



**THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND THE CONCEPT OF
MOTHERHOOD IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE***

(Yüksek Lisans Tezi)

CANSEL KEDERLİ

Kütahya-2022

T.C
KÜTAHYA DUMLUPINAR ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

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Kütahya - 2022

Kabul ve Onay

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27.06.2022

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Özgeçmiş

Cansel KEDERLİ, 2014 yılında Şehit Jandarma Er Selim Koçdemir Lisesi'nden, 2019 yılında Kütahya Dumlupınar Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü'nden mezun oldu. Mezun olduğu yıl aynı bölümde Yüksek Lisans eğitimine başladı. Avrupa Birliği tarafından organize edilen Comenius Hayat Boyu Öğrenme Programı'nda 3 yıl aktif olarak görev aldı. Araştırmacının Kütahya Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü bünyesinde yayınlanan Eko-Eleştiri ve İklim Kurgu konuları üzerine yazılmış bir sempozyum bildirisi bulunmaktadır.

ÖZET

MARGARET ATWOOD'UN *DAMIZLIK KIZIN ÖYKÜSÜ* ADLI ESERİNDE KADIN SÖMÜRÜSÜ VE ANNELİK KAVRAMI

KEDERLİ, Cansel

Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ali BELENLİ

Mayıs, 2022, 88 sayfa

Bireyler veya yönetimde söz sahibi olan kurumlar kontrolsüz bir güce sahip olduklarında bu gücü sömürmeye yatkınlardır. İnsanoğlu yaradılışı gereği kendi bulunduğu sosyal konumun altında olanları çıkarları doğrultusunda kullanmaya meyillidir. Bu sömürüye maruz kalanlar çoğu zaman toplum tarafından aşağı görülen kadın bireyler olmuştur. Bu tez de, Margaret Atwood tarafından yazılan *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü* adlı eserde kişisel özgürlükleri ortadan kaldırarak kontrolsüz bir güç elde eden Gilead rejiminin kadın tebaasını kendi çıkarları doğrultusunda nasıl sömürdüğüne odaklanmaktadır. Bahsi geçen sömürü kavramı romanda karşımıza fiziksel, cinsel, ve psikolojik sömürü olarak çıkacaktır. Gilead, demokrasiyi bertaraf ederek, kişisel özgürlüklerin hiçe sayıldığı teokratik, totaliter ve tamamiyle üreme odaklı sömürücü bir yönetim düzeni yaratmıştır. Üreme odaklı yeni yönetim düzeninin yıkıcı politikalarından alt sınıf mensubu herkes nasibini alsa da sömürüye en fazla maruz kalanlar doğurgan olan kadınlardır. Gilead rejiminin yarattığı yeni sistem, doğurgan kadınların elit kesime taşıyıcı anne olarak hizmet etmesiyle toplumsal nüfus sorunun çözülmesine olanak sağlanacağı düşüncesiyle hareket etmektedir. Anneliğe ulaşma sürecinin bu sürece dahil olan her taraf için oldukça acı verici olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Bu nedenle, Gilead'ın temellerini oluşturan üreme odaklı sistemin incelemesi, kadınların maruz kaldığı fiziksel, cinsel ve psikolojik sömürünün Gilead'ın kadınlarının halet-i ruhiyesine nasıl zarar verdiğini anlamaya yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Margaret Atwood, *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*, Distopya, Sömürü, Annelik, Taşıyıcı Annelik

ABSTRACT**THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND THE CONCEPT OF
MOTHERHOOD IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*****KEDERLİ, Cansel****Master Thesis, Department of English Language and Literature****Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Ali BELENLİ****May 2022, 88 pages**

When the individual or institution that has an influence on administration possesses an uncontrolled power, they are prone to exploit it. By their nature, human beings are inclined to manipulate those who are inferior to them considering their social status. The victims of such exploitations have often been women who are seen as inferior by society. This study focuses on how the regime of Gilead, which gained power by eliminating democracy and personal freedom, exploits its female subjects for its best interest. The concept of exploitation in question appears in the novel as physical, sexual, and psychological. By ruling democracy out, Gilead creates a theocratic totalitarian state which centers around both reproduction and exploitation. In this new reproduction-centered state, even though each subject from the lower classes is exploited in many ways, the ones who are exploited the most are fertile female assets of Gilead. Gilead's reproduction system operates with the idea of fertile women being the surrogate mothers for the elites of Gilead, thus, the population problem will be resolved. The process of reaching motherhood is painful for each party that is involved. Therefore, the analysis of the reproduction-centered system that forms the basis of Gilead will help to realize how physical, sexual, and psychological exploitation damages the state of mind of female assets of Gilead.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale, Dystopia, Exploitation, Motherhood, Surrogacy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Asst. Prof. Dr. Ali BELENLİ, for giving me his unconditional support and providing invaluable guidance throughout my thesis. His vision, sincerity, and enthusiasm have deeply inspired me. I would like to express my special thanks to Asst. Prof. Dr. Pelin KUT BELENLİ, for inspiring and encouraging me to pursue my graduate degree. Her love for literature is contagious.

I would like to thank the members of my thesis jury Asst. Prof. Dr. Işıl ÖTEYAKA, for her insightful comments that helped me widen my research and Asst. Prof. Dr. Anı SEV ATEŞ, for her precious support and invaluable recommendations. Her course Utopia and Dystopia in Literature encouraged me to choose this field of study.

I am forever indebted to my professors at Dumlupınar University English Language and Literature Department, Prof.Dr. Ayhan KAHRAMAN, Lect. Fatih AKDENİZ and Lect. Mehmet Can YILMAZ, for the support I have received during these years.

I wish to express my love and gratitude to my beloved parents, Aysel KEDERLİ and Abdi KEDERLİ, for their unconditional love and invaluable support throughout my life. I always knew that you believed in me and wanted the best for me. I would also like to thank my beloved sister and part-time mentor Özlem ÖSTERMAN, for helping me with every single question and believing in me when I doubted myself. I would like to give special thanks to my brother-in-law Mathias ÖSTERMAN, for his guidance and support throughout my research. He is the best grammatikpolisen I have ever seen. I also wish to express my deep and sincere gratitude to Melike TALAY KİPER and her family for their invaluable support, generosity, and hospitality during these years. Last but not least, my heartfelt appreciation goes to my dear friend Serap GÜRSER BOZDOĞAN; Thank you for being there to comfort me and support me whenever I needed it. I wish you a prosperous life.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents; without their encouragement, never-ending patience, and love, this work would have never been possible.

