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**Women Between Oppression and Resistance in a  
Totalitarian Society in *The Handmaid's Tale* by  
Margaret Atwood**

*A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English as a Partial Fulfilment of the  
Master Degree in English Literary and Cultural Studies*

**Presented by**

Bensaad Siham

Mestari Souad

**Supervised by**

Miss. Mengouchi Meryem

**Board of Examination:**

Dr. Mouro Wassila

Chairwoman

Miss Mengouchi Meryem

Supervisor

Dr. Berbar Souad

Examiner

Miss Belmerabet Fatiha

Examiner

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## Dedications (1)

*Every challenging work needs self-efforts as well as guidance of elders especially those who were very close to our hearts  
My humble effort is dedicated to:*

*The sake of Allah, my creator and my master  
My great teacher and messenger, Mohammed (May Allah bless and grant him), who taught us the purpose of life.*

*My undying gratefulness goes to my two shields and mentors in life Abdelkader and Karima who proved to be the perfect example of the desired parents,*

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*Siham*



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*To Almighty Allah who guided me to the right path*

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## Abstract

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a Dystopian novel that reveals some predominant feminist issues such as subordination, marginalization, suppression and exploitation used for an absolute sexual pleasure. It strives to display the issue of inequality towards women in a male chauvinist society, uncover the crisis of identity and oppression threatening them in the very same misogynistic society. Moreover, it resorts to illuminate their subservience and their hopes for freedom. These women are depicted more as objects rather than individuals following restricted rules. They are manipulated by a ruthless theocracy that determines them by their bodies 'as a two-legged womb' not their persona. There are few icons used by Atwood like calling flashbacks and narration by the protagonist to denote women's strength, resistance and their fervency to be freed. These symbols took place in a society ruled by a super male power that allowed all forms of oppression and violence against women, as men were not blamed for any sexual abuse or insult women could face. Such totalitarian regime used some ideologies, religious references as well as propaganda to manipulate women's behaviour and their thoughts. Likewise, this virile society used different tools as those of surveillance. Women were watched every single day via the so called 'the eyes', being punished to death for any mistakes they make for the sake of a total control. Atwood endeavours to crystallize some other kind of disobediences against the totalitarian regime as well as the call for gender equality.

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## Note

Due to the impossibility of finding page numbers in few documents retrieved from *GoogleBooks*, the mention N/A (Not Available) was used to replace them.

# General Introduction

It is believed that a well written novel can magnificently transport writers and people to another realm. It opens up the opportunity to critically analyse, discuss, and solve several issues related to the real world. Such formidable work that is to be dealt with is that of *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood which is predominantly deemed to be a postmodern feminist novel for, it deals with paradoxical matters, questions the possibility of truth as it can be a reference, parallel, or extended discussion of previous literary work.

The Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood is famed for her fascinating and spellbinding work. She has been writing all her life about forms of constriction, subjugation, servitude and oppression. Her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) displayed a Dystopian drama that has proven to be incredibly vocal to the current political climate and what it means for individuals especially women whose identities and rights have been stripped away. Atwood pointed out that every aspect in *The Handmaid's Tale* really happened at some point in history, somewhere in the world (“Why dystopian fiction is an instruction manual for now”).

Atwood was reckoned as the United States bestselling author and out, for her thrilling accomplishment *The Handmaid's Tale*. It affectively forces its readers to recognize the importance of continued attention to the cultural and linguistic issues of its narrator. A woman who ultimately suffered from ill-treatment, abuse and injustice, and who robustly refused to remain silent.

Another aspect Atwood dealt with is women's reduction to objects, as their bodies were transformed into sexual machines considered as nothing more than a source of fertility within an oppressive society. The very society imposed silence on their racial, cultural, social and political specificities as well. Atwood attempted to unfold the malevolence of the totalitarian regime, and prove that women are far more than mechanical bodies in a contemporaneous American world. This leads to a number of questions:

- Could *The Handmaid's Tale* be considered as a feminist work?

- Could *The Handmaid's Tale* mirror female resistance and their lust for freedom?
- What role could religion really play in a totalitarian community like the one depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale*?
- Did Atwood succeed in predicting the future where a totalitarian regime can be the main wrinkle to oppress and reduce women to objects?

In order to fulfill the above questions the approach used is both feminist and Marxist. Feminist in the sense that it digs into the feminist aspects of the novel merely related to women's exploitation as objects and their oppression. The Marxist theory in the sense that unveils the different forms of oppression by governments towards their peoples. The questions asked above might accept as hypotheses the prospective ideas that *The Handmaid's Tale* could be deemed as feminist work since Atwood is a postmodern feminist as much as woman writer. It endeavors to show the handling of inequality and oppression of women in a patriarchal society. The second question might accept a response that women were marginalized and ill-treated with violated rights. Yet they were not all presented as weak individuals, for some of the female characters were pictured as rebellious. Atwood gave hints of women strength and power which will be confirmed through the application of the feminist theory on *The Handmaid's Tale* analysis. For the third question, the novel is not anti-religion, yet, it is against the misuse of religion to manipulate women. The response to the last question could be that since the prediction of the future is merely impossible, but the novel pictured many unforeseen possibilities that might happen as much as they might not. Atwood intended to describe what could happen in the future and the danger of totalitarianism that may be the most powerful way to oppress women.

The present research work is divided into two chapters. The first chapter concerns the conceptualization of the prominent Dystopian features, form of oppression as well as types of control. Finally, a brief view about feminist theory and their reaction to inequality supported by the portrayal of the female body using seven vignettes by Margaret Atwood. The second is a thorough study of the totalitarian

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concepts within *The Handmaid's Tale*. It deals with the analysis of the status of women in a virile society; it examines the social hierarchy that led to the loss of female identity. Finally, it discusses the female resistance and eagerness for freedom.

Chapter One:  
Dystopian Societies and  
Totalitarian Regimes

### 1.1 Introduction

In the period of the nineteenth century, the world of literature had known many changes and developments in the way of writing novels and literary texts, since this period went through different changes in politics, economy, religion and many stages in the life of the citizens around the world. World War I and II were the main reasons why many authors shifted from one way of writing to a different one, thus giving birth to new genres. Fundamentally, the Dystopian genre flourished in the literature of the nineteenth century, and cropped up as a reaction against Utopian fantasy (Gerard 1). While the industrial developments led people to worship material prosperity and neglect humanity. After a period of prosperity and perfection, an awful depression appeared the reason why writers worried about the future and decided to write about it in order to warn readers and make them more aware as well.

British writer George Orwell's *1984* is perhaps one of the best twentieth century novels that can illustrate all the aspects of totalitarianism and oppression enacted in a Dystopian society. After it had a great impact on millions of readers and more profound influence as well, this masterpiece serves as an inspiration for many other writers, which draw on the same major themes (Secino). In doing so, another masterpiece was born. A novel that revealed the conspiracy of powerful groups that secretly ruled the world and played God without permission. This novel, written by Canadian author Margaret Atwood and entitled *The Handmaid's Tale*, shows dangerously a state that oppressed and repressed all human rights, particularly those of women.

In a chaotic world, *The Handmaid's Tale* turned to be the topmost well-timed novel to the political moment (Fallon). The year 1985 marked the appearance of the futuristic novel *The Handmaids Tale* that showed its relation or its similarities to George Orwell's *1984* (Ingersoll 64). Both Orwell and Atwood shared the liberal-

humanist<sup>1</sup>anxieties, in which a Dystopian state offers individuals no freedom but, repression and ruthless torment (Ingersoll 64).

Dystopia is a world in which societies live under a totalitarian regime exercised by an authoritarian government, for achieving superiority as well as Semitic power that are characterized by extreme oppression, using different types of control and brainwash through propaganda, media,...etc (Zuckerman).

### 1.2. From Utopia to Dystopia

It is said that Dystopia finds its roots in Utopia. Thus, Dystopian literature emerged in the twentieth century as a response to the panorama of Utopia, which seeks to create an ideal life. The idea of Utopia derived from the myth of Eden back to Plato's *Republic*, in which Plato described an ideal, perfect world (Babae 64).

#### 1.2.1 Utopia

According to the British Anthropologist Professor David Harvey "Utopia is an artificially created island, which functions as an isolated, coherently organized, and largely closed space economy" (160). What he meant by is that Utopia is created as an isolated place separated from reality, and it is a place where everything is organized and perfect. Utopia is a term from the Greek language to mean 'no place', used to represent a non-existent, perfect, life (Gulick 3). The concept was first introduced by Sir Thomas More 1516 in his book *Utopia* inspired by Plato's *Republic* (White) which is considered as the first Utopian work in literature (Geier). It was quietly a description of an island characterized by perfection ("Utopia and Dystopia Information").

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<sup>1</sup>"Humanism is a philosophical and literary movement which has human being as its central concern. It also holds a general belief that human nature is something fixed and constant. Now, Liberal Humanism is a term which falls within the domain of literary criticism. During the 1970s, the hour of literary theory, as it was known, Liberal Humanism was a term applied to theory that came before 'theory'. The word 'Liberal' defines something it is not, that is not 'radically political' and thus evasive on political commitment, on how it is aligned. Humanism in this context also means something similar, that is something not-Marxist, not-Feminist or not-Theoretical. Liberal Humanists also believe in the fixedness and constancy of human nature as expressed in great literature" ( Budhiraja 1).



It is argued that Utopia is no more existing, or never existed before, for Utopia gives an incredible image of an ideal life; a perfect government that provides equality, rights and happiness for individuals, which is in beyond reality and far from what societies are built on nowadays. Examples of Utopian novels are Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905), among others. French philosopher Bertrand DeJouvenel states that “There is a tyranny in the womb of every Utopia.” (qtd inKapur), which roughly means that inside every Utopia is a Dystopia striving to get out.

### 1.2.2 Dystopia

Dystopia has been defined by many theorists as an imagined society in which the living conditions are extremely negative, and it is characterized by extreme oppression and despondence (Zuckerman). American politician Gordon Browning argues that the Dystopia uses satiric literary techniques, projects the major dissatisfaction of the author with current society onto the Dystopian setting, and represents society as isolated (Donawerth 29). In these fictional Dystopian societies, citizens live in a dehumanized way, under the illusion of a well-faired society (Utopia). In the following quotation the author supported the previous idea:

“Consequently, Bouson believes that Dystopia in the novel is not based on a faraway isolated and impossible land as that of Utopia, it is rather set in a real land with an accurate historical background” (Bouafoura12). That is the difference between Utopia and Dystopia is that Utopia is more imaginary; that while reading, readers go beyond the reality, while Dystopia is more realistic which means the events in Dystopian novel can be found in the real life; survived by people and writer were based on these events while writing.

Dystopia is defined as a “bad place” by American critic by M.H. Abrams, who describes Dystopia as having recently come to:

be applied to works of fiction, including science, which represents a very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected in some disastrous future culmination (218).

The definition mentioned above argues that Dystopia is usually mentioned in fiction works that reveal an extremely unfair world shaped by social, political, and technological orders, related to now days as it can depict what could happen in the future.

Dystopia is also defined in the *Online Oxford Dictionary* as an imaginary place of condition in which everything is as bad as possible (*OED online*). The term Dystopia was first used by the British philosopher John Stuart Mill in 1868 in his political speech, while commenting on the state of Ireland, where he used the word in contrast with the term Utopia. He stated that “what is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practical, but what they [the government] appear to favour is too bad to be practical” (88). The idea behind Mills’ speech is that, on the one hand, Dystopia is a place where society is under a totalitarian control, and where oppression takes place as well, on the other hand, it is unfair as well as bad such criminal acts to be practised by the government.

In this regard, Gregory Claeys, French Professor of the History of Political Thought, attempted to trace the roots of the two opposite concepts, Utopia and Dystopia, in mythology. He concluded: “It invites us to consider the parallel religious prehistoric of both concepts, which in the Christian traditions are dominated by ideas of Eden and heaven, on the one hand and hell on the other” (146). This idea provides us with a clear view that heaven and hell constitute two extremes, one representing the absolute paradise, and the other place as a total misery which is the same thing concerning Dystopia and Utopia. Claeys represents Utopia as the ideal perfect life (heaven), and Dystopia as an absolute hell.

Dystopia describes something quite terrible; a society ruled by an incredibly bad government that provides a complete control over people, particularly women. For example, in her classic novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Margaret Atwood heavily showed

that the Republic of Gilead is a Dystopian society manipulated by cruel leaders who deprive women from their rights and their freedom (“Utopia and DystopiaInformation”).

Dystopia is a world that involves domination and suppression, values superiority and imposed inferiority. In a Dystopian universe the dominant parties set their power through oppressing, exploiting, and abusing people. Moreover, in Dystopian societies, the dominant party creates laws and rules that fit and suit its interest, neglecting what may suit its citizens (Das 55)

Dystopia may be considered as a horror fiction since it takes readers beyond reality. Not to provide an escapist world for readers, but to warn them of the growth of oppression in societies nowadays (Bloom 82). That is Dystopia pictures oppressive societies that are controlled by a tyrannical power that is wrongly practised and used to manipulate people and thus arrest them in paralysis. It is also shaped by a patriarchal system that offends women, gives them no right nor freedom, and *The Handmaid’s Tale* can be the best example that shows all aspects of Dystopia, totalitarianism, and patriarchy.

David.W.Sick defines Dystopia as a world that is always set in the future, suggesting that there is yet time to reverse trends that concern the author. Dystopia is a hopeful genre, which deliberately scares us for our own good: it does not exist in a vacuum, but shows the reader frightening visions of what might arise from events he or she can clearly see in the contemporary world. (qtd in Nyström 5)

David.W’s definition means that Dystopia did not appear from nothing, it has a big role in changing our future since it frightens people and make them aware of what could happen to the societies if people keep living and acting the same way.

Dystopia is also defined as the opposite of Utopia. Utopia is an imaginary place, where people live under perfect conditions and where social justice is achieved as well (“Utopia and DystopiaInformation”).It symbolizes people’s hopes and dreams, and it is turned to be synonymous with impossible, because an ideal life is out of

reach, which is too good to be practised according to J.S. Mill as mentioned before. Yet, the government's aim is totally the opposite i.e. Utopia is tremendously impossible to be practised or achieved in any kind of societies ("Utopia and DystopiaInformation"). However, governments keep holding in this quixotic lie, controlling people's thoughts by representing the illusion of a perfect life using totalitarianism and oppression. The term Utopia was introduced in Thomas More's novel *Utopia* in 1516 as ideal society based on equality, economic, and political prosperity (Desmet 7).

More's *Utopia* is inspired by Plato's *Republic*, while Utopian society is referred to as the light of people's life, Dystopian societies are totally the opposite. They represent an abhorrent life with very strict conditions. Dystopia also represents a society that is meant to be repulsive, chaotic, imperfect, resulting from the use of violence, oppression, terrorism, tyranny, poverty and Technology as well. In one way or another, all these kinds of criminal acts are used against people. Hence, Paranoia is very evident among citizens within Dystopian societies because they constantly live in fear, and they are being very often monitored betrayed or manipulated (11).

### 1.3 Dystopian Literature

The reason why the positive Utopian thinking shifted to a negative representation of the future is referred to some historical events. Most of these events occurred in the nineteenth century, like the October Revolution<sup>2</sup> of 1917 in Russia, Nazi Germany, and the Second World War, in addition to the technological progress and the creation of the atomic bomb. All these events created the disillusionment and

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<sup>2</sup>October Revolution: or the Bolshevik revolution happened in 6th and 7th November (24 and 25 October in the Julian calendar) led by the Bolsheviks and Vladimir Lenin. After the beginning of the First World War in 1914 Russia was in war with Germany, and unfortunately the Russian army had the lack of equipments and training what led them to be killed. All these events made the Russian people angry at the Tsar Nicolas the second for getting the country into war and for the economical failure, what made him quite the ruling replaced by the provisional government, however, they followed almost the same ruling; this made the Bolsheviks led by Lenin (the communist party of the soviet union); who had a symbol slogan of peace, bread, and land to arrest the provisional government and signed a peace treaty with the German ("Russian Revolution 1917")

the fear of the future that it might not be as imagined (Gerhard 1). It is also thought that the :

Industrial revolution, World War I, the Russian Revolution, growing awareness of environmental damage, rapid progress of technology, popularization of capitalistic trends as well as fear that machine could take power on the men were the reasons for appearance of creation of Dystopian literature(“Utopia and DystopiaInformation”).

