

The Consequences of Disobeying the Patriarchal Values in Niki Caro's *North Country* and Steven Soderbergh's *Erin Brockovich*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the consequences that Josey Aimes and Erin Brockovich face in disobeying the patriarchal values in *North Country* and *Erin Brockovich*. Patriarchal society where Aimes and Brockovich live, demands that the roles of women are as domestic creatures. If they cannot accept their roles, as the consequences, they will be punished by the people who guard the patriarchal values. It can be seen that Aimes and Brockovich are still bound by the patriarchal values which inhibit their position to express themselves. Their effort to get equality shows how the patriarchal values are deeply rooted in their society because both men and women guard those values.

Keywords: Patriarchal values, female roles, consequences, domestic creatures.

North Country and *Erin Brockovich* show that there are strong patriarchal values that bring disadvantages for women, one of them is that women should be in the domestic sphere. Patriarchal society puts women inside the house to take care of their children or do domestic work because it is considered to be their main duty. Women are also not allowed to work in public areas and earn money. In addition, they are not given the same opportunities as men and always in the disadvantaged position because of their gender. Patriarchal values that exist in the society make women experience injustice. Women have no choice, so they must obey and follow those values.

In a patriarchal society, women are always the victims of injustice from men. For example, in *North Country*, Aimes is not allowed to work in public areas and earn money. She also cannot express herself in front of people. On the other side, in *Erin Brockovich*, Brockovich is not given the same opportunities as men and always in the disadvantaged position because of her gender. It is proved that patriarchal values that exist in their environment make them experience injustice. This issue in these two films such as women's empowerment leads me to my topic. My topic relates to how the patriarchal values put the position of women under men and do not give the same opportunities between women and men.

I am interested in discussing what female roles that Josey Aimes and Erin Brockovich should obey and what consequences of disobeying the patriarchal roles that they face. The purpose of this study is to reveal that in a patriarchal society, Josey Aimes and Erin Brockovich should obey their roles as domestic creatures as expected by the society. If they do not do their roles well, as the consequences, they will get punishment from the society.

Patriarchal values refer to "a system of society or government which is controlled by men" (*Patriarchal Values*", para. 1). In a patriarchal society, women are required to stay at home, take care of their children and do domestic work. Real women "still look good, adore children, and care about homemaking" (Wood 24). Fathers are the head of the household who are dominant and decision maker, so it makes mothers must obey their husbands. Mothers are assumed to love their children, to be glad to devote themselves to their roles, and want to be with their children at all times. Raising a child is their duty in life because they accept the definition of motherhood as natural, so it makes them "spend most of their time with their children and they should not be included in many public activities" (Bates 288). It also means that the entire responsibility of childcare falling on the mothers because they give birth to babies and it makes them are limited to the roles of the caregivers and nurturers.

In the male-dominated workplace, women are still judged by their appearance. Women are required to be "beautiful, slim, and well dressed" (Wood 177). The male workers consider women

are “as sex objects, so they always maul, violate, and harass women” (Wood 232). The female workers may “have to face crude sexual jokes or more or less indirect statements that are not suitable for them” (Alvesson 128). In our society, there is a social agent who guards the patriarchal values. A social agent means “an agent in the human system, such as person, nation, organization, culture, and ideology” (“*Social Agent*”, para. 1). Josey Aimes and Erin Brockovich do not play the roles as the ideal women as expected by the society. They break and deviate from the patriarchal values such as being a miner and a lawyer assistant. Patriarchal society puts women inside the house and they should not work in the public area because it is not their duty, their duty is to take care of their children or do domestic work. As the consequences of their disobedience to the patriarchal values, they get a punishment from the society.

FEMALE ROLES AND CONSEQUENCES OF DISOBEYING THE PATRIARCHAL VALUES

The roles of women in Josey Aimes and Erin Brockovich’s neighborhood bring disadvantages to them. It can be seen that there is gender discrimination in their neighborhood such as women should be at home while men should be outside the home. The first role of women is as domestic workers. The patriarchal family model in Aimes and Brockovich’s neighborhood requires them to fulfill the role of a housewife, so it causes them not to be in the public area. The second role of women is to be submissive wives. Aimes and Brockovich are expected to respect and listen to whatever their husbands tell them to do because men take control of everything. In a patriarchal society, women who do not obey the patriarchal values, will be punished in the form of sexual harassment and mockery by the society.

Female Roles in a Patriarchal Society

The first role of women is as domestic workers. The ideology in the patriarchal society where Aimes and Brockovich live places women to stay at home and do domestic work. After getting divorced with her ex-husband, Wayne, Aimes becomes the breadwinner and the head of the family, so she must work to get a salary for living expenses for her and her children, Sammy and Karen. Her son, Sammy Aimes does not like her working, especially at the mine.