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THESIS TEXT

INTRODUCTION

The notions of power and exploitation exist in unity and are often directly proportional to each other. Exploitation draws its strength from the notion of power. As the power possessed by the individuals or institutions increases over others, exploitation increases as well. As Otto Van Bismarck once said, it is the destiny of the weak to be devoured by the strong. Regardless of their status in society, every entity tends to exploit others when it seizes power since having such power over others corrupts the state which leads to an exploitative form of ruling. The most reoccurring example of this is the exploitation of women by men. As a result of this corrupted handling of power, unprivileged subjects of the state suffer the most, mostly women. Throughout the history of humanity, women are mostly associated with meekness, and vulnerability and are regarded as the weak link in the chain. These associations have always caused women to be perceived as disposable and open to exploitation. Since literature is always influenced by life itself such examples began to appear in literature as well as in the real world. Margaret Atwood's dystopian fiction novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, is a perfect example of this influence considering its main theme.

This study focuses on how the female subjects of the state are affected by the democratic order's replacement with the theocratic totalitarian regime, furthermore the appliance of class and gender hierarchies and their consequences on women's perception and social status. Also, a thematic approach to the text will be conducted by analyzing the concept of exploitation. However, before dealing with the exploitation of women in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the terms 'utopia' and 'dystopia' must be discussed first. The term 'utopia' was coined by Sir Thomas More in his notable work *Utopia* which was published in 1516. The word utopia simply means no place. Jennifer Morrish claims that:

More coined the word, 'Utopia,' from two Greek roots: ou-['not'] and topos [= 'place']. Thus 'Utopia' means 'Not Place' or 'No Place'. The evidence in support of this definition rather than a derivation from the Greek roots eu-['happy'] and topos [= 'place'] occurs in the correspondence between More and Erasmus where, as P.S Allen noted, mention is made several times of 'Nusquama nostra' when Utopia is meant; for example, in the well-known letter[...] he wrote: 'NVSQVAMAM nostram nusquam bene scriptam ad te mitto.'¹ 'Utopia' is thus the neo-Greek equivalent of the neo-Latin, 'Nusquama', derived from the adverb, 'nusquam', 'no where'. (Morrish, 2001, p.120)

¹ In a letter to Erasmus dated 3 September 1516, Thomas More wrote: 'I am sending you my "Nowhere", which is nowhere well written' (Parrish, 1997, p.493).

Utopias are often regarded as non-existent happy places since they contain an imaginatively optimistic way of life. Utopias offer an ideal community where the state provides freedom of speech and glorifies individuality. The term is often associated with ‘good’, ‘perfection’, and ‘ideal’, however, an exaggeration is embedded in its associations as well. Since they present perfect state policies that provide equality in the social order, utopias may be interpreted as a critique of existing states and policies. Utopias mirror the desire to formulate a perfect society in real life. Therefore, it might be stated that utopias demonstrate the improved version of the current socio-political order considering the fact that Thomas More’s *Utopia* was also a socio-political satire. Vieira claims that as a literary genre, one of the main features of utopia is “its relationship with reality. Utopists depart from the observation of the society they live in, note down the aspects that need to be changed and imagine a place where those problems have been solved” (Vieira, 2010, p.8). Mostly, the society in utopias is a reversed version of society in reality. However, it should not be considered as:

[A] feeble echo of the real world; utopias are by essence dynamic, and in spite of the fact that they are born out of a given set of circumstances, their scope of action is not limited to a criticism of the present; indeed, utopias put forward projective ideas that are to be adopted by future audiences, which may cause real changes. (Vieira, 2010, p.16)

Utopian societies can be considered as instructive tools which might help improve the current socio-political order in the real world.

After discussing the term ‘utopia’, it is necessary to comprehend the meaning of the contradictory term ‘dystopia’, which serves as utopia’s antonym. As it is mentioned above, the term utopia is associated with words that have positive meanings. Unlike utopia, the term dystopia has negative associations. It is believed that the term dystopia was first used by John Stuart Mill in 1868:

[I]n a parliamentary speech in which John Stuart Mill tried to find a name for a perspective which was opposite to that of utopia: if utopia was commonly seen as ‘too good to be practicable’, then dystopia was ‘too bad to be practicable’. In that speech, Mill used the word dystopia as synonymous with cacotopia, a neologism that had been invented by Jeremy Bentham; and the two words have in fact a similar etymology and intention: dys comes from the Greek dus, and means bad, abnormal, diseased; caco comes from the Greek kako, which is used to refer to something which is unpleasant or incorrect. (Vieira, 2010, p.16)

In dystopian universes, the society deals with oppression, inequality in government policies and social order, constant surveillance, and state propaganda. The oppressor often divides society into classes hierarchically regarding religion, race, or gender. The regime

would desire to keep its citizens under control constantly. In order to achieve this, the oppressor uses the elements of fear.

Beginning with Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *We*, which echoes in many works related to the genre, dystopian fiction novels mostly present futuristic states where a new form of government prohibits individual freedom and freedom of thought. The society that is presented in dystopian fiction works is often under constant surveillance and also a hierarchic distribution of power is observed. The entire system works to benefit the entity placed at the top of the social pyramid. Moreover, the operating system of the state in dystopias is usually based on the exploitation of its subjects. Such examples can be found in works such as *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, *1984* by George Orwell, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. The common theme for the listed books above are:

[T]he quasi-omnipotence of a monolithic, totalitarian state demanding and normally exacting complete obedience from its citizens, challenged occasionally but usually ineffectually by vestigial individualism or systemic flaws, and relying upon scientific and technological advances to ensure social control. (Claeys, 2010, p.109)