Dystopian narrative has been a popular literary genre for more than a century.*Fahrenheit451*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Zamiatin’s *We* and Orwell’s *1984*are blankly the cornerstone of Dystopian literature, representing the best of what Dystopian function has to offer.

Starting with the very first and famous Dystopian novel *WE* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, a twentieth century novel written in 1917, who wrote this novel as a consequence of his deceit after the October Revolution in 1917since he had bright expectations for the future because of the economic prosperity but it turned out to be a negative outcome what led him change his positive view of the world in the future. He even participated in the Revolution of 1905<sup>3</sup>as a member of the Bolshevik party willing for the positive change to the future, thus supporting the Revolution. This disappointment mad him write *We*, a novel written as a warning against the Stalinist totalitarian regime (Gerhard 9-10).

Another example of a Dystopian plot written by Aldous Huxley is *Brave New World*, this novel also was written under, or as a result to, specific circumstances. He felt loathsome about the consequences of the Industrial Revolution in Europe in the twentieth century. These consequences included mass production, technological advances, the loss of individuality, and the transformation into machines because of

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<sup>3</sup>When Russia announced war with Japan, the working class in Russia were striking for their rights. That was why Russia wanted to distract them by the war. Russians blamed the government for the losses of the war why they went for more strikes demanding for new constitution. January, 21<sup>st</sup> 1905 they presented a petition to the Tsar where many of the citizens have been killed by Nicolas the second’s army (the Bloody Sunday), after months of the strikes Nicolas issued the October Manifesto in which her delivered a Duma, however he was still in control of everything till the Tsar’s regime crashed down (“Crises and Revolution in Russia 1905”).

the increasing number of factories and plants in Europe; especially after he worked at a chemical plant in England. As a result to all these fears, he wrote *Brave New World*, as suggested by Mustafa Mencútekin, who depicts an “inhuman society controlled by technology, in which art and religion have been abolished and human beings reproduce by artificial fertilization” which means that technology controlled societies and it had more importance than human beings (Gerhard 10).

Dystopian literature paved the way to a perfect illustration of a highly oppressed society, manipulated by a totalitarian government that acts against the citizens' aims and desires. Basically, oppression is caused by a number of different circumstances such as, overpopulation, disease, poverty and sexism, what gave rise to the loss of identity, deprivation of liberty, and unsustainable life conditions as well(Stoner 1). Moreover, Dystopian literature is considered to be ‘cautionary tale’ (ibid). Thus, it can be read as political warning since Dystopian writers depict what could happen in the future based on present issues. Otherwise, it highlights the political and cultural problems that societies suffer from. In this sense, Dystopian literature is said to be a “vessel for political commentary dating back to the 19th century” (Stoner 1) which can be clearly seen in the novels mentioned before.

Zamyatin's *We*, influenced the use of Dystopian literature as a political commentary by using it as a vessel for direct analogy, for existing Russian political system under Lenin and Putin. “In *We* the One-State suppresses individuality of thought and artistic expression in favour of being the same, which they believe promotes peace” (4). Another interesting novel *1984*, where Orwell shows perfectly the political system of Oceania, an oppressive state that goes behind the mottoes ‘BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU’ (3). Thereby it controls human thoughts, actions and restrict human companionship, a striking example of this is Winston in the novel, who has no friends and has no right to socialize with anyone outside the politically acceptable conversation.

Finally, the feminist Dystopian novel by Margaret Atwood *The Handmaid's Tale* written in 1985, this novel is set in a futuristic society called Gilead referring to the United States. The leader of this state adopted a new totalitarian regime and

eliminated old ideas and traditions of his society; including family, jobs, love, etc, and substituted them with a strong patriarchal society that divided all the social community into classes according to their social functions: commanders, wives, aunts, eyes, and of course handmaids etc. which means citizens are no longer free to choose their social rank in society it is a must.

### 1.4 Types of Dystopian control

In time of fear, injustice, chaos and anxiety, Dystopian literature became very popular and believed to be one of the literary genres that can explicitly show the truth, and perfectly unveil opacity and ambiguity through an imaginary futuristic oppressed society that live under specific rules which in turn are obligatory to be followed, subjected to prejudiced standards manipulated by the illusion of a perfect society through media, religion, and the use of propaganda (“Dystopia”).

#### 1.4.1 The Power of Ideology

In totalitarian societies’ leaders use specific ways to control citizens, by making them believe a certain ideology, in order to convince them to act and behave in specific ways to serve their own benefit. For Marxists “we are blind to our own condition because of the effect of what it calls ideology” (Bertens 83). That is, ideology misrepresents the world for us and makes believe what is not true (85).

Ideology is generally known as a set of ideas that individuals have total belief in it. As Adorno Theodor (qtd in Gerring) defined ideology as:

An organization of opinions, attitudes, and values –a way of thinking about man and society. We may speak of an individual’s total ideology or his ideology with respect to different areas of social life, politics, economics, religion, minority groups and so forth (Gerring 958).

This confirms the previous definition and adds that ideology can be in different fields in society like politics, economics, religion etc.

Althusser’s study of ideology and its function in society was built on the work of French psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, thus Althusser did not have the same view of the

Marxist understanding as ‘the false consciousness’ that is “A false understanding of the way the world functioned”(Felluga)

Althusser states that ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their conditions of existence; he means that, people always think that they are aware and believe they act freely, but in fact they are not (Bertens 85). In his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” he discusses the understanding of ideology as ‘the mistaken ideas about the world’ to be false (qtd in Felluga). Althusser’s view was that ideology is to be seen from the materialistic side, that is, it exists in social institutions (churches, schools, trade unions, families etc.) as he argued: “Ideology exists in institutions and the practices specific to them. We are even tempted to say more precisely: Ideology exists in apparatuses and practices specific to them” (ibid). He adds to this idea that these ideologies exist in the social institutions that serves the benefit of the ruling class in order to stay in powerful position by reinforcing specific beliefs or ideologies through certain ways (qtd in Ryder).

According to Althusser, ideology belongs to the state and it has two components which are: first, ‘repressive state apparatuses that includes the army, the police, and courts so that the ruling class reinforces the working class through the use of physical forces while the second component is ‘the ideological state apparatuses’ that maintains the ruling class by controlling people’s ideas, beliefs, values through religion, media, and the educational system (ibid).

The aim of totalitarian societies is to reinforce these ideologies and beliefs in the minds of the citizens. Such ideologies are reinforced by changing old traditions and beliefs with new ones, and implementing them in different social institutions through propaganda.

### 1.4.2. Propaganda and Surveillance in Dystopian Societies

Propaganda and surveillance are two prevalent tools linked together and used to control citizens in a Dystopian society. In Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, there is an entire network of surveillance in Gilead, which is made up partly of the men



employed as “Eyes” (24), and of the way the handmaids are encouraged to spy on each other when they are in company out of the commanders’ house.

Propaganda has become a very popular phenomenon in the modern world. It focuses more on differences in social rather than political levels (Ellul 4). The French Politician Jacque Ellul in his book *Propaganda: The Men’s Attitude*, classified the most important and powerful propaganda blocs in the world which are, U.S.S.R, China and Unites States in term of effectiveness (4). Propaganda was made for the purpose of effectiveness, to provide irresistible power (ibid).The aim of propaganda is to manipulate people; which is considered as an evil and not a technique. He added that Propaganda that does not manipulate people is not propaganda, what made is difficult to be studied (5).

The term propaganda refers to the spread of a particular doctrine or a system of principles (Strong 236). It is the use of media like television, radio, newspaper, magazine, art, and even a specific language in spreading beliefs and doctrines to root them in society unconsciously (Jacques 9). According to the online dictionary *Dictionary.com*, propaganda is information, ideas, or rumours deliberately spread to help or harm a person, group, movement, institution or nation.

The American political scientist and communications theorist Harold Lass well defined propaganda as “the control of opinion by significant symbols” including “stories, rumours, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication” (Glander 12). On the other hand, the Scottish writer and publisher William Stewart Ross defines propaganda much more narrowly as “an epistemically defective message used with the intention to persuade a socially significant group of people on behalf of a political institution, organization or cause”(51). That is propaganda is a means to spread ideas and information whether it is true of false, to manipulate people and paralyse their power. It is an effective message that can be suitable for the benefit and interest of a particular government to control its citizens. Yet, Ellul states that,

The aim of modern propaganda is no longer to modify ideas but to provoke action. It is no longer to change adherence to a doctrine, but to make the individual cling irrationally to a process of action... it is no longer to transform an opinion, but to arouse an active and mythical beliefs (Ellul 25).

The new aim of propaganda is no longer the same. Modern propaganda took a new shape; it is no more about faking information or changing thoughts and opinions to manipulate people, but to provide strong actions as well as impressive beliefs in order to reach the total control and power.

Propaganda is the most effective tool used to manipulate societies, their beliefs as well as their behaviours, by using false ideas and information to serve the political issues of the government. It creates a fake prediction of the future to provide silence, avoid giving arguments, and reasons to citizens as well. In a way or another, propaganda turns people unconsciously to slaves, it makes them believe what is not believable, attempts to create an illusion of a perfect life though it is not the case, through for example media and religion.

“Propaganda is associated with control of information flow”, which means the responsible in delivering this information through media is in control of what message he wants to convey; which could may send false ones (Jowett 297). The analyst of this message could through “pictures; symbols; graphics; colours; filmed, televised, and Internet representations; books; pamphlets; and newspapers” should examine the hidden message (298). In addition to that the analyst should be aware of what message has been transmitted (ibid).

Dystopian societies are also controlled by the ideology of religion. Religion was always one of the predominate devices placed in humanity. It is not about life and death anymore, yet, it is how a handful of evil beings (government) keeps society as slaves, and subdues their souls in a way to keep them in state of fear, in order to make them easy to be managed and prevent them from their real potential, as well as responsibility the so-called freedom (“Religious Control”). In Gilead, the executions of

priests and Jews are made public, an open testimony to what would happen if anyone went against the religious beliefs of the government (Atwood 167).

The French Politician Jacques Ellul agrees with the producer Jacques Driencourt that “Propaganda is everything” because, everything in the political and economic field seems to be moulded by this force (Ellul 6). Propaganda is defined as differently by Marburg B. Ogle who thinks it is “any effort to change opinions or attitudes. . . The propagandist is anyone who communicates his ideas with the intent of influencing his listener” (6). The definition confirms that anyone can have their own propaganda. Indeed, any person who conversing with another topic could be considered as a propagandist. (ibid)

For Offred (protagonist in *The Handmaid's Tale*) and many others, seeing people hanged on the Wall for religious heresy fills a fear that tramps down any will they might have had of rising against the government (167). The government purposely controls the religion of Gilead as a way to control its people through strict rules and fear.

### 1.5 Characteristics of The Dystopian Society

The creation of Dystopian societies was based on the authors' needs, to create different kinds from the previous standard ones, the Utopian (Gulik 4). Dystopian societies are based on one rule which is ‘The government organizes and rules everything’, i.e. people have no right to decide. They are deprived of their families, rights, desires, freedom and cultures. The motto of this society is “Everyone Belongs to Everyone” that is, everybody is a part of the society, and does not belong to a family. There are neither families nor marriages. The dystopian order considers peoples and cultures outside it as “savages” (Akman 3). For that reason, Dystopian societies are considered as dark, and nightmarish, or approached as environments that are based on totalitarianism, oppression, rigorous control etc. (ibid). The government is meant to decide for everyone and everything without the willing contribution of individuals. Such decision is taken by government for the so called the common good of states and their citizens (Akman 4).

In Dystopian societies, individuality is deemed an ultimate crime. The concept of individualism is eliminated, and people are utterly subordinated by a totalitarian government (Gerhard 56). Jacques Ellul argues on the matter saying:

Due to the domineering ideology and state's overpowering control, when citizens Dystopian societies for any particular reason deviate from their social duties and become more interested in their personal feelings, they feel that they are lacking discipline and betraying the state, as they no longer can fulfill their social functions and be of any use to society (Ellul 41-42)

Thus, a Dystopian society includes physical and spiritual oppression. It is a place where citizens live in a dehumanized state and in which independence and freedom are confined.

Additionally, Dystopia is a consequence of totalitarianism, i.e., a total control of the government over the people. All Dystopias are keen on strict division of the citizens by intellect, ability and class. Over and above, in typical Dystopia there is no social group except the state, and independent religions do not exist among individuals. Instead, all forms of culture and permitted identity traits are those made up and approved by the representatives of power (head of state or other forms of authority). Consequently, individuals are powerless in the face of an oppressive government run by a totalitarian dictatorship ("Utopia and Dystopia Information"). It is clear that Dystopian societies are societies where the state is most often ruled by a totalitarian regime whose ultimate aim is to exercise permanent control over citizens. Since it is easiest to control people by gathering every kind of information on them (which means everything, even the most infinitesimal piece that would not even be notable), privacy is easily violated through stubborn penetration. And this, in turn, is established through political means such as censorship, manipulation, propaganda, surveillance, totalitarianism, and/or oppression ("Dystopia").

## 1.6 The Power of Totalitarianism in Dystopian Societies

Totalitarianism was denounced by Orwell in his classic Dystopian novel *1984*, describing the future in a totalitarian state where thoughts and actions are monitored and controlled at all times. It is a political form or a system of the government that allows no individual freedom. The last hundred years have undeniably been bloody, and it is therefore only natural that revolves around the evils of the totalitarian regime (Zuckerman).

In her book *Dictatorship, Fascism and, Totalitarianism*, the Indian writer Shalini Saxena defined totalitarianism as “a form of government that theoretically permits no individual freedom and, that seeks to subordinate all aspects of the individual’s life to the authority of the government” (N/A). The Russian Scholar Abbott Gleason also explains that, totalitarianism denotes a society in which political power is in the hand of a dictator or leader, and non-traditional ruling elite. The mass of population are only politically powerless but deprived of all intellectual and cultural resources (361).

In this regard, and in one of the most prominent books of the twentieth century, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by the German political theorist Hannah Arendt, the aspects of totalitarianism are thoroughly examined, starting by the leaders who are characterized by their fame and curious impermanence. Furthermore, she emphasized on the fickleness of the masses that, totalitarian movement or leaders exploit, i.e., where the human rights are completely ripped, because of their lack of political and cultural power. Thus, totalitarian leaders cannot admit an error and, must be seen infallible (qtd in Hagood).

According to Hannah Arendt totalitarian Governments are characterized by their replacement of all prior traditions and political institutions with new ones that serve a specific and singular goal of totalitarian state (qtd. in Slair). If the government controls all aspects of citizens’ lives, and if its leaders change everything including systems and laws that existed before and destroy or replace all the traditions then these governments are building a totalitarian regime (Cernak 12). “A totalitarian government

tells citizens what they must do, where they must live, and what they must think about the government policies and leaders”(13) that is these citizens are obliged to follow what they have been told without changing anything, nor refusing it. In addition to that, citizens are deprived of their private or personal lives. The state also controls their businesses, media, theatre, art, music and even literature and writing, all these things must serve the goals of the government (13, 14).