SAMMY AIMES. Just most people's mothers cook and clean. They don't work at the mine.

JOSEY AIMES. I used to tell you you could be anything you want. Isn't it the same for me? Aren't I allowed to be anything I want?

SAMMY AIMES. Not when you're doing someone else's job. (*North Country*)

The quotation above shows that Sammy protests to Aimes because he wants his mother to play her role as a natural and normal mother, who stays at home, cooks and cleans like the other mothers. He also shows that he disagrees if she works because he expects the figure of a mother who does domestic work. Sammy guards the patriarchal values that man is as the main breadwinner and woman is as a housewife by saying “They don’t work at the mine”, so she should not work and earn a living. Sammy’s statement “Not when you're doing someone else's job” also shows that he does not allow his mother doing the work of men that actually should be done by men, like being a miner. There is also an assumption in their society that women are identical with motherhood character that requires them to undergo the function of motherhood and domesticity because the patriarchal society puts women inside the house to do domestic work. So, when Aimes decides to be a miner and works at the mine, her son thinks that it is wrong and she is considered as an abnormal and unnatural mother because a normal and natural mother will stay at home and do not work in a public area. From Sammy’s statement, I also can conclude that Aimes is considered wrong and breaks the rules because her place is at home, and certainly not at the mine. While in *Erin Brockovich*, it is also seen that Brockovich’s son, Matthew Brockovich does not like that she works because it makes her rarely spend her time with her family.

ERIN BROCKOVICH. Look, I know you're upset. Please don't be mad at me. I'm..I'm doing this for us. I know it's hard for you to understand but..I mean, don't you want mommy to be good at her job? And it's not like I miss dinner all the time. We all ate together last night.

MATTHEW BROCKOVICH. You were reading the whole time. (*Erin Brockovich*)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Matthew feels that his mother is not always there for him. He considers that his mother prioritizes her job more than him. Patriarchal norm requires that a mother must take care of their children because it is her main duty. Matthew's statement "You were reading the whole time" indicates that Brockovich keeps reading during the dinner and it seems like she does not have any time for her family. Brockovich works outside the house as a lawyer assistant while her boyfriend, George stays at home and takes care of her children. When she is active outside the house while her boyfriend replaces the parenting duties, she is considered forgetting her nature as a woman. Matthew does not feel the presence of her because she is too busy with her work that makes her come home until late at night and miss to have dinner together. She does not give all her time as it is expected in the patriarchal society as a mother.

Brockovich is also required to devote herself to her role and to be with her children at all times. It means that being at home is her duty as a mother, so she should spend most of her time with her children and she should not get involved in public activities. Brockovich and her son have a fight about her absence, especially when he needs her presence as a mother.

MATTHEW BROCKOVICH. Why everything has to be such a big deal. All I want to do is play roller hockey. Other moms give permission.

ERIN BROCKOVICH. All I'm saying is, we'll see. I can't talk about this now. I don't care what other moms do.

MATTHEW BROCKOVICH. So when!? When can I get a friggin answer!? Randy's mom said yes right away!

ERIN BROCKOVICH. Well, goddamn it, Matthew - Randy's mom doesn't work and Randy's dad didn't leave her, so figuring out who's gonna drive to roller hockey every other week is a little easier over at Randy's house. (*Erin Brockovich*)

Matthew cannot play roller hockey because his mother is too busy with her job, so she cannot take him to that place. He compares her with his friend's mother which means that most mothers always have time for their children, while she does not. Brockovich's statement "Randy's mom doesn't work" actually shows that she breaks the rules and deviates from the patriarchal norm because the ideology at that time did not put women outside the house, while it can be seen that she works in a public area. Brockovich does not do her main duty that is being a mother, caregiver, nurturer, or homemaker because it is proved that she does not have any time to drive Matthew to roller hockey every other week. Patriarchal value believes that it is because mothers who give birth the children, so it is natural that they are the only one who nurtures the children.

In the patriarchal society, women's duty is to do the domestic work, so they do not need to be paid. This is a conversation when Aimes' father, Hank Aimes talks to his wife: "I work hard for that money, Alice" and she replies to him: "Oh, and I don't? Maybe I should charge you for every load of laundry." Hank considers that his wife as a domestic worker should accept the reality that she is unpaid for her work. Alice's work is considered unimportant because it is her natural responsibility as women, to do the whole domestic work. He also has the assumption that his wife does not work hard and cannot do anything to help him, but she always spends his money. In fact, she also works hard, even though she works at home, such as washing his clothes. The patriarchal norm places women to stay at home and it makes him think that she does nothing for the family, she is unappreciated. Hank only realizes and sees his hard work and his statement also shows that his wife is always seen from the negative side. In conclusion, it can be seen that the patriarchal society puts women inside the house to do domestic work and take care of their children. The society also expects women to devote themselves to their role and to be with their children at all times because it is their duty as a mother. This perception that exists in their society makes women spend most of their time with their children and they cannot get involved in public activities. From these examples, it can also be concluded that not only a man expects his wife to stay at home, but also her male child. So it shows that patriarchy is taught to children since they are very young.