Similar to the classics of the genre of dystopian fiction, Atwood's novel offers the same totalitarian state that demands obedience from its subjects. Atwood sets *The Handmaid's Tale* in the near future where the government of the United States of America was overthrown by a group of terrorists who call themselves the Sons of Jacob. They abolish democracy and form a totalitarian government under the name of the Republic of Gilead. After its take over, Gilead begins to confiscate the property of women and prohibits them from working. Furthermore, they divide society into classes according to their gender, and biological abilities. In Gilead's caste system, men, specifically the Commanders are placed at the top. They are responsible for governing Gilead. The Wives are placed below the Commanders as the highest-ranking women. Below the Commanders, the Eyes, the secret police forces of Gilead, are placed. The Eyes operate to catch any disobedience or crimes committed against Gilead's ideologies. The Aunts who are responsible for training and monitoring the Handmaids are placed just below the Wives. The Handmaids' place is below the Aunts and above the Marthas who occupy the bottom of the social pyramid of the Republic of Gilead. While the Handmaids are responsible to bear children for the elites of Gilead, the Marthas serve as the housekeepers, responsible for any kind of domestic work. The last two groups that are also a part of the social structure are Econowives, wives of poorer men who belong to the working class, and Jezebels which

contains the women who work as prostitutes to provide sexual pleasure to the highest-ranking men.

Preventing women from working is not the only prohibition that the Sons of Jacob introduced after their take-over. Reading, writing, or possessing any reading materials are also forbidden. The dimensions of this prohibition are so far stretched that even the writings on the market signs are erased. Pictorial representations are preferred in such places. In order to alienate the Handmaids from the sense of self and destroy individuality, the re-naming process is applied. Gilead bans the Handmaids from using their real names and assigns them new ones derived from the names of their appointed Commanders; ‘Of-Fred’, ‘Of-Warren’, ‘Of-Glen’. Moreover, Gilead uses various methods of violence focused on the physical and psychological exploitation of the Handmaids. Such examples of physical and psychological exploitation are embedded in the very essence of the training that is received at the Red Centre and the insemination ceremony that is organized monthly.

The narrator of the book, Offred, whose real name was never mentioned, tells her story through flashbacks. She informs the reader that she is a Handmaid on her third posting at the house of Commander Fred and his wife Serena Joy. By using flashbacks, Offred shares her observations and informs the reader about the vile practices of Gilead. At the end of the novel, it is revealed to the reader the story was “transcribed from cassette recordings of Offred’s voice”(Atwood, 2016, p.487) and discussed at a symposium on Gileadean Studies at The University of Denay, Nunavit² in 2195. What happens to Offred at the end of her cassette recordings is never revealed to the reader.

Margaret Atwood wrote her iconic novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* when she was living in West Berlin “which was still encircled by the Berlin Wall” (Atwood, 2017) and the Soviet Empire was still in power. Considering the political environment that she lived in at the time when she wrote the novel, the resemblance between the governing ideologies of Gilead and some political ideologies that Atwood witnessed firsthand in real life is uncanny. The author comments on the influences she had while she was writing as follows:

² Atwood’s pun for ‘Deny none of it’.

Every Sunday the East German Air Force made sonic booms to remind us of how close they were. During my visits to several countries behind the Iron Curtain — Czechoslovakia, East Germany - I experienced the wariness, the feeling of being spied on, the silences, the changes of subject, the oblique ways in which people might convey information, and these had an influence on what I was writing. (Atwood, 2017)

The totalitarian state of Gilead, in many ways, resembles Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union considering its eugenic practices, constant surveillance, permitting no individual freedom, the existence of only white Handmaids, and the desire for having healthy white babies in order to form a perfect society.

The real-life totalitarian states highly influenced Atwood when she was writing. Totalitarianism embraces the “form of government that theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of individual life to the authority of the state” (Britannica). These governments gain power from surveillance and fear, most of the time strengthened by religious doctrines. They divide society by bringing a class system and embracing mostly sexist and racist ideologies. Atwood’s totalitarian state is also a theocracy operated by religious extremists the Sons of Jacob. Although examples of religious extremism are to be found in many places in the world, Atwood chose to set the novel in New England, United States, precisely in Cambridge, Massachusetts, due to New England’s puritan background. The author herself explains why she decided to set the book in Cambridge as follows: “You often hear in North America, ‘It can’t happen here,’ but it happened quite early on. The Puritans banished people who didn’t agree with them, so we would be rather smug to assume that the seeds are not there. That’s why I set the book in Cambridge” (McCarthy, 1986). As a graduate student, the author studied Puritan New England, as well as the history of utopias and dystopias. As the author herself mentions: “It was clear to me that America had not always been a democracy: it had started as a theocracy – a country governed by religion” (Atwood, 2016, p.483). *The Handmaid’s Tale* employs many elements from Puritanism. Therefore, it can be claimed that Atwood was highly influenced by Puritan practices and used many of them while forming Gilead’s governing ideologies. Many of Gilead’s practices:

[E]specially its attitudes to women as the inferior sex, are reminiscent of the Puritans. For example, Anne K. Kaler writes that New England Puritan women were assigned names like ‘Silence, Fear, Patience, Prudence, Mindwell, Comfort, Hopeskill and Be Fruitful’ so as to be ‘reminded ... of their feminine destiny’, and they were not allowed to use combs or mirrors or wear anything but plain and functional clothing. (Historical Context, 2017)

In many ways, Gilead adapts puritan traditions such as forcing women to wear simple and unpretentious clothes, regarding the female sex as inferior and associating meekness with women. Considering Gilead's discourse, the idea of women being the meek is even embedded in the essence of women's speech as Aunts at Red Centre constantly state to the Handmaids that the "blessed are the meek" (Atwood, 2016, p.100).

As being a work of dystopian speculative fiction, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* also recalls George Orwell's *1984*, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The books listed above, as mentioned before, display surveillance, state propaganda, and elements of sexism in their plots. Considering their dates of publishing, these works can be labeled as the canonical works of dystopian fiction, and the predecessors of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Perhaps, Atwood might be hinting at George Orwell's Big Brother by placing Eyes of the God, also known as The Eyes, who are responsible for the surveillance in Gilead. Atwood herself states that:

[W]hen I wrote The Handmaid's Tale over thirty years ago, dystopias – apart from stories set on other planets – were not much in evidence. But the form fascinated me. I'd grown up in the 1950s reading Orwell's 1984, Huxley's Brave New World, and Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451, to name a few. (Atwood, 2016, p.482)

In her novel, Atwood presents a dystopic state that centers around reproduction, which also contains a hierarchal form of society and elements of surveillance and state propaganda. However, unlike the canonical works of dystopian fiction, the main theme of *The Handmaid's Tale* is the exploitation of women which is also the main concern of this thesis.