Likewise, totalitarian states do not ensure the right of vote of their citizens, who do not even have the right to choose their leaders as in democratic states. Researcher and author Linda Cernak goes on arguing that even if these regimes would claim transparency, they would pretend to run elections, that are usually fake and thus do not voice the real choices of the people (72).

In the early 1920s, the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini coined the term totalitarianism to describe the new fascist state of Italy, which he further described as “all within the state, non-outside the state, non-against the state”(qtd in Shalini). Totalitarianism had been equivalent to an absolute oppressive government at the onset of World War II. In other words, totalitarianism is marked by a strong control over the individual’s life through despotism and oppression (“Totalitarianism”).

### 1.6.1 The Ultimate Tragedy of Oppression in Dystopian Societies

It is said that “oppressing is oppressive to those who oppress as well as those they oppress”(Frye 10). In this regard, the American philosopher and feminist theorist Marilyn Frye’s idea about oppression is that not only women are oppressed but even men can be, she illustrated by saying that men are told not to cry since they are masculine, on the basis that they are strong and this does not include crying, yet, they do feel the need to cry. Frye further explains that this assumption is oppression to men based on their gender, and goes on “oppressors are oppressed by their oppressing” (ibid). Oppressors themselves are being under oppression not only oppressed people, more precisely, oppressors are thoroughly surrounded by rules that limit their liberty and their choices as well. Subsequently, an autocratic state can be as powerful and strong as it can be fragile, collapsing from one second to the next (ibid).

The American author Charlton James states:

Oppression occurs when individuals are systematically subjected to political, economic, cultural, or social degradation because they belong to a social group...results from structures of domination and subordination and, correspondingly, ideologies of superiority and inferiority (8).

Oppression is the inequitable use of authority law or physical force to prevent others from being free or equal. It is the source of injustice, by practising tyranny and power over people. However, community is not always oppressed by cruel leaders, but also by the system itself. On the other hand, oppression can be physically and psychologically practised within a Dystopian society through for instance, sexual violence and racism (Lewis).

Oppression is a harm through which persons are systematically and unfairly constrained, burdened or reduced by any of several forces. Harms are inflicted by both psychological and material forces of oppression (Cudd 2). Thus; oppression cannot be given one definition. Yet, it is hereby understood and agreed that oppression is the process of treating humans in a dehumanized manner. Furthermore, it is used to describe the way dominant groups organize and protect their position as dominant ones. Usually making life more difficult for people in less privileged groups i.e. oppressed classes.

### 1.6.1.1. The Predominate Faces of Oppression

According to the American political theorist and feminist Iris Young oppression is the state of treating other people as less human, that is in a dehumanized manner, by denying their language, education, and other opportunities ("Five Faces of Oppression" 1). She states that there are five faces or types of oppression which are: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and, violence.

### 1.6.1.1.1 Exploitation

Exploitation is the act of using people's labours to produce profits while, not compensating them fairly. The American Sociologist and historian Charles Tilly defined exploitation as powerful, connected people deploying resources from which they draw significantly increased returns by coordinating the effort of outsiders, whom they exclude from the full value added by that effort ( ibid).

### 1.6.1.1.2 Marginalization:

Marginalization expels a whole category of people from useful participation in social life. As a result, these groups are subjected to severe material deprivation (as not having access to basic resources) and even extermination (such as genocide).Marginalization is in some ways worse than exploitation because society decided that it cannot or will not use these people even for labour. Most commonly, people are marginalized based upon race ("Five Faces of Oppression"2).

For instance, in the Dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood women are marginalized, sent to a place called Gilead where all women are subjugated to men regardless of rank or status. Men are usually commanders. Women tend to be defined by negative reference to the men as the human norm. By their lack of the identifying male characteristics, women are treated as 'Others' or objects used only as a source of production deprived of their rights as well as their freedom. There are just handfuls of roles that women are allowed to hold in Gilead, valued only by their perceived moral virtues and their ability to bear children.

### 1.6.1.1.3 Powerlessness

The idea links to Karl Marx's theory of socialism: some people "have" power while others "have-not"(ibid). The powerless are dominated by the ruling class and are confined to the position of the eternal submissive. These kinds of helpless people in



general are characterized by lack of decision-making. In consequence, they are exposed to disrespectful treatment because of the lowered status.

To some extent, powerlessness creates what the Brazilian educational Philosopher Paulo Freire calls a Culture of Silence. According to Freire, oppressed and marginalized people become totally silent that they do not even talk about their oppression or call for their rights. If they reach this stage of oppression, it creates a culture where in it is forbidden to even mention the injustices that are being committed (ibid ).

### 1.6.1.1.4 Cultural Imperialism

Cultural Imperialism involves taking the culture of the ruling class and establishing it as the norm. The groups that have power in society control how the people in that society interpret and communicate. Those who are oppressed by cultural imperialism are both marked by stereotypes and made to feel invisible. The stereotypes define what they can and cannot be. At the same time, these same stereotypes turn these people into a mass of others that lack separate identities (“Five Faces of Oppression” 3).

### 1.6.1.1.5 Violence

It is the most obvious and visible form of oppression. In American society, women, Blacks, Asians, Arabs, gay men, and lesbians live under such threats of violence. In her book *Analyzing Oppression*, the American Professor of Philosophy Ann E. Cudd argues that violence is and has always been a crucial component in the origin and maintenance of oppression. It explores how violence and the threat of violence constrain the actions of groups, harming the victims and benefiting the correlative privileged social groups. It argues that women as a group are oppressed materially through violence, and that there is a credible, psychologically effective threat of greater harm that is transmitted by the obvious material harm that they do suffer(85-86).

### 1.6.2 Patriarchal Oppression in Dystopian Societies

Patriarchy is the dominance of men to everything, and everyone, including women. The American feminist author Bell Hooks gave the example of her life as she suffered from a patriarchal family. Their parents had that patriarchal lifestyle, she said that in churches they learned that God created man to rule, and woman had to help man to achieve this task, these beliefs were reinforced in every part of the society such as schools, clubs, court-houses, and specially churches (qtd in Beck 1).

Hooks commented on the damages created by patriarchy in a society, stating that,

Until we can collectively acknowledge the damage patriarchy causes and the suffering it creates, we cannot demand for men the right to be whole, to be givers and sustainers of life...they are imprisoned by a system that undermines their mental health (qtd in Beck).

Furthermore, Patriarchal societies are characterized by male dominance, where they use violence to reinforce the acceptance of patriarchal beliefs especially on women and if there is any resistance or rejection they use certain punishments in order to teach them lessons about appropriate gender role. It was also introduced by The British sociologist Sylvia Wally in *Theorizing Patriarchy* as “a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (20).

Patriarchy is a term that referred to the (almost) complete domination of men in Western society and beyond (Bertens 96). In which family systems or entire societies are organized around the idea of father-rule, where males are the primary authority figures (Crossman).

### 1.7 Gender Oppression

Talking about gender oppression often starts by defining gender because there is always a mistaken thought of gender and sex to be the same. While sex refers to the biological differences between male and female; gender has nothing to do with how females and males are represented biologically, but how they are represented culturally

and socially (Bertens98).It is also definedas“Gender oppression is the individual acts of abuse and violence, patterns of power and control, and systems of abuse and violence perpetrated against women and girls due to their gender”that is the target gender in gender oppression is woman (“Gender Oppression: Abuse. Violence” 5).

Women have been oppressed from the old time, even in the ancient Greece (from where the term democracy originated) women were deprived form political rights and it was forbidden to leave home after dark only if they are accompanied by their husbands. The same case as the ancient Rome, which means that women from the old time were marginalized and oppressed (Taylor).

The teacher and Psychologist Steve Taylor in his book *The Fall* claims that the oppression of women is a symptom of psychological disorder called ‘humania’. It appears in the obsession of taking power and being in control in addition of being brutal and maltreated by denying their rights and their feelings too. Moreover, he claims that “Men associated themselves with ‘purity’ of the mind, and women with the ‘corruption’ of the body” referring to the biological changes like menstruation period, breast-feeding and pregnancy. These things are regarded as corruption of the body. However, they know that women still have sexual power what made them incomplete in the domination of their bodies (Taylor).

According to John Stuart Mill, what cancels the differentiation between male and female is gender ideal, that is when male and female are equally treated in society (not man being stronger than woman because he is a man) gender oppression will vanish or at least decrease. Because women are imaged as weak and emotional they are oppressed by men (Popa 3-4).The main purpose that made Feminists focus on gender was the deep revision of gender roles, which looked like as the most effective way of changing the power relations between men and women (Bertens 98).

### 1.7.1 Sexual Oppression

Sex, in traditional communities, is seen only in the framework of marriage; to form families and a purpose of procreation, which means that any other forms of

sexual acts out of marriage are condemned as abnormal (Haeberle). Many people are ignorant, or unaware, of the connection between sex and procreation what made it ambiguous. They thought that a spirit gets in a female body, and grew as a baby, what made the action of sex just blissful act. Therefore, the limitation of sexual capability has only to do with the task of producing children (ibid).

Although many theorists studied the issue, no frank attachments between sexual oppression and cultural advancement is achieved. Religion was the ground source of ethical issues which made believers distinguish bad from good. Any sexual behaviour out of marriage was seen as a sin and showed disbelief in addition to the harm it causes to people, and any punishment toward these sinful persons is justified by religion (Haeberle).

On the other hand, in the Greek civilizations sex was seen as a primary life force what justified all sexual motives to be useful or adequate. Like the Greeks, The Romans regarded sex and procreation as correlative, but supported all types of sexual activities and considered them to be good (ibid).

Male dominated societies justified their discrimination to women or sexism by the fact that men are superior to women which is a way in maintaining power and control. According to some feminists, sexism and discrimination are forms of oppression, from where other kinds were deprived of.

Feminist Andrea Dworkin stated that: “Sexism is the foundation on which all tyranny is built. Every social form of hierarchy and abuse is modelled on male-over-female domination” which means the main reason why women are oppressed; in any kind of oppression, is patriarchy the fact that men are higher than women oppressive; including sexual oppression (qtd in Napikoski).

In the years of 1960s, the term oppression took a wide spread in almost every society in the world, especially during the Women’s Liberal Movement. These feminists wanted to shift the idea of women are sexually oppressed because men are superior to women, to male chauvinist who refers to these men who believe that they

are superior. In general their aim was to show that the problem originated in the greed of men.

Some people still believed that sexual oppression began with Freud's idea about women being biologically different from men; considering this differentiation between men and women as a power to men, from this point, women were sexually oppressed through their whole life ("Sexual Oppression"). According to Barbara Duke:

Women, in particular are limited by our role as child-bearers in a society which does not allow mothers a full role in production, it is hardly surprising that popular literature from pornography to the tabloids, portrays women as almost exclusively creatures of the kitchen and the bedroom ("Sexual Oppression")

That is women are considered as sexual machines and their main role is bearing children as well as cooking.

According to the French Philosopher Michel Foucault sexuality is part of the person's behaviour and each person is aware and responsible for their sexual life i.e. humans are sexually free. Foucault goes on with his argument into justifying homosexuality as a personal choice and personal freedom, thus asserting that sexuality is a matter of choice rather than a social construct (or decision) (*Sex, Power, And The Politics of Identity* 163). However, this freedom is not achieved in many places because of the different cultures and religious beliefs. This choice, as Foucault claimed, is considered as a crime in society, which is also portrayed in the Canadian author Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*.

In his book *The History of Sexuality* Foucault explicates the formidable paradoxical relationship between sexuality and power politics. He stated that, to deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounces itself. Its instrument: the threat of punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex. Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed, do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at

the cost of your nullification. Power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two non-existences (84).

Cultures where women are born are the responsible number one in shaping the person's values, attitudes and behaviours in addition the immense role in how people perceive sexuality as well as sexual violence on women (Kalra 244). Many cultures consider some kind of sexual violence acts to be punishable and other forms to be allowed; for example in South Africa rape on white women is not allowed; it is punishable, while raping black women is not; it is permitted and considered as part of life, another example from some rural places in India, marriage and having sexual relationships with young girls who are not adults yet is allowed too (Kalra 245).

These immoral acts of sexual violence have many consequences; not only rape of victim women but also rape of human rights and freedom (246). In some cultures the victims of sexual violence won't be able to speak up and ask for their rights as human being for the harm they suffered from; because of being ashamed and feeling guilty which is a result of what culture taught them (247).

Throughout decades women were oppressed, especially from the sexual part; they were not allowed to express their sexuality in any form in public, this led to the prohibition of the spread of sexual knowledge which caused the lack of the sexual health of women that became a taboo(VonVorys-Norton).

In the male-dominated society, women are controlled economically and socially, which affected their sexual life; according to some feminists, wherein women also lost control, adding that the main factor that made man powerful and succeeded in controlling women in general is sexuality, while another group of feminists insists that sexuality is not a fundamental issue, but other factors such as women's equality in labour and inside family (Richardson 74).

The main concern from these points of view is not how women's sexual life is affected by these gender inequalities, but how male's dominance on sexuality oppressed women throughout their whole life and in every aspect of their lives; how they see

their bodies, the appearances, how they wear, the work they do even the relationships with both men and women (Richardson 74).

Even though this issue of sexual violence are ignored by many societies till now, however it is high time to take it into consideration, and people especially women should have enough knowledge to fight against it, otherwise it would grow more and more (Kalra247).

### 1.7.2 Feminist Reaction to Oppression

Ever since antiquity, there were several powers, ideologies, tendencies and beliefs that women sought to dispose of. Attempting to make situation better, these efforts are for the sake of freeing themselves and these trials rose against the process of domination, patriarchy, oppression as well as living under pressure, and being abuse by different kind of harassment establishing in a specific societies and different domains such as Economics and Politics.

Feasibly, in particular societies women's aim is to achieve equality, individual freedom as well as creating their new rules, principles and gauges. Since forever, women suffer from various kind of oppression, inequality, marginalization, torture and agony from the most powerful force, 'Men'. Subsequently, feminism is a reaction against the superiority of men and the way they see, treat, and define women as sexual objects, rather than individuals. Women attempt to defend themselves differently, even through literature, exposing the truth and reacting against the spitefulness and misogyny. It still continues through the twenty-first Century yet, although women succeeded in having some rights, men still have the power and word to be said.

The Feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the beginning of the Second Wave Feminism. They are liberal feminist, Marxist and social feminist as well as social construction feminist. They all fight for the same thing which is women's right but, they differ in the methods to approach and achieve those rights. Liberal feminism claims that men and women are not different though they are but only biologically. Liberal feminism calls for equality between men and women concerning

social roles as well as having the same rights. Judith Lorber quoted the liberal feminist saying that, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex" (9). Judith said that the goal of liberal feminism in the United States was embodied in the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which was never ratified.

The goal of Marxist and socialist feminism is unlike others; its aim is to fight against women's oppression and exploitation. It stated that if a woman must work in her home then she merits to be supported by men and be economically dependent on 'the man of house', exactly like her children. Or have the right to work outside and fulfil her needs and duties and ends up working hard twice inside and outside the house and be strong as much as men are (Lorber 11).

The social construction of gender simply denotes that gender is a social construct, men and women are prescribed their behaviour, character traits and identity constituents following their genders by society. These roles are social constructions, in which female or male identity is a social construction itself. The social construction of gender became problematic among critics and scholars who insisted that men and women must be by their skills, competencies and qualifications, not by their gender or sex.

On the whole, feminist call for several reforms in the 1970s, takes it into public consciousness, since women were ignored, marginalized and interrupted. Feminists organized political movement that defended their rights and gave them the chance to become part in workplaces, schools and even home. Women became more aware about their abilities, power, social right as well as everyday puts downs.