The second role of women is as submissive wives. Man has always been the head of household who is dominant and decision maker while woman has always been a follower of men. Aimes marries a temperamental man, Wayne, who always beats and slaps her. The following

quotation is a conversation between Aimes and her mother when she tells her mother what happens in her household which shows that the power in the household is entirely on men.

ALICE AIMES. He is your husband, you know.

JOSEY AIMES. He beat me, Mom. More than once, more than lightly.

ALICE AIMES. A man needs a job.

JOSEY AIMES. Wayne beat me because he was out of work? That's what you're saying?
(*North Country*)

Aimes experiences domestic violence in her household. It is seen that if there is injustice in a household that is experienced by women, they cannot do anything because it is believed by the patriarchal society that "a wife cannot sue her husband" (Wood 31) no matter what happens to her. This perception exists in Aimes' environment, so it makes her become passive and cannot do anything except receives all the bad treatment from him. Her mother also reminds her that her husband who does the violence to her, although he does it more than once, she must realize that there is nothing she can do, men always win over women. She should know that men have the power while she does not. As a woman, her duty is to respect and submits to her husband and receives all the treatment from her husband although it is violence.

In *Erin Brockovich*, it can be seen that Brockovich can do nothing other than obeying men. It is an example that Brockovich is treated unfairly by her ex-husbands when she says: "You think either one of the men who gave me those children asked what I wanted before they walked away?! All I've ever done is bend my life around what men decide they need!" Brockovich is forced to obey men. Her ex-husbands have the power to ask her to do what they want, and of course, she should be submissive to them. For example, all her ex-husbands decide her life without asking her agreement first because they take control of everything. It is proved that her ex-husbands are the decision makers in all things. Once again, Brockovich should accept their decision because men always win. Men assert the patriarchal rule to subordinate and control her. Brockovich's statement "All I've ever done is bend my life around what men decide they need!" shows that she is in the disadvantaged position, but she cannot do anything about it because she lives in a patriarchal society that puts man as the leader, while woman as the follower of man, so she receives to be treated arbitrarily by man. This quotation below comes from George and Brockovich which shows that he controls her life. George does not like if his girlfriend is rarely at home.

ERIN BROCKOVICH. I'm sorry. I'm just working so hard -- I can't leave my job, George.

GEORGE. Yeah, you can. You could just quit. People do it all the time. And what I'm thinking is, you oughta either find a different job or a different boyfriend. (*Erin Brockovich*)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Brockovich must accept and follow her boyfriend's decision or she must find a new boyfriend because he will leave her if she does not obey him. George asks her to find a different job actually shows that he does not like if his girlfriend works as a lawyer assistant because it makes her to be outside the house almost every day, while he expects her to be inside the house, doing her main duty for her children. "A different job" here also indicates that George wants his girlfriend to choose a job that does not make her to be outside the house completely. Brockovich's boyfriend is the decision maker in her life because he is more dominant in the patriarchal society and has the authority to control his girlfriend. When Brockovich says that she cannot leave her job, her boyfriend gives her two choices between her career and him to prove that actually she is wrong because she forgets her domestic sphere. Her gender makes her in a disadvantaged position because she must be submissive to her boyfriend, so she cannot freely have two things that she wants in her life. In conclusion, it can be seen that the power in the household is entirely on men, so it causes women should be submissive to men. Even when they are not married, a man can already demand submissiveness from his girlfriend.

The Consequences of Disobeying the Patriarchal Roles

There are two forms of punishment that Aimes receives when she does not obey and follow the patriarchal values. The first punishment that Aimes gets is in the form of sexual harassment. Aimes gets sexual harassment from the male workers because she works at a working place which is dominated by men. The quotation below is a conversation between Aimes and her father when

she tells him that she gets a house, the loan and everything for her and her family after being a miner.

JOSEY AIMES. Pop. We got a house. We got the loan and everything.

HANK AIMES. You want me to congratulate you?

JOSEY AIMES. You act like I'm stealing. I work damn hard every day, same as you.

HANK AIMES. Now you're the same as me.