The author defines her book as a work of speculative fiction³ which is a term coined by Robert Heinlein. (Oziewicz, 2017, p.3) This genre is defined as "a literary 'super genre,' which encompasses a number of different genres of fiction, each with speculative elements that are based on conjecture and do not exist in the real world. Sometimes called 'what-if' books, speculative literature changes the laws of what's real or possible as we know them in our current society, and then speculates on the outcome" (MasterClass, 2021). Speculative fiction works are usually set in a world that is different from ours and deal with unimagined events. In Atwood's speculative fiction, the reader faces the question 'what if?' *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a world where one of the most powerful countries in the world is taken over by a group of religious extremists.

³ The genre of speculative fiction consists of many subgenres such as science fiction, utopian fiction, dystopian fiction and horror.

Throughout the novel, Atwood's attitude in writing arouses some significant questions in the minds of the readers: What would happen if the democracy was ruled out and your country was turned into a totalitarian theocratic state? Would you be able to fight against it? "Having been born in 1939 and come to consciousness during World War II" Atwood "knew that established orders could vanish overnight. Change could also be as fast as lightning. It can't happen here could not be depended on: Anything could happen anywhere, given the circumstances" (Atwood, 2017).

However, Atwood states that when she wrote *The Handmaid's Tale*, "nothing went into it that had not happened in real life somewhere at some time. The reason I made that rule is that I didn't want anybody saying, 'You certainly have an evil imagination, you made up all these bad things.' I didn't make them up" (MasterClass, 2020). The Republic of Gilead or religious extremists called Sons of Jacob does not exist in the real world for sure. Yet, it is a fact that there were places that permit no individual freedom, where the female sex is regarded as inferior, and where women were exploited by using the power of law or religion. Those places still exist somewhere in today's world. It is on the news every day if only we manage to notice it. What Margaret Atwood did while writing *The Handmaid's Tale* was to combine historical facts with elements of fiction. Nazi Germany, Puritan practices, and Ceaușescu⁴ Romania were her main influences. For example, during Ceaușescu's rule in Romania, the government "outlawed abortion for women under 40 with fewer than four children. 'The fetus is the property of the entire society,' Ceaușescu announced. 'Anyone who avoids having children is a deserter who abandons the laws of national continuity'" (Steavenson, 2014). Ceaușescu's policies regarding childbirth and abortion can be found also in Gilead's policies. In Gilead, the Handmaids carry babies for the state, and abortion is outlawed. Considering such influences, this study covers the concept of motherhood in Gilead as well. In an interview, Atwood shows the interviewer some newspaper clippings as *The Handmaid's Tale's* background material and explains that "'Women forced to have babies'. This is an article about Ceaușescu and Romania. He passed laws that said women had to have four babies. They had to have pregnancy tests every month and if they weren't pregnant they had to explain why" (Atwood, 2019).

⁴ Nicolae Ceaușescu, (born January 26, 1918, Scornicești, Romania—died December 25, 1989, near Bucharest), Communist official who was leader of Romania from 1965 until he was overthrown and killed in a revolution in 1989. (Britannica)

Since the main theme of the book is based upon actual events considering the concepts of exploitation and reproduction, the focus of this study is women's exploitation and the perception of motherhood in Gilead. It is possible to analyze the work with feminist theories or post-modern approaches, however, this thesis presents a thematic approach for the analysis. The main reason for this is to be able to give a clear comprehension of how historical facts can be combined with fiction to create a familiar state and to reveal the concept of 'what if' in the text. The fictional events and practices that Atwood presents in the novel are inspired by actual historical events that changed many people's lives. Although it is set in the United States of America, the novel reveals that the same scenario could happen anywhere in the world and some already happened before. What concerns this study is how those events affected the perception of women in the novel.

In the first chapter of the thesis, the Republic of Gilead and the new order that Gilead applied will be introduced in detail to give a better understanding of the social order in Gilead. Since the main focus of the thesis is on women, male subjects of Gilead will be left outside this introduction. In the second chapter, Gilead's brain-washing re-education system and the insemination ceremony will be analyzed thoroughly. The main focus of the chapter will be on the mental and physical exploitation of women which is conducted by the regime by using oppression, violence, and religious doctrines. In the third and last chapter of the thesis, a comprehensive analysis of Gilead's surrogacy system and a comparison of Gilead's surrogacy system and the traditional surrogacy system will be given. Furthermore, the post-partum period will be analyzed thoroughly to reveal their possible effects on women's mental health.



CHAPTER 1
GILEAD AND ITS SUBJECTS

1.1 THE REPUBLIC OF GILEAD

Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate

Abandon all hope, ye who enter here

-Dante Alighieri, La Divina Comedia

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* allows the reader to explore and witness the story of the protagonist Offred and the other Handmaids under the administration of the repressive government named The Republic of Gilead, formerly known as the United States of America. Gilead is a totalitarian theocracy that follows the teachings of manipulated versions of some religious texts which allow the regime to use women as Handmaids to produce children for the elites of Gilead, mostly for those who are in the ruling class of this totalitarian regime. The term 'theocracy' is defined as "government by divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided" (Britannica). Theocracies have religious leaders to govern. In Margaret Atwood's Gilead, the religious leaders are known as the Sons of Jacob. The name of this extremist religious group is derived from the Bible. In Genesis 28: 1-5, it is told that Jacob begins a journey to Paddan-Aram⁵ to find himself a wife. There, Jacob falls in love with Laban's⁶ daughter Rachel and asks her hand in marriage. Laban asks Jacob to work for him for seven years so he could marry Rachel. After seven years, on the wedding day, Laban tricks Jacob and marries him his other daughter Leah instead of Rachel. Later, Jacob finds out about this trickery and faces his uncle. Then, Laban agrees to give Rachel to Jacob. As a result, Jacob becomes the husband of both Rachel and Leah. At the end of his journey, Jacob manages to enlarge his family and becomes the father of thirteen children. Considering Jacob's life and the number of children he had, it might seem even logical that Gilead's leaders chose to call themselves the Sons of Jacob. As Denninger claims, by calling themselves the Sons of Jacob, "the men are sending a clear message [...] we can change how things are going in the country. We can populate the Earth because we come from a man that was proficient in making children" (Denninger, 2017).