Out of this awareness, feminism is totally against male domination, that men are more valued than women and men are the leaders of society because they are the most powerful creatures (Lorber 17). It is a movement against any kind of objection, control, abuse, sexual and gender oppression, harassment, male domination, manipulation and rape. It is more into intimacy, value, caring and sharing. Feminism has been a protection of victim's rape, the condemnation of pornography, sexual



violence and inequality since the dominant power relationship between men and women is unequal and unfair (Lorber 18).

Gender oppression is the fundamental issue of feminism. Feminists reacted against gender oppression, since it is an act of violence patterns of power, control, and political system that are prepared against women due to their gender. Feminism then has been focused right from the beginning on gender because a thorough revision of gender roles seemed the most effective way of changing the power relations between men and women. Since no one will want to give serious power to a person who must be timid, dependent, irrational, and self-pitying because she is a woman (Bertens 98). Though gender has nothing to do how females and males look or how they really are. But, describes the characteristics that a society or culture delineates as masculine or feminine, i.e., how they are culturally constructed (98).

Feminism seeks to change the power relations between men and women that prevail under what was called patriarchy, and they worked hard to achieve gender equality:

Many feminists — and particularly liberal feminists- feel that human beings cannot develop their true potential until they would live in a society where men and women have complete equality. One solution to this problem is to abolish gender roles, or to value social and legal norms because they promote gender neutrality. Because actual gender roles are shaped by patriarchy, the elimination of gender roles would open up possibilities for human emancipation (Papa 2).

That is women and men should be socially equal and delete gender roles in societies so that women can practice their rights and express their thoughts freely.

The Nigerian novelist Ngozi Chimamanda Achidie explained in her work *We Should All Be Feminist* that feminism is not about hating men. It was her response to her friend who thought being feminist means showing hatred toward men. Consequently, Achidie rejected the idea of her friend, and she called herself an African feminist who does not hate men. Thus, she showed that the concept of feminism is

misinterpreted and misunderstood. That's why she wanted to show the real comprehension and meaning of the concepts as well (2).

Achidie said that, "Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes", this definition strongly show that feminism is not only about women, even men can be feminist who believe on having the same social, economical, political rights between the two different gender. According to her words women have the right to share their abilities and inner power in all aspects of life. Otherwise, Achidie also showed her pride of being a feminist and called a feminist by her friends though they were formerly against it (Achidie11).

Allan G. Johnson defines feminism as a concept that encompasses various approaches of gender and patriarchy. He claims that feminism challenges individuals to experience new way to life to criticize what have been already said about human nature, reveal the truth about male centered prerogatives and persecution of women (95).

In addition to what has been said, that of affording power to men in oblivion to women. Faris gave his own definition to feminism and claimed in *The Muslim Debate Initiative (MDI)*, that "women need feminism because there are women who suffer injustice" (1) that is women should be always defended because they are suffering from bad treatments.

Rosalind Delmar declares that women should get rid of discrimination and marginalization. She claims that women have some specific needs that must not be neglected as well as women are blamed for such behaviour 'because of their sex'. To fulfil these needs women need some changes in different domains such as economical, political, cultural and social ones (qtd in Mostefaoui 11).

The Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood proclaims that feminism is all about women's right. Raising a question of whether feminism means women are better than men or it leads men to be pushed off a cliff. Atwood has her own comprehension of feminism; she has argued that feminism has nothing to do with preferring women than men. Or the allegation women are always right.

During an interview with the American actress Emma Watson for Entertainment weekly, Atwood was asked about if she was bored during the conversation talking only about feminism and being feminist, most importantly, whether her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is a feminist one. She strongly replied that she is very proud of being a feminist, and said that she was not bored and people should realize that feminism is a bunch of different things. She stated that people cannot talk unless they know what is feminism, because if they do not they will have no idea what they are talking about (Maya). Atwood emphasizes on people to look for the real meaning of feminism.

It is clearly seen that Atwood is aware of women and their importance, the reason why always gives priority to women's persona (Sarieh 13). She believes women deserve equality and freedom, at the same time she doesn't mean women and men are the same. It is agreed that Atwood started writing through the second wave of feminism 1970s, for some features of the second wave can be seen in her work *Cat's eye*, about women group exquisiteness of abortion rights and rejecting marriage (14).

The second wave of feminism rebelled against many kinds of oppression and treating women as objects for sexual desire. Called for equality and individual freedom within an iniquitous patriarchal system. In this regard Atwood in *Cat's Eye* said that,

It was about men, the kind who caused women to fall. I did not ascribe any intentions to these men. They were like the weather, they didn't have a mind. They merely drenched you or struck you like lightning and moved on, mindless as blizzards. Or they were like rocks, a line of sharp slippery rocks with jagged edges. You could walk with care along between the rocks, picking your steps, and if you slipped you'd fall and cut yourself, but it was no use blaming the rocks (qtd in Sarieh 14).

The idea is, women may fall because of men, men thought and believe they can make women fall down. Thus falling women clearly depict oppression.

On the whole, feminism main problem was, is and will be always the problem of oppression and gender differences. It is against the patriarchal system that favours

men and executes women. Men are the centre while women are considered as other. Thus, men became every single woman's enemy, for everything is defined according to their points of view where women's opinions take no place. Women started fighting men because they were neglected as humans and treated as objects, horribly harassed and abused. As result, if men did not think about women as things, there would be no hatred and no competition between the two species, yet, if women are strong enough, there will be no falling women. If women decide to enter to the male world and challenge him, they'd better be careful and smart, otherwise there is no use blaming men for their fall.

### 1.8 Margaret Atwood and The Female Body

The female body has been a hot topic that many writers and critics dealt with. It has been an extremely influential amongst feminist scholars for, the male world misrepresents women and their bodies. In her essay "The Female Body", the Canadian author Margaret Atwood criticized and defined the female body using satire and humour. She created seven vignettes to portray how men perceive and treat women as well as their bodies. The aim is to give credible and effective explanation on how the virile world devalues the female body and how it works in such world.

In the first vignette, Atwood emphasised her satire relating her ethos and personal experiences by saying that, "I dump in the fuel and away goes my topic, my topical topic, my controversial topic [...] my topic that is out of the question" ("The Female Body" 490). By using personal experiences Atwood can properly satirize the masculine society, their flaws and the way the objectified women according to their appearances.

Satirizing societies is undoubtedly the main concern of Atwood. It said previously that she represents the female body not only as one topic. She depicted her body as many bad different topics using strong, ironic adjectives such as, 'vulgar', 'outrageous' and 'badly behaved'. The purpose behind using such offensive adjectives is to picture how female gender is considered as something shameful and sinful. For men women's bodies are something inappropriate in the society what can lead to

adultery and chaos. Likewise, she stated that women are being judged for their body language and behaviour. Consequently, they are the only one to be blamed for any kind of sexual abuse, oppression or male manipulation. Any behaviour from women is taken as a negative and bad one that can affect society. What she proclaimed as a problem back topic (“The Female Body” 490).

Within the essay, Atwood kept emphasising on the way the female body is oppressed and exploited as it is a hunting flesh. Men think and believe that women are made to give up their bodies to men and fulfil their sexual desires. Otherwise, they are useless. Using satire, humour and irony by Atwood is an effective method to attack male perception to the female body. To show her power and awareness of women’s oppression by simply saying, “I agree it is a hot topic”. She revealed that the female body can be a controversial, dangerous, complicated and powerful topic (“The Female Body” 490)

In the second vignette, she kept satirizing the masculine world. She explained the construction of the female body creating a list of accessories that an objectified or stereotypical female would be wearing (ibid). Her aim is to show that gender role and women are physically represented by the clothes they’re wearing or the use of the word “virgin”. She decided to take both roles in her essay to see how women are perceived through both genders. Their clothes and judged for the way they wear (ibid).

In her third vignette, Atwood sarcastically compared the female body to a plastic doll. It only illuminates and works once they plug it in (491). A doll that cannot sell but be sold. She meant that women cannot work until men want it to. It cannot be useful until it fulfils men’ sexual desires, exactly like dolls, once children get bored and gone playing, the doll is neglected again. She also used many colours to picture the function of each part in her boy. She named it a circulatory red system. She ended up her description stating that, “The reproductive system is optional, and can be removed... We do not wish to frighten or offend,” which satirizes the perceived vulgarity of the objectified female body (ibid).

Otherwise, she supported the previous idea by creating a dialogue between a daughter and her father who prevented her to have a doll in her room. Because the father did not want his daughter to have a doll, for he thought that it would later on influence the way his daughter perceived beauty. Throughout this vignette, women are categorized as “fake”. Such description is mentioned in her Dystopian novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* when Offred described the way women used to repeat words. She said that, “They used to have dolls, for little girls, that would talk if you pulled a string at the back; I thought I was sounding like that, voice of a monotone, voice of a doll”, which means women were highly manipulated and the use of words was limited, and they were learnt by heart and repeated every single day (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 16). It is also used when Offred had an affair with the commander she felt herself as a doll since the purpose of the relationship was not love or passion. She got used, exploited then easily neglected (110).

Later on, the fifth vignette Atwood depicted the function of female body as *item*. She objectified the body as a “door-knocker, a bottle opener [...] and out comes your nut” (“The Female Body” 492). She added that it is seen as a tool of desire and entertainment. The female body is compared to the longing for a cigarette or hard liquor. A lust that men cannot abandon but neglect once they do not need it. For Atwood the female body is considered as a business for men, they buy and sell it like cars. It is used and exploited like they use and exploit money (“The Female Body” 492).

Reaching the sixth vignette, Atwood focused more on the spiritual side. She mentioned that women’s pleasure is not seen as requirement. Women do not have the chance to enjoy or fulfil their sexual desire. Having a relationship with men has nothing to do with love; it is called “biology”. It is not about merging bodies and has one same body. Atwood stated that, “one and one equals another one”. That is, one man can have many relations with different women. Thus, women are badly exploited, used interchangeably like *snails*, since animals have nothing to do with emotions (ibid).

Finally, Atwood concluded her definitions to the female body by comparing female and male brains as well as their functions. She claimed that women are easy to understand and be understood. Men should be smart how they treat them, and they will have amazing result that can satisfy them otherwise they can be nightmares for those who do not value them (ibid). On the other hand, the male brain is another case, somehow weak and full of empty places. That emptiness represents women. Yet, men are not aware of their needs because their brains are divided into two halves the right side does not know what the left one does (493). Atwood then ends with the understanding that men finally value the female body when they feel like they lack something within themselves. They can never admit that they value women because they fear that they will eventually lose it, which is ironic because humans usually need to value something in order to not lose it.

Atwood used satire throughout her entire essay to reveal her opinions of society and how it ignores the way some men seemly use women as nothing more than a piece of meat. She explained how men also feel when they have no control over a female body. Moreover, Atwood makes it clear that both the masculine society and the female society should be treated equally because they are both humans.

### 1.9 Conclusion

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a thrilling Dystopian novel that reveals and exposes the dominance as well as the manipulation of women in a totalitarian society called Gilead, where freedom for women is completely forbidden, and they considered only as a source of fertility. Women live under a patriarchal oppression, because of the new Christian law. The story is told by a woman who was forced to live a condemned life.

*The Handmaid's Tale* is a Dystopian novel that seeks to uncover how the state of Gilead controls and damages the picture of women, and the way they are misrepresented and tyrannized. Gilead is Dystopian society having negative conditions to survive. It is a world where life is impossible and escapism is a death wish. In Gilead people are treated as animals neglecting their rights and freedom. This

unfortunate life is shaped by a totalitarian regime that gives the authority only for the government to decide. Based on religious belief, that oppresses people. Women in Gilead live under a patriarchal system that allows nothing but, depression and anxiety. Which leads to whether there is any form of a personal resistance which can overcome the nightmare of oppression or not.



Chapter two:  
Women and Resistance in  
Gilead

### 2.1 Introduction

Atwood's Gilead depicts a state which shows no respect and no protection for women, denies their equality and their rights to be independent. This regime is an extreme reaction against women's movement 1960. The *Handmaid's Tale* portrays an oppressive totalitarian society which was the United States before. This society is founded by false biblical beliefs, the reason why it is named Gilead taken from the Mountain Gilead in the book of Genesis XII, where God judge human affairs and disputes.

Society in Gilead is unfair toward women; a society that provides nothing but oppression, abuse, physical and physiological torture. Women are separated from their families and taken to the Red Centre<sup>4</sup> where they are trained to be handmaids. That is their new role and job is childbearing. In addition, women live under a patriarchal regime where they lose their personal identities and sexual freedom. Thus, Gilead uses different methods to control and manipulate women, putting them under an extreme surveillance, and scaring them by a horrible public punishment.

As a result, there are some women who are strongly manipulated by the Gileadean ideology and others who resist and fight the totalitarian regime though it seems almost impossible. Through the novel the feminist Canadian author Margaret Atwood presents a situation where a totalitarian theocracy has taken over, after a long period of an extreme liberalism. A regime that enforces silence, obedience and power on women, prevents them from writing and reading to achieve a complete domination. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a Dystopian novel that makes the readers more aware about the significance and the misrepresentation of the female body, in certain societies men objectifies women as sex machines; but in reality the body has many other functions not related to them; like enjoying their body and granting their desires. The novel also reveals that women have many rights neglected by many societies like

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<sup>4</sup>The Red Center or the Rachel and Leah Center which was named after the biblical story of Leah and Rachel that inspired the new theocracy in Gilead.

writing, reading and taking decision. All in all Atwood emphasized and showed that women reconstructed their identities using different ways.

### 2.2 From a Perfect to a Nightmarish Gilead

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in the twentieth century, presents a world and a society based on totalitarian regime and women's oppression. The Republic of Gilead replaced what was once the United States of America (Atwood 9), and what was known as western culture (Nicola). Society in Gilead transformed from a free democratic society to a patriarchal society. Many changes have been made by the government what turns Gilead to be very restricted and shaped by stern conditions. Gilead believed that women became excessively independent, which drove them to neglect their duties toward men especially after the 1960s to the late 1970s (ibid).

Before Gilead existed, women used to have the right to do whatever they wanted as loving, travelling, studying, and even practising any job that fit them. Women could also wear different types of clothes which showed their independence as Offred kept remembering, "I think about Laundromats. What I wore to them: shorts, jeans, jogging pants. What I put into them: my own clothes ... I had earned myself" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 21). Offred was self-reliant before Gilead came to existence; she used to express herself and her body under no control. She, and all women, were strong enough to walk their paths successfully.

Life in Gilead was tightly strict and regular, where every woman had her specific rank and rule in society. The wife took care of the household giving orders to Marthas and her handmaid. She was also obliged to attend the ceremony each month. The ceremony was the day when the commander would copulate with his handmaid to impregnate her. In fact, bringing children was the only job of women in Gilead. They also went shopping every day with their other handmaid partners, and any person who violated the law was punished (166).

Before the new regime Offred was independent, literate, and married woman, she had a little girl and a comfortable job. She lost all that fertility and became slave under a terrible totalitarian society (Johnson 71), as she describes it,

I once had a garden. I can remember the smell of the turned earth, the plump shapes of bulbs held in the hands, fullness, the dry rustle of seeds through the fingers. Time could pass more swiftly that way. Sometimes the Commander's Wife has a chair brought out, and just sits in it, in her garden. From a distance it looks like peace (*The Handmaid's Tale* 13).

Offred expressed how happy she was before, when she was allowed to have her own garden. She added that appearance could be mistaken in Gilead; that it gives the impression of a perfect life and place, while it is all a false “Sometimes the Commander's Wife has a chair brought out, and just sits in it, in her garden. From a distance it looks like peace” while it was not the case (13). Offred used to think that only handmaids are experiencing a patriarchal oppression. She then found that even wives the most powerful women in the Gileadean society are living under almost the same situation, where men could control them and restrict their freedom as well.