JOSEY AIMES. Oh, no. There's a few differences. You don't go scared of what they write about you on walls...or what kind of disgusting thing you might find in your locker. You do not gotta be scared that one of these days you'll come to work and get raped. (*North Country*)

It is proved that Aimes receives a punishment from men because she breaks the patriarchal values. The quotation above shows that Aimes is underestimated by her father and also harassed by the male workers. When Hank says "You want me to congratulate you?" shows that he does not feel that she is great because she can get a house. Hank's statement also shows that he underestimates his daughter because she should realize that earning money is not her duty. Aimes is not respected by her father although she also works hard like him because the money that she gets is by breaking the patriarchal values. While Aimes is harassed by the male workers can be seen when Aimes and her father both work at the mine, but they are treated differently because of their gender. For example, she is called rudely by men, she sees the unspeakable writings in the bathroom and locker room that are written from men's shit, gets brutal treatment such as rape from men, and experiences violence. The rude treatment that is done by the male workers actually shows that there is a difference in treatment between women and men because women come to the mine with fear, while men do not.

In a patriarchal society, women are also required to give sexual services to men. Aimes is also as sex object for men. Men at the mine maul, violate, harass, and treat women improperly. Bobby Sharp treats women rudely, he says: "So. So, Arlen, which one of these girls is gonna be my bitch? And we want a nice body. No fatties. Give me the one on the right." It can be seen that in the workplace, women are still judged by their appearance. It means that to be desirable, they are urged to be young, slim, and sexy. Sharp assumes that women there can become the sexual object that he can kiss, grope and hold the parts of their body to fulfill his sexual. This is a quotation which also shows that Sharp regards women as the object of men. He says: "Josey, you wanna, I don't know...kiss and make up? Come on, just one kiss." It can be seen that Aimes is considered as a mere sex object to be enjoyed by Sharp. He asks her to give him a kiss and she is expected to satisfy his desire and give him a pleasure. The society that is led by man makes woman is responsible to serve the needs of man.

The second punishment that Aimes faces is in the form of mockery. Many male workers at the mine, especially Bobby Sharp tries to get rid of women because he realizes that it is unnatural for women to work there, so he mocks Aimes by saying:

BOBBY SHARP. I never did anything to this bitch. That's right. Now she wants to sue all of us? You know what a class action is, don't you? It means it's all of them against all of us! That's right, this bitch wants to take...every single swinging dick in this room to court. (*North Country*)

Sharp, as a social agent who guards the patriarchal values, considers that Aimes breaks the rules because she is not expected to be at the mine and even be a breadwinner that is supposed to be done by men. He has warned her who claims *class action*; it means "certain lawsuits against people or institutions to protect themselves because at that time there was no protection for female employees" ("*Class Action*", para. 1). Aimes realizes that her secondary position makes men can do whatever they want to do, including mocking to her when she says about the *class action*. She also notices that Sharp affects other female workers not to support her, so she must accept her punishment for being disobedient.

Aimes also gets mockery from the society, including women in her neighborhood when she dares to leave her husband, then lives with her parents and works at the mine. The society cannot accept her presence well because she is not supposed to abandon her husband and replaces his role that is as the head of the household. The neighbors talk about Aimes and her mother, Alice Aimes.

One of them says: "Poor Alice. That girl has been nothing but trouble for her since day one. Heck of a shame." The society where Aimes lives, considers her brings trouble and shame to her mother for being a disobedient wife to her husband. The patriarchal society expects her to be a woman who obeys her husband and does all the commands from men. Aimes is also considered bringing problem because she does not do her main duty as a mother to her children, but she works at the mine. In conclusion, it can be seen that women who do not obey the patriarchal values, will be punished in the form of sexual harassment and mockery by the society. It is not only men who guard those values, but women also do.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen that from 1975 to 1996, there were some women who wanted to rebel patriarchal values such as Josey Aimes and Erin Brockovich. They did not want to be bound by patriarchal values which inhibited their position to express themselves. They no longer wanted to be treated unfairly by men, so they began working in a profession that was dominated by men such as a miner and a lawyer assistant and started to not obey men. They did not play the roles as the ideal women as expected by the society.

The society expects women to obey men because their position is under men, so when they are against men, they get discrimination and negative views from the society such as sexual harassment and mockery because men cannot accept the presence of women in public areas. Women who dare to violate from the patriarchal values are considered as abnormal and unnatural.

It can be seen how deep the patriarchal values that exist in a patriarchal society. In the middle of the 20th century, women had tried to get equality. Patriarchal values are very difficult to be eliminated because the society, men and women guard the patriarchal values strictly. When women want to get equal rights with men, they might be regarded as breaking the patriarchal values. The men's effort to guard the patriarchal values shows how the men feel threatened by the presence of women in a patriarchal society. Although in the end Aimes and Brockovich can overcome injustice that they face, we know that it is not easy to erase the patriarchal values.

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