⁵ PADDAN-ARAM (Heb. פַּדָּן אֲרָם), place mentioned only in Genesis and prominently associated with the lives of the Patriarchs. Paddan-Aram seems to have been either identical with, or included within, the area of Aram-Naharaim and is described by Abraham as 'the land of my birth' to which he sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac (24:4, 10; 25:20). It is most frequently mentioned in connection with Jacob's flight from Esau and his residence with his uncle Laban, the brother of Rebekah his mother. All but one of the tribes of Israel originated there (28:2-7; 31:18; 33:18; 35:9, 26; 46:15; 48:7). (Paddan-Aram, 2008).

⁶ Laban the Aramean, brother of Rebekah. Uncle of Jacob.

Considering Jacob's story from the Bible, Gilead presents a customized and converted version of biblical events that all subjects must acknowledge. In the beginning, Atwood informs the reader about the theocratical background of Gilead by presenting a biblical story from the Old Testament. Rachel and her maid Bilhah's story is the basis of Gilead's *modus operandi*. The book begins with a quotation from Genesis 30:1-3 which goes as:

*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. (King James Bible, 2020)*

As the story suggests, Rachel was barren and she was in pain for not being able to bear a child for Jacob. However, her maid Bilhah was fecund and she was offered to Jacob to bear a child instead of Rachel. The story from Genesis set the basis of Gilead's ideology and its reproduction system. The usage of such biblical stories reveals the fact that how religion is misrepresented in the ideology of the government and serves as an oppressive power since it is used to force fertile women to have intercourse with Commanders in front of their wives every month and praise such an event as a sacred ritual. Since the ritual, also known as the Insemination Ceremony, is defined as a religious act:

[T]rue to the precedent set in Genesis, the Commander's Wife arranges and supervises these sex sessions, in which the handmaid, desexed and dehumanized, is obliged to participate. The dire alternative for the handmaid is banishment to the Colonies, where women clean up radioactive waste as slave labourers. The dictates of state policy in Gilead thus relegate sex to a saleable commodity exchanged for mere minimal survival. (Malak, 1987, p.9)

Given the circumstances, Handmaids do not have any other choice but to obey and let their bodies be used as vessels. To survive, the Handmaid should accept to have sexual intercourse with the appointed Commander of the Faith. The sexual intercourse between the Commander and the Handmaid is regarded as something noble and divine which essentially is a patriotic duty according to Gilead's religious doctrines. This exemplifies how the Genesis part is manipulated by the Sons of Jacob. By coercing religion, Gilead tries to impose the toxic reality they have created on its assets. The regime uses religion as a tool for manipulation which operates on the truth. Dorota Filipczak comments on the misused understanding of biblical intertext as follows:

The role of the Bible in the state depicted in The Handmaid's Tale is ambiguous. Locked in a special wooden box, it becomes a totem of the totalitarian system in every house. At the same time, it is 'an incendiary device', available only to the initiated; others are forbidden to read it. Offred, the main character comments on this situation in a revealing way: 'who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it?' The Bible is a trapped text turned into a lethal instrument because the regime makes it generate oppressive laws. Everyday life in the state is based on principles whose authors claim that they follow the biblical model. (Flipczak, 1993, p.171)

As a typical dystopian regime, Gilead strictly prohibits any kind of reading material including the Bible which is used by the regime to justify their actions and the way of administration. Only those who are in power may have access to such materials. There is a distorted reality that is created by Gilead and it should be protected in order to reach prosperity as a nation. Making the subjects believe in Gilead's reality requires extensive measures such as forbidding them to read or reach any written material. Especially women should be kept under control. Therefore, "their society strips them of any resources with which to create their own subjective reality" (Hogsette, 1997, p.264). The main reason behind this prohibition is to keep subjects away from learning or discovering any truth that may lead them to rebel against authority.

In regimes like Gilead, all assets that are not placed at the top of the social pyramid might be subjected to exploitation. Therefore, it must be stated that the female assets are not the only ones who are exploited in Gilead. The system was designed to exploit the inferior according to their social pyramid. As Malak suggests:

[T]he victimization process does not involve Offred and the handmaids alone, but extends to the oppressors as well. Everyone ruled by the Gilead regime suffers the deprivation of having no choice, except what the church-state decrees; even the Commander is compelled to perform his sexual assignment with Offred as a matter of obligation: 'This is no recreation, even for the Commander. This is serious business. The Commander, too, is doing his duty' (Malak, 1987, p. 105)

The idea is that each subject of Gilead is exploited on its own terms. Everyone who live within the borders of Gilead has a duty to fulfill. However, what should exclusively be stated here is that the Handmaids suffer deeply and are exploited more than anyone in the state. The idea behind Gilead's foundation is believed to be the desire to do better by creating a country like Gilead. During a conversation with the narrator, the Commander says "[b]etter never means better for everyone. It always means worse, for some"

(Atwood, 2016, p.325). Ironically, the novel's plot reveals the fact that it is mostly worse for women. Here, it is significant to realize that the oppressor is aware of the fact that Gilead hurts some people. However, as the Commander states, "you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs" (Atwood, 2016, p.325). The oppressor knew that there were going to be some casualties for sure. Yet, according to their way of thinking, this is the only path to solve their problems.