Offred also described the past and how the new government transformed them into objects. “We slept in what had once been the gymnasium” (9) a gymnasium used to be school, what then became the centre where “Aunts” taught women to be handmaids. She gave more details that the floor was made of wood and circles where they used to play games. Once, Offred could even imagine the spectators, girls and boys dancing on a loud music (ibid). Moreover, there is the household where Offred lives with the commander and his wife Serena, built for a “large rich family” (11). That is, a big house and large family means freedom and happiness. Yet, it is not the case in Gilead anymore. The household is a dark place for handmaids where they prison their thoughts, liberty and bodies. Do their jobs silently and perfectly well.

People in Gilead were not allowed to trade (sell and buy as they used to do from black markets). This part is clearly exposed when Offred met the commander's wife for the first time in the sitting room

The lighter was ivory-colored. The cigarettes must have come from the black market, I thought, and this gave me hope. Even now that there is no real money anymore, there's still a black market [...] He has a cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth, which shows that he too has something he can trade on the black market (*The Handmaid's Tale* 15-17).

### 2.3 Women Under Patriarchal Oppression

In Gilead all women lived under a patriarchal system that valued males and devalued female identity, which led automatically to gender oppression as well. The patriarchal system is not just an act, but state of mind that allows and encourages oppression, violence, as well as control and abuse.

Patriarchy supports oppression by imposing silence on women using their own ideology. That is they deny that oppression over women exists. The society attempts to brainwash women's minds by making everything look positive and perfect, for instance putting sexual harassment as date and violence as argument (12). Therefore, the government turned their rules, abuse, oppression and deeds over women that in turn stand against gender or patriarchal oppression, even name them man haters or controlling women (ibid). Women had no right to decide or give opinions, it was forbidden for a woman to rule the country or even share and participate in the political, social and economic issues. Women had no power neither in their hand nor in their minds, women in Gilead are objectified, believed be obedient servants and submissive to the authority of man.

According to the Feminist activists in patriarchal societies women are considered inferior to men, or sometimes they give them no value, feminism "seeks to change this situation" and tries to increase "women's access to equality" in a male dominated culture (Zarrinjooee 67). Moreover, the French writer Simone De Beauvoir revealed the reason why women are oppressed in her work *The Second Sex*, she stated that their oppression is due to the fact of considering man as 'the Self' and women 'the

Other', and because she is not a man she is oppressed (Zarrinjooee 67). All these ideas are perfectly pictured in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Canadian Author Margaret Atwood creates an oppressive society where women are under control and patriarchal oppression. In this society women are divided according to their functions as wives, Handmaids, Marthas, Aunts, and another category called *unwoman*, each one of them have a specific social role in Gilead, which they are obliged to follow (97).

Gilead's aim was to increase new-birth that is why their focus was on women. They took young fertile women to centres called the Red Centre, where they teach them how to be handmaids and how to do their jobs. "The Handmaids are systematically oppressed through society's requirement to participate in the Ceremony, an unjust procreative ritual" (Tripp). The ceremony goes every month; handmaids are obliged to be copulated by the commander, and that in the presence of his wife to avoid any kind of passion or sexual freedom. In this case, patriarchal oppression can be seen since women have no right to choose the man they will have sex with or even the right to refuse it as well. If women try to disobey which is considered as a crime, they either send them to the colonies to work hard till they die or hang them on the wall in order to be a lesson for the other women: "We stop, together as if on signal, and stand and look at the bodies. It doesn't matter if we look. We're supposed to look: this is what they are there for, hanging on the Wall. Sometimes they'll be there for days" (26). That is women have the right to look at the hanging bodies not as a sense of freedom, yet to be scared and controlled.

In the Republic of Gilead, women are in a different kind of prison; they are controlled physically and spatially that is women especially handmaids are dehumanized and not giving any importance in society (Kouhestani 130). Handmaids in this society are targeted by everyone included commanders, guardians, eyes even women like commander's wives, aunts, and true believer handmaids spy on each other (ibid) "We can feel their eyes on us as we walk in our red dresses two by two across to the side opposite to them. We are being looked at, assessed, whispered about; we can feel it, like tiny ants running on our bare skins" which means they have no freedom to

have their privacy or be their selves, even when they are together(*The Handmaid's Tale* 128).

In addition to the patriarchal oppression and maltreatment of women by men. They are other women 'wives' since they have the authority and power. Wives could even hit the handmaids though they both are women. Offred recalls that, "They can hit us, there's Scriptural precedent. But not with any implement. Only with their hands" (16). As if they had not been sufficiently humiliated. In Gilead, femininity means purification of female's body and any punishment toward these women for the sake of being pure and obedient is allowed (Kouhestani 130). Based on these religious beliefs the patriarchal system in Gilead humiliates and oppresses women, claiming that women will be protected and be able to "fulfil their biological destinies in peace with full support and encouragement" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 131).

### 2.3.1 Female Docile Body "Tool of Oppression"

For the body to be useful, it has to be both productive and subjected. For Foucault the body is made into subjects and is disempowered through violence. Violence is a power that attacks the body as well as the mind, this power is subtle or soft coercion that make "use neither of weapons nor of terror and yet remain[s] of a physical order". Otherwise, Knowledge is what identified the body but the discipline is not monolithic i.e. the body is no more than a multiform instrumentation (Discipline and Punish 26).

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood dealt with an affronted attitude toward women and their bodies in Dystopian society called the Republic of Gilead (Barkass-Williamson 1). The female body is a symbol of oppression in Gilead which demotes the importance of women and their value as well (1). The female body in *The Handmaid's Tale*, is considered as a patriotic power, it is described through specific function of different female bodies in the Gileadean society under a hierarchical system (Hsieh 3). Every single woman in Gilead has their own occupation, and they are divided into seven categories dressed in different colors according to their levels (ibid).

Clothing in dystopian societies is a sign of a totalitarian control, ensuring that women are in their right places (Charlotte). Atwood's characters are defined by their coloured uniforms that are obliged to wear.

There are other women with baskets, some in red, some in the dull green of the Marthas, some in the striped dresses, red and blue and green and cheap and skimpy, that mark the women of the poorer men. Econowives, they're called (*The Handmaid's Tale* 21).

Marthas are functioning as cooks, econowives are women who dress in different colours among them the unwoman who are to be sentenced to death or take hard work in the colonies till they die. These kinds of women are usually dressed in gray.

Primarily, the handmaids are forced to wear loose long red dresses that cover their whole bodies. As Offred describes:

Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. The skirt is ankle-length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, the sleeves are full. The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen (11)

Red is a symbol of blood and womb (Charlotte). It is also associated with lust and overpowering passion which is oppressive and cruel. It indicates women's fertility for it reflects the colour of menstrual blood (*Vanity Fair*). As aunt Lydia said: "You are a transitional generation" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 71). Red has been also associated with sexual sin in *The Scarlet Letter* by the American author Nathaniel Hawthorne.

In opposition to the commander's wives who dress in blue echoing the color of virgin Mary and not symbolizing only the function of mother, yet a virgin mother (Rossetti). That, what drives Offred jealous because it made her feel less powerful as well as free, totally useless and terrible with the dreadful red. As she states: "Her dress is crisp cool cotton. For her it is blue, watercolour, not this red of mine that sucks in heat and blazes" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 122). This passage shows that Offred was completely against the red oppression, and she could not accept that, and she could not rebel either, but, she was expressing her feeling and anger inside her mind because it was forbidden to write or say something unless they ask them to do. Said aunt Lydia



“it was best not to speak unless they asked you a direct question” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 15), blue for Offred is a sign of liberty, power and independence as well as a high place in the hierarchy of women, which no woman in Gilead has this chance (Rossetti).

In addition, of being defined by colour and uniform, women were considered as a national property (Hsieh 4) to reward the commanders ‘the leaders of Gilead’ that is women in Gilead are a source of fertility and production, this function is meant for the handmaids dressed in red. After giving a birth to one commander, handmaids will be transferred to another commander (ibid). As Offred recalled in her narration, “I wait, washed, brushed, fed, like a prize pig. Sometimes in the eighties they invented pig balls, for pigs who were being fattened in pens” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 69). This kind of exploitation of her body, Offred thinks about her body as an object. Her body was used only for production, her body is what defines her as a woman and her ability to bring children to the Gileadean society and save the situation, is what save her in return from being punished and tortured. Offred compares her body to an objectified prize pig who are used only when it is needed. All women in Gilead among them Offred have no right to wash and bath their bodies or even take care of its shape except when the ceremony is to happen (98). It can be clearly seen when Offred narrates her thoughts, “Can I be blamed for wanting a real body, to put my arms around without it I too am disembodied” (63).

The aim is to give birth and not more. Women were deprived of their sexual rights from having pleasure or fun as Offred claims again “I am like a room where things once happened and now nothing does, except the pollen of the weeds that grow up outside the window, blowing in as dust across the floor” (ibid). Women did not have the right to enjoy their bodies as they used to do before. What made Offred feel pity about herself and try to remember her memories with Luke to make herself feel better and remind herself that she was a real woman before. “I feel like the word shatter. I want to be with someone. Lying in bed, with Luke, his hand on my rounded belly. The three of us, in bed, she kicking, turning over within me” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 63).

Offred is extremely ashamed of her body, not because she is no more beautiful. Yet, because she hates the fact her body is inappropriately used and harassed, and she hates to look at her body, for it determine her. She expresses this saying “I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 42).

In Gilead women's bodies are used, subjected and transformed to a source of production. The body is controlled ideologically and physically (Kouhestani 2). Bodies in Gilead are all by means turned to be one body and docile<sup>5</sup>. The femininity is constructed by the purification of the body. In the Red Centre, Aunt Lydia kept reminding the handmaids that “The Republic of Gilead, Aunt Lydia said, knows no bounds. Gilead is within you” (21). This statement shows strongly how many women are considered as others, controlled and must behave accordingly (Hsieh 8) as well as remembering that “The posture of the body is important, here and now, minor discomforts are instructive” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 50).

As a national property, the female body is under a total control by the leaders of Gilead (Hsieh 4), Offred finds out that their bodies are not only used and controlled but, exploited with extreme stress on female sexuality (6). The handmaid's bodies turned to be productive or sex machines (9). In Gilead the female body is treated as one body and it has no meaning or value unless it is productive. Furthermore, women are not seen as individuals, but as group with different jobs (ibid). i.e. women have no identity if they do not have the ability to bear children (Zarrinjooee 3). Women are worthy only for their fertile capacity. According to the French author De Beauvoir, woman serves man and defined by her body (ibid) and even Offred says “Something that completely defines me” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 69). De Beauvoir states that “He is the subject, he is the absolute, she is the other” (16), and that can be fairly seen in *The Handmaid's Tale* that women are depicted as others, they are “related being” (De Beauvoir 15), treated as non-human and defined by their bodies.

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<sup>5</sup> Docile boy is a term defined by Foucault "one that may be subjected used, transformed, and improved. and that this docile body can only be achieved through strict regimen of disciplinary acts" (qtd in urbania)

The worst power that can be applied on humans and most suffer from is to have no right to freely choose or enjoy their own properties “bodies” (“Abuse of Female Sexuality in *Handmaid's Tale*”). This power is not given equally to men and women. Usually women are the victims of such power. Women in the 1980s suffered from sexuality oppression and the irresistible power over their bodies. Women did not have the right to practise their sexuality liberty, and always facing difficulties to overcome that physical power of male. Therefore, women’s sexuality is neither respected nor protected. For instance, the Gileadean society neglects women’s sexuality. Yet, Appreciates men’s more (ibid). “What's going on in this room, under Serena Joy's silvery canopy, is not exciting. It has nothing to do with passion or love or romance or any of those other notions we used to titillate ourselves with. It has nothing to do with sexual desire” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 58) in this passage Offred is strongly showing that relations are no more the same and it is not about love and passion, but for the purpose to have children. Her body is used as a sex machine neglecting how she could feel or how much it could be physically and emotionally be harmful.

### 2.3.2 Sexual Violence in Gilead

In *The handmaid's Tale*, Atwood tackled many ideas about abuse of women’s sexual in Gilead. Handmaids are isolated and separated from their husbands and children, and fairly provide them with sexuality duties for the sake of bringing children to Gilead since it is already suffering from children bearing potentials. Handmaids have to serve their country and sacrifice their lives to bring total change to the world, it even destroys them and takes their female’s identity. Though women do such hard job, but still seen as stigma, shameful and disgraceful (“Abuse of Female Sexuality in *Handmaid's Tale*”). Women are banned from their positions as women instead of being praised or called up as heroes and saviours (ibid). In addition, handmaids are deprived of their individual liberty, for they are forced to wear red dresses as sign of their sinful condition which is not their choice but forced on them (“Abuse of Female Sexuality in *Handmaid's Tale*”).

Women in a way or another are blamed for their sexual abuse and have no ability or right to protest and rebel against as well as no way to manage it (ibid). These ideas can be clearly seen in *The Handmaid's Tale*. First, women are stripped from their jobs and accounts, then, being kidnapped by the military. Physically punished and separated from their families, lose the right of abortion or birth control to end up as sex slaves as Offred describes Serena Joy who used to be happy and. She lost her identity and individual freedom, sacrifices her life to serve Gilead. Even Serena had no sexual freedom as all women in Gilead (*The Handmaid's Tale* 61). Women are used by unwanted men, "The commanders", which is all by means disgusting and abhorred crime. But, it is still proclaimed as religious and a social necessity. "The Ceremony goes as usual. I lie on my back, fully clothed except for the healthy white cotton under drawers. What I could see, if I were to open my eyes, would be the large white canopy of Serena Joy's oversized colonial style four-poster bed" (58).

Though her narration, Offred said that the ceremony continued as usual. After reading few pages from the bible and praying, Offred had to lie on her back between Serena's legs, after they finish the process handmaids should wait for ten minutes to have better chances to get pregnant (ibid). Women were forced to do their job or what they called duty. "It's my job to provide what is otherwise lacking. Even the Scrabble. It's an absurd as well as an ignominious position" (98) which means they had no choice.

Atwood aimed to expose female sexuality complexity through the character Offred, who narrated her daily life in the household, talking about her past from time to time (ibid). In Gilead, a new society emerged from a chaotic America, women are the future of Gilead and thought that men are mostly the leaders of their society and women had no ability or the right to rebel against it. Women were made to bring children and for those who did not have the ability to do so were supposed to be punished and blamed for it, for it is their fault as it is mentioned in the novel, "it is because the woman is contaminated and full of sin"( *The Handmaid's Tale*61). Women had to accept the patriarchal system where men order and women obey.

The way sexual is regulated in Gilead deprives not only women from having sexuality freedom; but also men and everyone living in Gilead had no choice when it came to sexual expression (3). Offred, through her narration explained and tried to express her sexual abuse and how the system could manipulate other women, “They got them more or less under control before they started in on everybody else” (147). For the most part red represents desire, sexuality and lust. The handmaids wear only red to symbolize sexuality, and to show that women were considered only as source of fertility (2).

Offred did not represent her sexuality only by the red outfit. Yet, by the tulips in Serena’s garden and shows ironically her relation to Nick because Offred was such desire for him, Offred stated that,

In the driveway, Nick is polishing the Whirlwind again. He's reached the chrome at the back. I put my gloved hand on the latch of the gate, open it, push inward. The gate clicks behind me. The tulips along the border are redder than ever, opening, no longer wine cups but chalices; thrusting themselves up, to what end? They are, after all, empty. When they are old they turn themselves inside out, then explode slowly, the petals thrown out like shards. Nick looks up and begins to whistle. Then he says, Nice walk? (32).

Offred represents herself and all the other handmaids to the tulip, once they grow up they become useful and once it loses its ability they cut it off. The same case with the handmaids, once they cannot bring children they get punished and neglected till death. Women are useful just when their bodies are fruitful.

