on trauma, moral development, or general feminist themes, but fewer have examined the specific interplay of paternal religious authority, maternal complicity, and fraternal violence as a single system. Scholarship on religious memoirs has discussed themes of escape and self-discovery, yet the role of material autonomy and spiritual disengagement as linked forms of resistance is less frequently explored. By combining Walby's structural analysis with Daly's critique of patriarchal religion, this study offers a clearer picture of how power is organized and how Tara gradually resists it.

Like any textual study, this research has limitations. It focuses on a single memoir and relies on selective theoretical frameworks, which means its findings cannot be generalized to all religious contexts. Future research might compare *Educated* with other narratives of strict religious upbringings to identify broader patterns of patriarchal control and female resistance. Even so, the findings suggest that religious patriarchy in contemporary memoirs is best understood as a lived system shaped by

economic dependence, family roles, and spiritual narratives, and that women's emancipation often begins with access to education, financial stability, and the ability to claim their own story.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how religious-based patriarchy operates in Tara Westover's *Educated* and how Tara navigates and resists it. The analysis shows a specific configuration of patriarchal power in the Westover household: a father who uses religious doctrine to justify control, a mother whose partial complicity reinforces that authority, and a brother whose violence becomes an extension of the system. These dynamics reflect key elements in Sylvia Walby's domestic patriarchy such as control over labour, violence, and culturally sanctioned gender norms, illustrating how religious discourse sustains private forms of domination.

In response to the first research question, the study shows that religious patriarchy in the memoir is represented not only through explicit teachings but also through everyday practices that limit women's movement, labour, and self-definition. Regarding the second question, Tara's resistance emerges through education, financial independence, and gradual reconstruction of her own narrative authority. This trajectory marks a shift from private to public patriarchy, as her entry into the academy exposes her to new structures of power but also creates space for agency. Finally, education functions not merely as an institutional pathway but as a feminist practice of self-formation, enabling Tara to name, question, and ultimately reject the systems that constrained her.

Empirically, this study contributes a clearer mapping of how patriarchy is enacted and maintained within a religious survivalist family, highlighting the interplay between paternal authority, maternal complicity, and religious ideology. Theoretically, it extends Walby's framework by showing how domestic patriarchy rooted in religious belief can transition into public forms of control when the subject enters wider social institutions. The study also reinforces feminist arguments about the role of narrative and self-reflection in reclaiming agency.

While this research highlights the power of education and self-narration in resisting religious patriarchy, it is limited by its focus on a single memoir. Broader comparative work with other religious life writings could further illuminate how women negotiate and reinterpret patriarchal religious structures across different contexts.

This study is limited by its focus on a single memoir, which restricts the generalizability of its findings. Future research could compare *Educated* with other religious memoirs or life writings from different faith traditions to see whether similar patterns of patriarchal control and female resistance emerge. Such comparative work would help refine, challenge, or extend the insights offered in this article.

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