To be able to comprehend Gilead, it is crucial to understand its social pyramid. The male population of Gilead, which can be categorized as Commanders, Guardians of the Faith, Angels, and Eyes, serve as authorities and oppressors. On the other hand, the female population may be categorized as the lower class. Moreover, like in each part of Gilead's society, women are divided hierarchically among themselves. For example, a Commander's wife can be categorized as the oppressor of this lower class. In Offred and Serena Joy's first encounter, Serena Joy displays her dominance and shows Offred that she is in charge of everything that happens in their house. To show her dominance, she lights a cigarette when Offred enters the room. A cigarette is something that Offred cannot reach and in a way, she envies Serena Joy. Offred thinks, "I looked at the cigarette with longing. For me like liquor and coffee, cigarettes are forbidden" (Atwood, 2016, p. 22). Serena informs Offred how she should behave during her time at the house, "I want to see as little of you as possible, she said. I expect you feel the same way about me" (Atwood, 2016, p. 24). Both of them are in a tremendously uncomfortable situation. Even though Serena Joy is the wife of a Commander she finds the idea of sharing her husband irritating. Yet, like everyone else in Gilead, she has to accept and obey the rules. While obeying the rules of Gilead and following the religious doctrines, Serena tries to preserve her dominance which can only be shown at the house. Therefore, she specifically tells Offred that her husband is 'her' husband. She states that "as for my husband, she said, he's just that. My husband. I want that to be perfectly clear. Till death do us part. It's final" (Atwood, 2016, p. 25). Serena's words can be interpreted as a warning to Offred in case she decides to break the rules and extend her relationship with Serena's husband.

Atwood portrays two women here; a barren woman who tries to preserve her dignity and protect her relationship with her husband, the other who has to be the surrogate mother of this couple's children. Although the situation that they are in might be a reason for Offred to hate everyone around her, she somehow empathizes with Serena. Offred tells how she cries during the ceremony, "Serena has begun to cry. I can hear her,

behind my back. It isn't the first time. She always does this, the night of the Ceremony. She's trying to not to make a noise. She's trying to preserve her dignity, in front of us" (Atwood, 2016, p. 141). As it is clear from the quotation, the ceremony is not only humiliating for the Handmaid but also for the Wife. Both the Handmaid and the Wife are exploited psychologically during the reproduction process and this sometimes prevents them from empathizing. Whereas, both women are in an equally disturbing situation and face exploitation on their own terms. Offred reveals her thoughts on Serena joy by saying: "how she must hate me, I think" (Atwood, 2016, p.141). Here, even though it is very challenging, Offred manages to understand how Serena must be feeling at this moment. Serena has to go through this process in front of people who are inferior to her in Gilead's social pyramid. The ceremony itself is disgracing enough, but the presence of the household makes it even more humiliating, hence, Serena tries to keep it quiet while crying.

The regime of Gilead appoints the Commander as the head of the household. He is the one who has the power to dominate more than anyone. According to the rules, the Commander has to fulfill his duty and impregnate the Handmaid in order to help the population grow. What separates the Commander from the others is his unquestionable authority and he may use his authority to break rules. Consequently, the tempting nature of the authority might result in abuse of power. For example, Fred summons Offred to her room in the middle of the night. As Offred states, "my presence here is illegal. It's forbidden for us to be alone with the Commanders. We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans" (Atwood, 1985, p. 211). Offred is well aware of the fact that she should not be alone with the Commander but still, she is not brave enough to reject the invitation since the Commander is the authority. Not only Offred but also the Commander knows that summoning the Handmaid to his room and being alone in the room with her is illegal. However, the power he holds in his hands allows him to break the rules and put the Handmaid in such a situation. There are two risky possibilities for Offred; one is to reject the Commander and anger him, and the other is to get caught by Serena when she specifically informed her about the boundaries. Offred explains why rejecting the Commander is not an option as follows: "to refuse to see him could be worse. There's no doubt about who holds the real power" (Atwood, 2016, p. 212). The power that the Commander holds frightens Offred more than what could Serena possibly do to her if she gets caught. Therefore, when considering the Commander's actions, authority,

and power, claiming that everyone is a victim in Gilead may be too optimistic compared to Handmaids and other women.

As mentioned before, Gilead was established after the removal of the government of the United States by the Sons of Jacob. As a consequence of the environmental pollution that left most of the people barren, the Sons of Jacob manage to create a corrupted social pattern that uses fertile women as Handmaids. Rubenstein introduces the Republic of Gilead and the starting point of Gilead's new social pattern as follows:

In the Republic of Gilead the 'natural' world is utterly denatured. Pollution of the environment has resulted in adult sterility and genetic mutation and deformity of offspring; generativity itself is at risk. Hence, fertile females are made vessels for procreation; anatomy is indeed destiny. The physically confining rooms, walls, and other actual boundaries of the Republic of Gilead corroborate the condition of reproductive 'confinement' to which the handmaids are subject. Maternity is both wish (handmaids are discarded after three unsuccessful attempts at pregnancy) and fear (the baby, unless deformed and declared an 'Unbaby,' becomes the property of the handmaid's Commander and his wife). The surrogate mother's function ceases after a brief lactation period following delivery of a healthy child.
(Rubenstein, 2001, p.12)

During their stay at a Commander's house, Handmaids have to embrace the fear of pregnancy from rape. However, considering their status it is also frightening to get pregnant because the baby will be conceived through a justified act of rape. Since it is a legal obligation for the Handmaid to serve the ruling class as a vessel, she has to stay silent and go through all humiliation by herself which in some cases results in self-murder. Even though the government tries to prevent such incidents, suicide is a way to salvation for the Handmaids. Considering this, some restrictions in the Handmaids' living space are introduced. The restrictions in the house show that the administration does everything in its power to keep the Handmaids alive. Offred introduces the reader to the precautions taken inside the house to prevent suicide in chapter two as follows: "A chair, a table, a lamp. Above, on the white ceiling, a relief ornament in the shape of a wreath, and in the centre of it a blank space, plastered over, like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out. There must have been a chandelier, once. They've removed anything you could tie a rope to" (Atwood, 2016, p.9). Any object that a person may use to kill herself was removed from the room. Possessions of Handmaids inside the room are reduced to the minimum. The narrator explains: "A window, two white curtains. Under the window, a window seat with a little cushion. When the window is partly open- it only opens partly-

the air can come in and make the curtains move” (Atwood, 2016, p.9). Even the liberty of opening the window and getting fresh air is taken away from the Handmaids since it may cause a disaster if they decide to throw themselves out the window. Offred comments on this as follows: “I know why there’s no glass, in front of the watercolour picture of blue irises, and why the window only opens partly and why the glass in it is shatterproof. It isn’t running away they’re afraid of. We wouldn’t get far. It’s those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge” (Atwood, 2016, p.10). Besides taking precautions to prevent suicide, even having the slightest hope for salvation is prevented by the regime. Offred is well aware of the fact that escaping from this prison is impossible. In some cases, if the Handmaid is brave enough, committing suicide might be the only way to reach one’s freedom. That is what the regime tries to prevent since a Handmaid is an exceptionally significant asset for them.