Relation between power and sex can expose the sexual abuse of the female body, what creates Dystopia for women (“Abuse of Female Sexuality in *Handmaid’s Tale*”). In Gilead women are powerless though they are the most important, for they can save sterile Gilead. Yet, they are the most oppressed at the same the time. They have no chance to be powerful since they are always stocked dealing with their position and, since man has the entire power and authority. Any woman who resists or put herself into trouble, will definitely be punished as Offred recalled, “we should

remember to do what we are told and not get into trouble, because if we do we will be rightfully punished” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 167). Women lives under an extreme control that defeats their identity and forced into their functions abandoning their emotions and desires (“Abuse of Female Sexuality in *Handmaid’s Tale*”).

### 2.3.3 Loss of Identity in Gilead

Atwood uses the treatment of her character Offred to reveal the loss of individual identity in Gilead. In the novel, it is clear that Gilead lived under a totalitarian severe regime that did not believe in individual freedom or action, but rather in a society where individuals were considered as collective groups. Women in Gilead were transformed from free individuals to abstracts. They turned to be ideas rather than identities and treated in a dehumanizing way. This way of thinking could be compared to the Nazi Germany, a period where Germany was under the control and dictatorship of political party led by Adolf Hitler in 1919. This system takes group of people and transforms them into ideas; deprives them of their power and personal identities (“Alpha History”)

Since the system in Gilead did not believe in individual liberty, the regime attempts to assimilate each woman into a certain social role and thus limit their identities. “The heads are zeros” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 26). Again Offred showed or described explicitly the horror of the Gileadean system that underestimate people among them women, and that most of them had been brutally tortured. In Gilead people were equal zeros, they mean nothing just like shadows which led to a faint of identity under social restrictions.

Gilead is a society where women wish to die but not living under its unjust system and repressive regime, the system that allows nothing, but ill-treatment and abuse. Gilead is a country that neglected individuals and freedom is totally impossible. This miserable life is shaped by a totalitarian system that gives power to men and treats women as animals or useless objects (Gulnaz 18). Any endeavour to withstand and resist the rules, any trial to protest against it or escape, and death is definitely women’s destiny. Women have no chance to rebel against the government or even

thinking about changing their predestination. Silence is their fate and accepting their situation is their new lifestyle as well as their opportunity to survive.

Women in Gilead are no more using their personal names for; their real identities are no longer available. Offred recalls that in her narration when she states, “My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 52). Offred is trying to convince herself that she is not herself or the old her anymore. She has new name that defines her and which is useful only for others just like a telephone number (ibid). In the Republic of Gilead, women must forget about their past, their families, their desires and even their names. Women have to forget about their bodies and sexual freedom because they are useful only when they can give birth and save Gilead, otherwise they are expelled to the colonies (Gulnaz 22); Since women are the only individuals with the ability of childbearing, the government and the patriarchal system have made women's first and foremost identity a mother by isolating them from the world while giving the freedom to men. Women in Gilead are valued for their bodies and their wombs, and not for their minds and personalities. This is another reason why most of the women lost their identities in Gilead.

The colour-coded uniform that women wore did not only show their function in Gilead. Yet, it signifies the loss of their own identities since they striped women from their real personal names and associate them with their commanders. For instance, ‘Of-fred’. Fred is the name of the commander from whom the handmaid Offred is to bear children. I.e. Woman is only defined by her reproductive function and the commander she belongs to. Women also have no right to use their personal real names anymore, they are merely objects used for a particular purpose what stripes them of their own identities.

In Gilead once handmaids brought one child to a particular commander or has the no ability to make pregnancy happens, they will be transferred to another commander. The name of the narrator is Offred but it can be at any time another name as Ofglen or Ofwaren. In this case woman has no personality and no merit to live. She

is completely ignored; executed women are interchangeable and replaceable with each other (Paget)

The novel, revealed some identity crises through Offred herself, displayed when she said, “I see despair coming towards me like famine. To feel that empty, again, again. I listen to my heart, wave upon wave, salty and red, continuing on and on, marking time” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 47). Offred does not feel her body anymore, she sees herself as an instrument that can be played with any time and be thrown away any moment, as useless. Particularly when she was taken to the doctor for tests. Offred confirmed that it is not as before, not for the sake of protection or welfare (11). Women are not free to visit doctors alone; they are always with the guardian’s company. Women are no longer women, they are considered as devices made for particular purpose. As Offred claimed ironically, in particular when she was still with the doctor, “At neck level there’s another sheet, suspended from the ceiling. It intersects me so that the doctor will never see my face. He deals with a torso only” (ibid). Offred sees herself and the other handmaid as sense of being made but not born. Women suffer again from lack of humanity what leads to the loss of their personal as well as corporal identities.

Offred lost hope to get neither her family back nor her identity. The impact of oppression affects her physically and psychologically, for she is no more fighting as before. Offred used to fight the oppression of Gilead by trying to escape, and keep faith on her. Now she is no more interested in her freedom. She could not endure and face oppression to any further extent, because recession is so depressing. While Offred used to lay bare freely her body in the beach, now she feels her body as an archaic trophy (42). Offred lost her self-confident. She is no more admiring her body, since her body is used only as a sex machine to bring children. She considers her body as an offence.

Childbirth is known to provide women with responsibility, value, privilege and worth. But it is not the same anymore for the handmaids. Childbearing is the only thing that determines women in Gilead, and it is the only thing or job that women were allowed to experience with no choice or control over their identities. Women were not



allowed to explore any part of the world, another reason that leads an unfulfilled and empty life (“Abuse of Female Sexuality in *Handmaid's Tale*”).

Handmaids also are forbidden to have any contact with others or expose themselves to strangers except commanders. They are stripped of their identities in that they are not allowed to write their thoughts, read or utter their opinions, “I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 30).

Within the vortex of resisting oppression and the fear of the political system, the handmaids definitely failed to maintain their identities in a certain extent, as they are all depressed by the never ending recession. Thus, all women doomed by the powerful system and successfully executed in a Dystopian society (Stillman 75). Gilead rules grow up inside every woman’s soul, oppression and violence become a habit for women to see or experience. Isolation in Gilead is the new lifestyle and a new way of escaping at the same time. Then, the reconstruction of new personal identity is weak, debased, degraded against the Gileadean regime, power. Physical and psychological control as well (ibid).

### 2.4. Brainwashing and Control of Women in Gilead

Gilead is presented in *The Handmaid's Tale* as fictional country that deals with Dystopian features based on political and sexual oppression of women as well as manipulation through the use of propaganda and religious beliefs. The bible was an effective tool to control and brainwash women as well (Johnson). The strict rules and laws innovated by the government of Gilead made women obedient and afraid of being against the regime, what led to the power and the success of the controlling system.

Control is heavily a feature that dominates society in Gilead. Gilead is an oppressed society where individuals are highly controlled by the totalitarian regime. This new regime controls people’s minds, bodies, language and even their relationships. Gilead found new way and methods to control individuals. Punishment is one of the powerful tools used to control people. Women are straightforwardly the

target group, since Gilead represented a place where marriage became uncommon and women did not rely on men anymore.

Due to the lack of fertility, the Gileadean government decided to find solution for such trouble and save the situation. Women had been transformed from independent sexual slaves. They were separated from their real families and significant others, replace their personal names to other names associated with the commanders' (*The Handmaid's Tale* 52). For, women were considered as "sluts" before, lazy and bad. The new regime in Gilead believed that women had to sacrifice their lives for men as well as for their country. Women in Gilead lost their rights and freedom anymore. They provided them with a single new job, which is of childbearing (132).

Women in Gilead are taught to believe that they were useless before; but it is high time to work and fulfil their duties. It is time to use their abilities to become more loyal and serious, and that was for the benefits of their country. Propaganda was used to convince women that they were neither oppressed nor abused, yet it was what they had to do and it is s their way to find real happiness. As Offred stated, "Where I am, is not a prison but a privilege, as Aunt Lydia said" (11). The Gileadean ideology turned all what is fallacious to reality to successfully control women and their opinions.

It is said that the main feature that construct and build a society is the desire for power and control over others (Paget 1). According to the most highly regarded English Romantic poets of the nineteenth century Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The good want power, but to weep barren tears. The powerful goodness want: worse need for them. Wise want love; and those who love want wisdom; all best things are thus confused to ill" (qtd in Paget 1) Shelley's words illustrate the complexity of power and control in a particular society, and that the relationship between individuals and their social freedom is what affect most playwrights and authors, especially those of the twentieth Century.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, control is meant only for man; in particular the commanders who governed society in Gilead. Yet, this control and lust for power is what created a chaotic and confused society, based on totalitarian power and women

oppression. Life in Gilead is tightly restricted, ruled by the dominance of women's by men, where freedom for women is impossible but fair. In addition, the new regime in Gilead uses many methods to control and manipulate women and it is constructed through what Foucault called 'semi-silence' (qtd in Nyström5).

According to Foucault "each society has its regime of truth" (ibid). In Gilead, the truth is totally redefined. For instance, the idea of fertility or absence of sterility is the main aspect of how the regime controls and oppresses women, by making them believe that the failure of bringing children is their own fault and man cannot be blamed for that. Women are taught that everything the regime claims is true and must be believed even if it is not. The same case in George Orwell's *1984*, when O'Brien forces Winston to believe that, "two and two equal five" (60). Likewise, Handmaids also had to acknowledge that they are valued only for their productive abilities, and everything else is irrelevant.

Aunt Lydia used to say that, "Men are sex machines [...] and not much more. They only want one thing" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 87). The purpose behind this statement is to manipulate women and make them believe that men cannot be blamed for their sexual desire. For, it was their nature and the way they were made. They were told that it was up to them to set the boundaries and make the situation better. It is their job and duty to please men and act as real women because a woman who cannot be pregnant and bring children is called *unwoman*. Offred says "Then they burn you up with the garbage, like an Unwoman", this is another way to change the truth and dominate women according to their benefits (130).

In the Red Centre where women were brainwashed, by erasing everything they believed in before the new regime. Replaced them by what the government wanted them to follow. Aunts train these women to be handmaids (Živić 24). Aunts also made women believe that "their predicament is their own fault", for example one of the handmaids confessed that once she was raped at the age of fourteen, instead of comforting her they humiliated her. Other handmaids were obliged to do the same (ibid).

But whose fault was it? Aunt Helena says, holding up one plump finger.

Her fault, her fault, her fault, we chant in unison.

Who led them on? Aunt Helena beams, pleased with us.

She did. She did. She did.

Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen?

Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson (*The Handmaid's Tale* 46).

She is not only accused of being the reason why she was raped. Yet, they even teach her a lesson by punishing her. This is another way of controlling and dominate women. Make them believe that men cannot be blamed, but women are responsible for any kind of violence.

Furthermore, the aunt's description of freedom is different from what freedom really means. They redefined it in order to maintain oppression and control as well as women actions. There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. "Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (21). Women were taught to believe that freedom to do and say whatever they wanted was what led men to violence and abuse. The "freedom to" is what creates Gilead and such rules to save the situation. Yet, preventing women from being free is the right way to avoid external violence and oppression. Women became more protected and more secured. There was no need to long for the freedom they lost because the freedom they earned was a *privilege*, and they would better not underestimate it.

Women in the Red Centre were obliged to watch what aunt Lydia calls *unwomandocumentary*<sup>6</sup> (72). Another way to terrify and submit women was the brutal *unwomendocumentary*,

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<sup>6</sup>Unwomen documentary: an old pornography film, from the seventies or eighties. They were used to control and manipulate women in Gilead. (*The Handmaid's Tale* 72)

Sometimes the movie she showed would be an old porno film, from the seventies or eighties. Women kneeling [...] tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed. Once we had to watch a woman being slowly cut into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out (*The Handmaid's Tale* 72)

The purpose was to make women believe that before Gilead women were acting wrong, and the pre-Gilead government is the one to blame for letting these *unwomen* waste time instead of doing something useful. Aunt Lydia used her loud voice when speaking and warning the handmaids of acting like *unwoman*, she kept emphasizing that conditions in Gilead were much better “with the smug authority in her voice of one who is in a position to judge. We would have to condone some of their ideas, even today. Only some, mind you, she said coyly, raising her index finger, wagging it at us” (ibid), aunts insisted blaming the pre-Gilead government of the bad things that destroyed and corrupted society.

The government gets control of women with spreading fear, torturing, and punishing them. They used The Wall where they hanged guilty women and leave them days hanged to serve as reminders to those who to destroy or rebel against the government (167). As Offred narrated, “On the Wall hang the three women from this morning, still in their dresses, still in their shoes, still with the white bags over their heads. Their arms have been untied and are stiff and proper at their sides” (166), once Offred and Ofglen saw the hanged women, they kept silent and shocked for a moment. Then they both realized that it was a reminder for them in case they wanted to do something similar. Women had to do what they were told and not get into trouble, because otherwise they would be rightfully punished (167).

Through the novel, it could be seen that Offred could not resist the oppression. She was weak enough to be manipulated. Somehow she accepted the new life, she lost faith trying to adapt with the situation though it is not fair or even bearable. Offred says that,

The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick” (Atwood 159), this is when Ofglen asked Offred to spy on the commander for the *Mayday*, but she refused because she felt extremely hopeless and incapable to do such risky mission “I can't, she says to Ofglen. I'm too afraid. Anyway I'd be no good at that, I'd get caught. I scarcely take the trouble to sound regretful, so lazy have I become (*The Handmaid's Tale* 167).

Gilead never stops trying, they prevent women from reading and writing because “Knowledge is power” (Nyström 15), which means when women have access to documents, information or books, they have the knowledge and once they have it they can fight back. They can express and be powerful, but without it they have nothing to be based on when trying to defend and speak about their rights. The aim is to keep women and others away from the truth. So that they remain powerless and it will be easy to control them as well (ibid).

Furthermore, preventing women from knowledge is not the last thing Gilead would ever do. Relationships were also limited or almost forbidden. The act of making relationships was punishable; they actually put spies between women –handmaids- to avoid rebellious acts (Callaway). Offred called the spies “believers” who might report them (*The Handmaid's Tale* 46). Offred meant that not everyone in Gilead was resisting oppression and rules. Some of them were manipulated and scared, they were ready to do their jobs perfectly and say everything they saw and heard.

The government in Gilead created new laws and erased the history of the pre-Gilead to maintain and support this new regime; so that they control the past of women. They also controlled propaganda (television, radio, newspapers, magazines...etc). They forbid books; reading and writing, controlled the language and planted fear in their hearts through the eyes (Johnson 72-73). Under such conditions, women could not rebel against the government; all these crimes made women lose their identity and individuality. Women were universalized and treated as one object, considered as sex machines and not as human beings.

### 2.4.1 Control of Relationship and Communication

The government of Gilead controls the relationships between citizens especially women, they are no more free of making friends or having any sexual ritual out of the ceremony where the commander tried to impregnate the handmaid; their relationship is based on bearing children not on love or desire. “Desire at least, at least touch, between two people now perhaps old or dead” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 35). Gilead first took power by separating women from their husbands and families, for instance, Offred who was separated from her husband Luck and her five years old daughter when they were trying to escape. (55)

Relationships between handmaids, Marthas, wives, and other women are limited; they are not allowed to make friendship because friendship is suspicious. They do not have the right to be involved in any kind of discussions. Even the use of words and phrases are not the same as before. For instance, while handmaids greeting each other or have the right to communicate for a while they should use a specific language;

“The war is going well, I hear,” she say

“Praise be,” I reply

“We've been sent good weather”

“Which I receive with joy”

“They've defeated more of the rebels, since yesterday”

“Praise be,” I say. I don't ask her how she knows, “What were they?”

“Baptists. They had a stronghold in the Blue Hills. They smoked them out”

“Praise be” (16).