Another aspect that the narrator touches upon is society’s return to the traditional values. While introducing the room, she explains, “there’s a rug on the floor, oval, of braided rags. This is the kind of touch they like: folk art, archaic, made by women, in their spare time, from things that have no further use. A return to traditional values. Waste not want not. I am not being wasted. Why do I want?” (Atwood, 2016, p.9). Independent women are used to be significant assets to the workforce, now they spend their spare time knitting and sewing which simply symbolizes a degradation in social status. Offred’s comment on not wasting things also involves herself where she admits that her body is not being wasted but used when necessary to produce children for Gilead. The lifestyle that Gilead offers to the Handmaids can be compared to a life in prison where someone’s basic human rights are disregarded. What is more interesting is that while living a prison-like life, the Handmaids are seen as fatal assets of Gilead and respected by others since they happen to be the only ones who can reproduce.

Another significant point that should be taken into consideration is that Gilead takes its power from fear and state propaganda. Each subject in Gilead is aware of the fact that there is always an official observing their actions which holds them back to act freely. By doing so, the regime gains control in people’s autonomy. Public protection and surveillance are carried out by a police force called Guardians of the Faith and an elite group of law enforcement called the Eyes. On one of her daily shopping trips, Offred introduces the Guardians as follows:

Behind the barrier, waiting for us at the narrow gateway, there are two men, in the green uniforms of the Guardians of the Faith, with the crests on their shoulders and berets: two swords, crossed, above a white triangle. The Guardians aren't real soldiers. They're used for routine policing and other menial functions, digging up the Commander's Wife's garden for instance, and they're either stupid or older or disabled or very young, apart from the ones that are Eyes incognito. (Atwood, 2016, p.32)

While introducing the Guardians of the Faith, it is obvious that Offred makes fun of their job description and skills. She describes the Guardians as stupid. As a woman who does not have the privilege to act on her mind, she uses her thoughts and observations to fight the regime in her mind. In an anti-freedom environment, thought is the only device that a colonized subject might use to humiliate and hurt those who are in charge in a way. While Offred introduces the Guardians, she also unintentionally reveals a fact that the most effective way to correct the disorder and apprehend the disobedient is to have spies in society according to the regime of Gilead. The Eyes, the secret police force of Gilead, work incognito for enforcing the order. These spies are monitoring the actions and behaviors of each subject of Gilead including the Commanders. Apart from the Guardians, and Eyes, the Handmaids are being monitored by other Handmaids as well. Offred explains the function of her walking partner in chapter four as follows: “The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers. If either of us slips through the net because of something that happens on one of our daily walks, the other will be accountable” (Atwood, 2016, p.30). Handmaids are required to observe the actions and behaviors of their walking partners. As Gayret states in her article: “suspicion is a key factor to stabilize constant surveillance since the sense of being watched breaks the female defiance hereby leading female characters to stick to the roles prescribed by the patriarchy” (Gayret, 2019, p.113). Knowing that being under constant surveillance enables the Handmaids to obey the rules. Like all human beings, Handmaids are capable of making mistakes and acting against the law. In their case, acting against the law may cause punishments. The possibility of being reported is always in question. The rules dictated by the regime create a climate of fear which eventually prevents the Handmaids to find a friend who can be trusted. Gilead's regime exploits women psychologically by causing fear of being reported by a fellow Handmaid. Therefore, arousing the feeling of fear and taking away the liberty of trusting each other might be considered the basis of the governing ideology of Gilead.

1.2 DRESS CODE

Clothing imagery holds a significant place in novels. Even a simple piece of clothing might provide readers with an immense amount of data about the character's financial situation or social status. Hence, it can be claimed that interpreting clothing in a novel is a way of gathering valuable information about the society in the novel. In general:

Utopias and dystopias both take a lot of pleasure in describing costume. What is worn and what is forbidden? What cannot be worn, who can wear what and under what circumstances? This is of course just an exaggerated variant on what goes on in society anyway. (Kuhn, 2005, p.13)

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood uses clothing as an element for control in Gilead. Through clothing imagery, the novel displays a society "where conformity is a requirement" (Kuhn, 2005, p.13). In the Gileadean context, certain restrictions on clothing serve as a reminder for subjects that all must follow and obey rules which are appropriate for their new beliefs.

The dress is a subsidiary element of a person's physical appearance that "has a close relationship to the body" and "attention to dress and appearance has been associated with the erotic, particularly the sin of the body" (Kuhn, 2005, p.2). Gilead's dress code requires the clothes worn by women to be long enough to cover their body parts, to be more precise, their curves since the dress has been associated with the erotic. Through Gilead, Atwood analyzes the relationship between the body of the women and clothing and uses it as a tool of the patriarchal system to control women. In Atwood's fictional state, subjects have to follow a particular dress code which symbolizes the group that they belong to. The dress code for Handmaids, Marthas, Aunts, and Wives is distinctive and each group has a specific color to wear. For example, the Handmaids are required to wear long, red uniforms and a white cap that Offred refers to as "wings" (Atwood, 2016, p.11). Offred describes her dressing routine in chapter one as follows:

I get up out of the chair, advance my feet into the sunlight, in their red shoes, flat-heeled to save the spine and not for dancing. The red gloves are lying on the bed. I pick them up, pull them onto my hands, finger by finger. 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. (Atwood, 2016, p. 11)

The clothing pack of a Handmaid contains red shoes, red gloves, a long red skirt, and white wings. Except for the wings, the dress is completely red which is a color only worn by the Handmaids. It is a very dominant and striking color. The underlying reason for the red uniform enforced by the administration is to create an unsafe environment for the Handmaids which constantly reminds them that they are part of something bigger than themselves. Offred likens the white wings they wear to “blinkers” (Atwood, 2016, p.49) which are a “pieces of leather that are placed at the side of a horse’s eyes to stop it from looking to the side” (“Blinker Noun”, n.d.). She says, “given our wings, our blinkers, it’s hard to look up, hard to get the full view, of the sky, of anything. But we can do it, a little at a time, a quick move of the head, up and down, to the side and back. We learned to see the world in gasps” (Atwood, 2016, p.49). Gilead uses the wings as a tool to protect the Handmaids from being seen by the others while they are out in the street. But it also serves as a tool to prevent them to see the outer world since a Handmaid should only focus on her duty. Also, with the red uniforms, the Handmaids can be spotted easily.