In the Republic of Gilead, women are not only deprived of speaking and expressing their own opinions, but even from writing and reading and any means of communication like television, radio, telephones. Because language and communication are powerful features that construct a strong personality; which encourages them to protest and rebel against the regime, all these were reasons why the government made women under control (Nyström 15).

Everything that expresses human freedom is forbidden in Gilead even songs that talk about freedom are no more sung or heard in Gilead, “Such songs are not sung anymore in public, especially the ones that use words like free. They are considered too dangerous” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 37). Music is not allowed in the household even Serena did not have the freedom to listen to her favourite music and if she did, the disc will be secretly played in a low volume (ibid).

Information is another factor that provides women with self-confidence and power. That is why Gilead controls its quantity and quality. And it is forbidden as well since it is a source of self-discovery and truth. Women had the freedom to read only from the bible and the word faith is the only thing that was given to women to read. As Offred stated, “I can spend minutes, tens of minutes, running my eyes over the print: FAITH. It's the only thing they've given me to read” (38); they allowed reading only when it was beneficial for the authority.

One of the absolute truths when a person could come out of the closet is friendship. In real life, it denoted supportive behaviour between people. Friends exhibit loyalty towards each other, engage in mutually helping behaviour. Friendship is nothing more than trust. Hence, an assumption could be made that because of all those reasons friendship was forbidden in Gilead: “It was hard to imagine now, having a friend” (35). Such a feeling could make a person stronger and more self-confident which is absolutely awkward for the state. That is why the handmaids “are not supposed to form friendships, loyalties, among one another” (Jasenaite 34).

Women remained isolated and lonely, which created a lack of exchange and underestimation of their identities,

I feel very unreal, talking to you like this. I feel as if I'm talking to a wall. I wish you'd answer. I feel so alone. All alone by the telephone. Except I can't use the telephone. And if I could, who could I call? Oh God. It's no joke. Oh God oh God. How can I keep on living?  
(Atwood 118)



Exchange is impossible between handmaids or even other women. They learned how to whisper without making sounds or read lips but never talk out loud. They could touch each other only when it was dark. “Our heads flat on the beds, turned sideways, watching each other’s mouths. In this way, we exchanged names, from bed to bed”( *The Handmaid’s Tale* 14), handmaids found ways to exchange secretly even though it was forbidden.

The opportunity for true connection is rare and almost impossible. Offred spends much of her time trying to understand and interpret the body language of those around her, one day Nick winked at her Offred and could not decode the gesture. For Offred Nick is as mysterious “What does he get for it, his role as page boy?” (110), which she could not read or understand, since reading is forbidden. At the same time she could not ask him or talk to him because communication is a sin. Here, certain kinds of scripted gestures and play-acting were used to maintain distance and to evade the general emotional hazards of true intimacy.

One night Offred was in the commander’s office, and she noticed a pen. She put the pen between her fingers; she incredibly felt power, power of words. Offred realized why they prevented women from writing or reading, because words are power. As aunt Lydia once said, “pen is envy” (112). Offred wanted to steal that pen for; she envied the commander for it. She wanted to have that pen instead.

Talking is powerful, that is why women in Gilead were deprived of the right to listening to any accessory talking. Talking is an interchange of thoughts, opinions or information thus it is dangerous for the system. When the handmaids watched such kinds of films they could not hear what the *unwomen* were saying during the scene, but they could hear their screaming whether from pain or pleasure (72). Names and titles are blocked out so the handmaids cannot read what they are about (ibid) Women had no chance to read or discover the truth, and everything was under control.

### 2.4.2. Surveillance and Silence

The English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham designed the word 'Panopticon' which means 'all-seeing eye'; it was the origin of the idea of surveillance (Nyström 6). He applied his idea in prisons, and its purpose was to watch prisoners; even when they are not watched they feel as if they were which avoided problems and bad things to happen in prisons (ibid).

The French philosopher Michel Foucault is one of the most influential sociological thinkers who contributed to the shift of the crime control from direct punishment; being afraid of the physical punishment, to control via surveillance; which meant the fear of being watched while doing something forbidden ("Foucault - Surveillance and Crime Control"). That was the change on how power was exercised in society came from what Foucault called 'sovereign power'; this term was applied during the eighteenth century when the monarch had power and controlled people by frightening them by the harm that could happen to their bodies, to 'disciplinary power' which was applied by the nineteenth century, where the government took power of control by watching and surveillance, which means the instilling of the idea of being watched that lead people to be afraid to do anything bad or wrong (ibid).

Jeremy Bentham expected the Panopticon as a model not only for prisons, but also to be held in schools, hospitals, military and in every level of society. According to Foucault the panopticon's position was not implemented completely in society as Bentham expected (Sheridan 12) otherwise, Foucault considered it (qtd in Sheridan) as "a diagram of mechanism of power in its ideal form" explaining that even though Panopticon did not attain what Bentham aimed, it penetrated into the cultural consciousness (13). That was the case of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* where the new totalitarian regime adopted the Panopticon or Surveillance as a tool of controlling Gilead's citizens especially women in order to keep them obedient and afraid to rebel against the state.

Offred and the other handmaids were not watched only by the high ranking commanders but also by aunts in the Red Centre, Guardians, the Eyes-secret police

even true believer handmaids who spied on each other; watching eyes analysed every single word they said, every step they took and, every single move they made (Edward).

When tourists (Japanese women who wore summer clothes and make-up) visited the historical places in Gilead, they were always accompanied by an interpreter to introduce the touristic spots, but the real aim was to block communication between tourists and the handmaids; since they are eyes (*The Handmaid's Tale*24)

“Most of the interpreters are Eyes, or so it's said” (ibid). These tourists tried to communicate with the handmaids; for them they are only women, they do not know the real truth of the handmaids, but they are warned and afraid to talk. Offred responded only to one question saying that they are very happy, and the interpreter ended the conversation, “I know what he'll be saying, I know the line. He'll be telling them that the women here have different customs, that to stare at them through the lens of a camera is, for them, an experience of violation” (ibid) they made them believe that women are very happy the way they are having their own beliefs.

Gilead authorized some infertile women such as aunts to control and have some power over handmaids but, it's not considered freedom. It is to have all women under total surveillance, physically and psychologically (Hsieh 4) to achieve a certain surveillance women were seized out, brainwashed, punished and re-educated relying on false biblical references (ibid). In addition, to convince them that following the rules as well as religious beliefs is the right way to find faith.

Women were forbidden from making any kind of relations or communication. One day Offred went out and saw Nick outside, she wanted to talk. Yet, it was too risky, so they both avoided looking at each other though nobody was there and no one could see them. Offred remained silent, because, she always felt that she has been all the day-long watched (*The Handmaid's Tale* 166).

### 2.4.3 Influence of Religion in Gilead

If religion deals with faith, belief and trust to reveal the truth, it is absolutely effective in one's life. Religion has a positive effect on people, on their decisions and the way they behave. It deals with peace, happiness and it gives a sense of purpose. Religion makes life easier and better. Yet, it is not always the case in Gilead religion it entirely misused to control people. The use of religion in Gilead turns people's lives to pain; misery, oppression and darkness.

Religion is used in Gilead as an effective method to control society, particularly women. Gilead is a government in which there is no separation between the state and religion, government ruled by theocracy<sup>7</sup>. In Gilead man is more powerful than women. Man is much more valued. Such gender hierarchy is influenced and taken from the bible, the story of Adam and Eve. For, Adam was first created and Eve is only a part of him. God created Eve for Adam's needs. Thus, women are meant to serve men and their job and duty is to bring children as Eve did(*The Handmaid's Tale* 55).

Atwood created Gilead, as a Dystopian society which is based and shaped by religious beliefs as a result of the high level of birth-rate and corruption of the previous society which was the United States of America. Religion and the state are inseparable that is why Gilead became a theocracy (Jafari 388). The name of the state Gilead was the same "where the patriarch Jacob set up his 'heap stones' and established his household" (ibid) which means that even names of places and persons are derived from the bible. The bible plays an important role at naming people in Gilead according to their social role. Commanders are the Guardian of faith. Angels are the eyes of Lord. Martha refers to the sister of Mary who served Jesus. In Gilead, they are old infertile women that have to work in the household. Wives wear blue dresses that

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<sup>7</sup> The term theocracy signifies belief in governance by divine guidance, a form of regime in which religion or faith plays the dominant role. It denotes thus a political unit governed by a deity or by officials thought to be divinely guided. The word theocracy originates from the Greek theokratia. The components of the word are Theos, "god," and kratein, "to rule," hence "rule by god" or "government by god"(Zakai 342)

represent the Virgin Mary, like Mary wives believe that they are granted a child from God through handmaids(Breuer).

Names are not the only references extracted from the Bible. Even language and conversations between handmaids refer to the Bible such as “Blessed be the fruit” or “May the lord open” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 78) such phrases are used to manipulate the whole population, and limit their thought and talk. The goal from manipulation was to avoid questions wrong and what is right. And because communication was freedom and freedom was forbidden. For instance in the Centre of Rachel and Leah, handmaids had to listen to the Beatitudes. However, the words were changed in order to perpetuate the role of the Handmaids. Offred knew that this was not the original passage from the Bible, but she could not look up the original words because reading and writing were prohibited and the Bible was locked away. The Commander was the only person in the household who was allowed to read it:

The Bible is kept locked up, the way people once kept tea locked up, so the servants wouldn't steal it. It is an incendiary device: who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it? We can be read to from it, by him, but we cannot read” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 54).

Offred was aware of the situation she was in. The state prohibits the reading of the Bible, so they could keep using it the way they want without the citizens questioning it or proving it wrongs. They wanted to make sure that the public did not find their lies.

The role of women in Gilead was justified with Biblical references, from the book of Genesis 30; the story of Rachel and her maid Bilhah. When Rachel could bare Jacob no children, she offered him Bilhah and asked him to make her pregnant (qtd in King 70). This was the same job of handmaids bearing children. In the novel, the Handmaids are used for reproductive purposes. Their role relates directly to the story of Rachel and Leah which is found in the Book of Genesis, which says:

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son (qtd in King 70).

This totalitarian society justified this immoral act of 'raping' by spiritual and religious beliefs as having a higher purpose (Jafari 388-389) it appeared in the novel where the commander read some verses from the bible while Offred was kneeling, before they moved to the sexual part where the commander tried to impregnate his handmaid with the presence of his wife (Atwood 54); the same thing to Rachel, Jacob and their maid Bilhah in the bible. Reading from the bible by the commander is necessary since it indicates that he is acting as 'a mediator' between God and the handmaid "as Angel Gabriel was the mediator between God and Virgin Mary, and God's words turned to Jesus Christ inside Mary's body"(Jafari 389).

Gilead added false religious ideas; invented by the authority, in order to serve their goals, the commander locked the bible in a wooden box (Atwood 54) "It is an incendiary device: who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it? We can be read to from it, by him, but we cannot read" (ibid) so that women could not check and discover the truth. Some women including Offred were aware of these rumours, but they had no power or any way to prove it. Women were afraid of talking because they would be severely punished "Blessed are the merciful. Blessed be the meek. Blessed are the silent. I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out, too, but there was no way of checking" (*The Handmaid's Tale*55).

The impulse of these theocratic beliefs in society made its citizens; including women, be true believers and obedient, what facilitated the controlling system for the leaders; they succeeded to maintain the power on women by making the handmaids believing that they are sacrificing their body for God and being blessed for that.

All in all, The Republic of Gilead used the Bible as a method to control society and reach absolute patriarchal supremacy. Through the use of biblical references and religious symbols in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood demonstrated the misuse of religion to achieve ulterior motives in our world today. For Atwood The deep foundation of the US was not the comparatively recent eighteenth century Enlightenment structures of the republic, with their talk of equality and their separation of church and state, but the heavy-handed theocracy of seventeenth century Puritan New England, with its marked bias against women, which would need only the opportunity of a period of social chaos to reassert itself. (*TheGuardian*)

### 2.5. Resistance in the Gilead

Resistance in Gilead was in many places, though handmaids were kept under ideological control, particularly in the Red Centre and where they were always under the aunt's control. Women in Gilead were so oppressed that they could not even think about what was happening to them. They have no chance to survive or think about escaping. While women were incredibly manipulated in Gilead, Offred in some extent was not. After she got used to the patriarchal oppression and the unfair conditions, she finally could analyse the situation and criticize the Gileadean society as well.

Offred could resist the regime differently. First, her attachment to the past; when she started remembering her life before Gilead and compared it to her new oppressive one "I have them, these attacks of the past, like faintness, a wave sweeping over my head" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 36) that was an evidence that she was against the new regime that is why she had these flashbacks; she could not forget the past and just accept her reality of being a child bearing machine for the commander.

Moreover, Offred maintained her power through narration; she could escape oppression, created her own secret world where she could talk to herself and recall the memories. She showed her resistance again through narration, to tell her story from the past to present. (Hsieh 2) even though she looked silent, weak and submissive, but in her mind she was totally the opposite in her imagination and with her words speaking

to herself, Offred used the language of the pre-Gilead which was forbidden in society what made her feel strong (Hsieh 1).

Besides being aware and conscious, Offred resisted control in Gilead by narrating her past and current situation. She was being a storyteller in her mind. For, writing was forbidden. Handmaids could not talk or share their thoughts, for Offred telling stories was a way to get back power and identity. She after thought saying “I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance. If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending” Said Offred (*The Handmaid's Tale*30), Offred tried to prove her existence through her narration.

After living three days in the household, Offred could discover that another Offred was there in her room. She decided to explore the room since she has too much time to waste, doing nothing but surrounded by empty walls(*The Handmaid's Tale* 35) Offred was also wondering whether she could be in a hotel room again with her husband Luke or not; because in such rooms Offred used to feel free and happy (ibid). Offred kept remembering her past, for her past is much better than the present. She was totally independent. By recalling her memories Offred felt strong again and hopeful that such situation would not last forever. She always imagined herself in her previous lifestyle with different clothes and different colors, because imagination made her breath. Offred enjoyed the way she was exploring her room. She decided not to do it in hurry but taking her time and examining the smallest details till she finds a “tiny writing” in the low part of the floor in her room “*Nolite te bastardes carborun dorum*” (36) which she later realizes that it is Latin means “Don't let the bastards grind you down” (113), she was sad and happy at the same time; sad because she did not know what happened to that poor girl and happy because she succeeded to transfer her message to the next woman, that encouraged Offred to keep her hope.

Through her narration, Offred showed hope about the future and to be free again, and to do things they used to before without limitations. For example when she said “As long as we do this, butter our skin to keep it soft, we can believe that we will someday get out, that we will be touched again, in love or desire. We have ceremonies



of our own, private ones” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 60). Thus, she wanted to break the routine as well as rules by telling stories everyday but only in her head pretending that Luke could hear her though she knew he could not. But at least it made her feel good, and she could feel his company though (30).

Offred’s mother is also a source of resistance; she has been mentioned through her narration several times. Her mother exists only in her flashbacks, and she has no idea where she is. She thought that she was dead till her friend Moira told her that she saw her in the *unwomen* documentary (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 150). Offred concern was to gain back her identity and that what she is doing by remembering her mother who was a strong feminist and model of a healthy woman, (151). Offred admires her mother’s energy and optimism, and she was trying to do the same under severe conditions. Offred’s mother whose name is not mentioned in the novel was single mother, a hard worker and taking part of in feminist get-together. Offred felt her liberty through her mother’s word though she wouldn’t to be the carnation of her ideas (74) yet, she still admires her abilities and strength.

Offred was amazed by her mother’s word and the way she thought and behaved freely. She once told her that bearing her at the age of thirty-seven was a risk, but she was a wanted child (73). Offred realized that her mother suffered a lot to bring her to life; she loved the way she suffered and struggled for her. For she could be deformed or dead, but her mother’s reaction was like “Garbage, I told them, biologically I'm twenty-two, I could run rings around you any day. I could have triplets and walk out of here while you were still trying to get up off the bed” (ibid). Offred’s mother was a unique, strong and independent woman. She never dyed her hair because she found it useless and fake, “Why pretend, she'd say. Anyway what do I need it for, I don't want a man around, what use are they except for ten seconds' worth of half babies. A man is just a woman's strategy for making other women” (ibid). She meant that men cannot take responsibility; it was always the mother who had to look after her children. Since men are useless for her she could take Offred’s responsibility and rely on herself. Without forgetting her funny critics to Luke, each time Offred remembers it a smile can be drowned in her sad face. Her mother was attacking Luke

and criticizing men in front of him, and she was usually calling him “Chauvinist pig” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 73).

Offred had confused feelings about her mother she was admiring her at the same time disagree with her,

I admired my mother in some ways, although things between us were never easy. She expected too much from me, I felt. She expected me to vindicate her life for her, and the choices she'd made. I didn't want to live my life on her terms. I didn't want to be the model offspring, the incarnation of her ideas. We used to fight about that. I am not your justification for existence, I said to her once. I want her back. I want everything back, the way it was. But there is no point to it, this wanting; (*The Handmaid’s Tale*74)

Offred and her best friend Moira met again in the Red Centre, after being separated when the new regime appeared. Offred used to take courage from Moira, she was strong and courageous “Don't think that way, Moira would say. Think that way and you'll make it happen” (46), Moira and Offred used to meet in washroom while they were at the Red Centre; they felt safer being together there (53). Moira is Offred’s friend from college days, she is a strong feminist and a model for other handmaids because she tried many times to escape from the Red Centre; the first time the secret police brought her back to the red centre after punishing her (57), the second time she tried to escape, and they caught her again they sent her to *Jezebels’* to work as a prostitute. Moira wants to break the rules and get rid of aunt Lydia and her silly words (55). She was aware of her lies and false ideology. She couldn’t be manipulated or brainwashed. Though in Jezebel Moira was under control again, she thought that enjoying sexual freedom was a sort of freedom for her (154).

Offred could be considered as an exception or a hero, for she is strong enough to create her own free world within a totalitarian regime. Although writing is forbidden in Gilead, but that law could not prevent Offred from having her little secret freedom. Though it was hard to recognize all these things, yet she could not move a finger; the

things that the other handmaids could not do. Offred could fight her open scars, broken heart and cracked trust. She believed that she had the right to be free, free to think, free to be herself, and free to think about being free. Though, it sounds impossible and silly, though she already lost hope before; yet, she could not fight her weakness and be critical and smart.

Offred discovers that the female body is sorely manipulated where women's sexuality is restricted, she also finds out their bodies are being exploited to a certain extent what puts their femininity under a severe control. Offred's critical thinking allowed her to analyze and notice all the weaknesses of the most powerful women in Gilead, 'Serena Joy'. Offred could easily compare Serena's eloquence before and her perplexed silence. As she recalls,

She wasn't singing anymore by I then, she was making speeches. She was good at it. Her speeches were about the sanctity of the home, about how women should stay home. Serena Joy didn't do this herself, she made speeches instead, but she presented this failure of hers as a sacrifice she was limiting for the good of all (*The Handmaid's Tale* 32).

Offred is aware that Serena has no power to act free as she thought. Though she has the ability to oppress handmaids, she has no ability to and no way to escape or deny the oppression of the patriarchal system in Gilead. Offred shows strongly her resistance through her sharp observation and critics to Serena's situation. Now Offred could feel the power inside, for she is plainly aware of the Gileadean ideology and lies and also, through her sarcasm over Serena's past life and her current situation. "Serena Joy, what a stupid name. It is like something you'd put on your hair, in the other time, the time before, to straighten it." (32) Offred mentioned through her narration that Serena Joy is not her real name, but her name was Pain, and she used to read that on magazines. (ibid).

Offred still remembered that she was once able to read, she felt somehow sorry for Serena, at the same time making fun of her. Because, there is no difference between her and the handmaids, they are all controlled and forced to submit to the Gileadean rules. It seems that Offred is admiring the way Serena is hiding her pain,

longing to freedom, pretending strength and happiness. She says that “she was good at it” while analyzing Serena’s persona, Offred considered Serena as a strong oppressed woman(*The Handmaid’s Tale* 32). Though silence means weakness for Offred, Serena’s silence and pretend to represent power and resistance.

Offred’s resistance appeared when she kept meeting Nick secretly behind Serena Joy(Blakemore); when she set up their first meeting in order to be impregnated by Nick. From this we understand also that even Serena Joy was desperate from this law, which is why she secretly broke it. Moreover, the commander also broke the law when he invited Offred secretly in his desk many nights they allowed he to read from magazines and speak freely the even played Scrabble “Like an old married couple” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 93). What encouraged her clinging to her hopes to become free one day and do all these things freely without being afraid to be caught.

### 2.5.1 “Mayday” Provenance of Resistance

Mayday is a secret movement formed by a group of unknown people that spread spies in the Republic of Gilead in order to destroy this oppressive totalitarian government. Mayday came from a French word “*m’aidez*” that means help me, it was used before in plains for pilots when a bad thing happens (31). Ofglen the handmaid partner of Offred was a member of this movement; she tried many times to know indirectly if Offred is a member in it by using ‘passwords’ “It’s a beautiful May day, Ofglen says. I feel rather than see her head turn towards me, waiting for a reply” (31) May Day was the password used between these rebels to recognize each other.

Offred is very happy to know about Ofglen, that she was not a true believer and, that there was hope to know news about her husband, daughter and mother even about Moira from her because she did not have any news about her when she escaped the second time till they met at the end in Jezebel (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 102). Offred did not help that much Ofglen to gather information about her commander, she was afraid she gets caught, while Ofglen was courageous enough to attack a man accused of rape and killed him, and later explains to Offred who was horrified, that the man was no rapist but a member of Mayday, and that she had knocked him out to relieve

torture for him before he would be killed by the Eyes having the attention also to protect her movement so that they could not take information from that man by torturing him (164). Soon after that accident, Ofglen disappeared and Offred did not know anything about her, she was replaced by another handmaid who had her name “the new Ofglen” (166). Offred was confused how to act with the new Ofglen, and she tried to test her whether she was a true believer or not, what made her use the same way her friend Ofglen used with her “*password*”

I've only known her since May, I say. I can feel my skin growing hot, my heart speeding up... Around the first of May I think it was. What they used to call May Day. Did they? She says, light, indifferent, menacing. That isn't a term I remember. I'm surprised you do. You ought to make an effort... She pauses. To clear your mind of such [...] She pauses again. Echoes. Now I feel cold, seeping over my skin like water. What she is doing is warning me (167).

What Offred tried to do is to know whether the new Ofglen was a true believer or another member of the Mayday, but what she found that even though she wasn't a member of the movement, she knew about it and warned Offred what terrified her more.

### 2.5.2 The Female Body “Another kind of Resistance”

The system in Gilead is interested on women and especially their bodies. They do not actually care about what women think or who they are. Offred becomes ashamed of her body because they make her believe that her body was what determined her; what made her call her body “a thing” or “it” (159), “I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 42).

This dissatisfaction about herself (separation of her body and self) makes her remember how her life became a disaster; especially when she thinks about her

separation of her daughter; husband and people she loved. She found herself in an oppressive society to prove her power and identity. In addition, the female body turned to be an “object of desire” and women’s interest now is proving their fertility by bearing babies so that they survive (Hsieh 11). When Offred realized that her body is a site of power since body is what matters the most in Gilead, the government tried to keep handmaids healthy by feeding them and giving them time to rest and relax. So that when they get impregnated they bear healthy children for them. Offred described that saying

A baked potato, green beans, salad. Canned pears for dessert. It's good enough food, though bland. Healthy food. You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel. No coffee or tea though, no alcohol. Studies have been done (*The Handmaid's Tale* 43).

Offred recalls being uncomfortable when being watched by the commander in his study room (111). While she was reading from the magazine he gave her, he was staring at her “This watching is a curiously sexual act, and I feel undressed while he does it” (ibid). This shows strongly that the body appears to be a site for their interests. Over and above, when the commander attempted to break the rules and enjoy his desires; which were forbidden, he took Offred to Jezebel’s. He used her body to show off (Hsieh 12). Nevertheless, Offred enjoyed being watched, because sometimes she used her body to seduce him (ibid), that is whenever she felt weak she used her body to re-take power because she knew it was a source of power.

After being weak and confused, Offred started using her body in order to feel that she still existed, and she still had power especially on men,

As we walk away I know they're watching, these two men who aren't yet permitted to touch women. They touch with their eyes instead and I move my hips a little, feeling the full red skirt sway around me. It's like thumbing your nose from behind a fence or teasing a dog with a bone held out of reach I enjoy the power; power of a dog bone, passive but there (The Handmaid's Tale 19).

She was even teasing the commander's wife Serena Joy since she was the one who is taking her role of holding her husband's child "Also: I now had power over her, of a kind, although she did not, know it. And I enjoyed that. Why pretend? I enjoyed it a lot" (98). Offred enjoyed the way she was provoking Serena, that made her feel good and funny.

### 2.6 Conclusion

It is commonly agreed that a woman's body is a source of fertility in Gilead that considers the mission of child bearing as a spiritual sacrifice. However, this manipulation could not be believed by all women, even though some of them were true believers, so manipulated that they did not question the government with the new oppressive regime. They just accepted their new life and conditions in the Republic of Gilead. In the meanwhile others were against and showed their resistance through different ways like Offred and her friend Moira as well as Ofglen.

Offred decided to use her body as a tool of resistance though she knew it is fake and wrong, but at least she could feel free to some extent by creating her own world where she could think, tell her story and be the leader of that world. It can be said that no matter the pain women can feel, and no matter how unfair society is, women can still be manipulated since they are considered as the weak sex. They can be also exploited through their bodies, which are said to be determining them in some societies finally yet importantly, women have always had the strength to express themselves, with nothing of the power to hinder them from exhibiting their notions. They proved themselves as they have always been, strong and powerful, a sex of might

## CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN AND RESISTANCE IN GILEAD

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in the face of hardships and intricacies of societies that could sometimes be considered as patriarchal or unjust in general.



# General Conclusion

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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It could be taken for fact that literature is not only a mirror to reflect the reality, but a hammer to shape it. It undoubtedly provides people with a rich knowledge about life, social and cultural issues as other parts of the world which some may never be able to visit. Trying to unveil all opacities explicitly through the use of words, i.e. Literature gave a strong voice to the words to be heard.

Literature helps readers and writers to answer some paradoxical queries, to display their ideas, critics and provide solutions for the premeditated issues, whether it is fictitious or real. Literature paved the way to those words that are left unspoken, uncover all what is buried under false ideologies; It focuses more on the issues that feels crucial to be dealt with, illuminates all what is ambiguous and hard to be understood, as it can bring readers a successful comprehension to existence.

*The Handmaid's Tale* is considered as one of the best literary works able to interpret some aspects of life as those of women. As to what has been discussed beforehand, one could effortlessly recognize that *The Handmaid's Tale* is deemed to be a feminist work since it mirrors all aspect of women, their lust for freedom and their revolt against inequality. That was portrayed through some female characters who strongly showed their rebellion against the totalitarian regime in the so-called Gilead. The novel itself raised many questions about the role, status and the malicious treatment men imposed on women in a virile Gilead.

On one hand, Atwood undeniably raised many feminist issues, once she depicted a community where men are the centre and women are Others. That is, men had all the power to rule society while women were subservient in every manner. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood took the notion of feminism much further by depicting again Offred's mother as a strong feminist who stood against women's violence and abuse. On the other hand the depiction of Moira (Offred's friend) as another feminist who rejected the feminine role and patriarchy. Moira could escape the Red Centre for, she did not accept the treatment, subjection and oppression as well, which contributes in building the feminist aspect of the novel, though unintentionally. Moira used to be optimistic about her future and freedom, she is a good example of strong rebellious

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woman who used to push and encourage Offred to be strong and never give her personal life.

Last and not least, the title was carefully chosen by Atwood along with her feminist tendencies. The novel is entitled *The Handmaid's Tale*, for the novel focused on one individual, 'Offred', who was mentioned in seven chapters called where she used to call her memories and tell her life story. She is to be viewed as an individual female, important person who acknowledged her personal identity. It is conceivable that Atwood referred to many feminist as well as themes to convey her point of view about what women suffered and what they could suffer recently such as, oppression, inequality, weakness, torture, crisis of identity and loss of individualism through the events taking place in the novel.

By the same token, female resistance and empowerment were successfully mirrored in the novel. Though the Gileadean society adopted a totalitarian regime that used to oppress and abuse women, some women could act against the grain and get rid of false ideologies that used to be a tool to manipulate women in Gilead. The protagonist, "Offred" was among those who could fearlessly show their rebellion in a virile society. Reading and writing was forbidden in Gilead, yet, these restricted rules could not stop Offred from expressing her thoughts, feelings, mockery, and anger. She escaped the spitefulness of Gilead through narration; she illuminated the darkness inside her heart by telling her story. The use of narration made Offred happy, strong and freed in a Dystopian, unjust, male society. Moreover, the use of flashbacks by Atwood was not aimless; flashbacks represented power and freedom, for Offred by recalling memories those of her husband, daughter, mother and friends.

After Offred's awareness that Gilead ultimately prevented all women from their sexual freedom, but treating them as reproductive machines, she dared to use her body differently. First by having a secret affair with Nick where she could enjoy her time and feel free. Then; provoking the commander after she discovered his weakness; she smartly used her attractive body to manipulate him and finally making him break rules successfully. Affecting and manipulating the commander undeniably represented for the protagonist strength and triumph. Moreover, Offred showed her resistance by

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being a member in a secret organization called The May Day which attempted to destroy the totalitarian regime and get back their individual freedom. Accordingly, Atwood succeeded again in revealing women's capacities that could liberate them from the abuse, grief, and torture.

It may happen that some readers, critics and writers could see the novel as an anti-religion work, but the fact is Religion is one of the main themes in the novel since Gilead was based, shaped and ruled by religious references. Everything was related to religious words, names, places and even the ceremony they used to force women to get involved in were derived from the Bible. Atwood did not tend to distort religion as she was not anti-religious. However, she was against the misuse, of religion to manipulate women and fulfill their needs as well. Gilead used false references from the bible since no one could have access to it only the high ranking people like commanders; to justify their cruel treatments toward women.

By all odds, *The Handmaid's Tale* is said to be a futuristic novel since the events can be relevant to the present time, particularly America. Predicting the future is merely impossible, yet Atwood pictured many unforeseen issues and events what made people think she could predict the future, named her a *prophet!* The novel can be to some extent depicted as a futuristic work according to what has become of America after the Trump election. Atwood dealt with all forms of oppression that women suffered from at that time, and as they already suffered from that cruelty, there is no guarantee it will not happen again. Thus, in a way or another, Atwood could predict what can happen to women in the future even she is not aware of it, through the novel and the events she attempted to make women aware of inequality, oppression, patriarchy and what could happen in the future since men will always be the super power which leads the world.

Finally, Atwood claimed that the novel is neither a feminist work nor a futuristic one. She proclaimed that she is not against men and the novel was only a description to a possible totalitarian regime. But, after showing the extent to which Orwell's *1984* influenced her, few more aspects can be observed about the

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novel. Atwood mentioned all the themes that were tackled by Orwell, however she focused more on the status of women unlike Orwell who neglected the female side. As a result, it may happen that Margaret Atwood is not aware she is influenced by the feminist ideology as a woman writer, which makes her novel an exceedingly feminist, futurist, Dystopian novel.

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