The appliance of the dress code is also a way of imprisoning the Handmaids in their clothing so that they could feel like a part of the regime. As a tool of the patriarchy, the dress code attempts to destroy individuality and identity and aims to make the Handmaids more submissive. The “color-coded uniform to her social function negates the individuality of the female citizens. As uniforms strip the individuality away and the society tells the woman who she is, she learns to hide her real self, becoming distorted” (Gayret, 2019, p.109). The idea behind enforcing a color-coded uniform is to prevent any distraction from outside. The uniforms are:

[N]ot only obscures their faces and forecloses their bodies from being seen but also subjugates their sight. The woman is not noticed by the system as she is not of the slightest importance. What matters most is the role of woman within the society. Function matters, not woman herself, hence reinforcing Offred’s reflection that they are only ‘two-legged wombs’.
(Gayret, 2019, p. 109)

What matters the most for the regime is the function of the Handmaids. Their existence is essential to overcome a significant problem that is caused by infertility. By restricting people to wear whatever they want, the government reminds its citizens that the aesthetical appearance of the body is not appreciated but the only thing that matters is the function of the body which is exploited constantly. Not just the Handmaids but also other women have to wear what the dress code requires which is an indication of all female

subjects are enslaved by the regime. The color-coded dress code facilitates being spotted and categorized while under constant surveillance of the patriarchal regime. The specific colored “clothes reveal female status within society while masking selfness, hereby remarking that their individual identities are evanished in predetermined roles by patriarchy” (Gayret, 2019, p. 109).

1.3 WOMEN OF GILEAD

1.3.1 The Handmaids

Similar to today's world, Gilead was once a country where its citizens were living in peace, but most importantly, as individuals that have personal freedom. With the coup, the idea of freedom, individualism, and perception of almost everything in society has changed a great deal. Although there is not a specific starting point for Gilead:

[I]t can be understood that it began with the fertility crisis and further caused a religious revival. The theocratic group believed that America needs to be cleaned up and hence starts demoting everything that we recognize as normal. 'The United States has undergone a coup d'état. The President has been shot, Congress, machine-gunned and the constitution suspended'. After the conservative religious group takes control of the United States and establishes a dictatorship by declaring a state of emergency. (Mythili, 2020, p.123)

Regarding the changes due to the military coup, the environment became more threatening for those who refuse to obey the new government's rules, but mostly for women as it is mentioned in previous sections. Population crash due to infertility paved the way for the establishment of the class of Handmaids. This new class became the key factor for Gilead's plans for population growth. Mythili remarks that:

Aids, Syphilis, and environmental toxics are some of the many reasons for the cause of infertility among the Wives. Most women in Gilead are barren as a result of constant exposure to pesticides, nuclear waste, or leakages from chemical weapon: 'nuclear plant accident... leakages from chemical and biological warfare stockpiles and toxic waste disposal sites... the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides and other sprays'. The Wives delivers wretched mutant children called 'Unbabies'. Thus the birthrate which is dangerously low among the ruling elite has led to the establishment of the class of Handmaids. (Mythili, 2020, p.124)

There are also women in Gilead who are not fertile like the Handmaids. Regarding what happens when a woman is fertile, one might consider herself lucky if she is infertile but Gilead exploits women in every possible way which means no one is fortunate enough to escape from Gilead's inhumane practices. For instance, in the Handmaids' case, they

might even be considered lucky to have rooms to sleep in since some of the women are sent to colonies to clean toxic waste, and eventually face a horrendous death caused by radiation poisoning. It is nearly impossible to measure which option is worse for a person who used to have her own identity and autonomy; to tolerate rape or die while cleaning up toxic waste.

The Handmaids are chosen among fertile women between the ages of 20 and 35 and being enslaved in Gilead without any fundamental rights. They “represent women living with a complete lack of autonomy. Further, they endure punishments, ritualistic rape at the hands of the commanders and facilitated by their wives, and hateful treatment” (Walker, 2019, p.1). Before the postings, fertile women are placed in the training centre to become ready to serve as Handmaids. In the first chapter of the book, Offred, mentions that they “slept in what had once been the gymnasium” (Atwood, 2016, p.3). As the quotation from the book indicates, places like gymnasiums are now serving as concentration camps, yet the authorities chose to name them as training centers. Offred describes the place they were sleeping in as follows:

The floor was of varnished wood, with stripes and circles painted on it, for the games that were formerly played there; the hoops for the basketball nets were still in place, though the nets were gone. A balcony around the room, for the spectators, and I thought I could smell, faintly like an afterimage, the pungent scent of sweat, shot through with the sweet taint of chewing gum and perfume from the watching girls, felt-skirted as I knew from pictures, later in mini-skirts, then pants, then in one earring, spiky green-streaked hair. (Atwood, 2016, p.3)

As the protagonist describes the gymnasium, she also mentions how the things from the past such as the hoops for the basketball nets are preserved. This familiar image from the past makes Offred psychologically uncomfortable since the situation that she and the other Handmaids are in is quite similar to life in prison. She cannot help but to think about how things were back in the normal days: she can even smell the sweat, chewing gum, and perfume while gazing at that place. Offred's descriptions and thoughts clearly show that she reminisces about the past and feels a longing for the days before Gilead.

As it is mentioned in the previous section, fertile women are taken to the training centers against their will. This might be interpreted as an open violation of their freedom which eventually leads to the exploitation of their bodies both physically and psychologically. In chapter twelve, Offred describes herself as “a national resource”

(Atwood, 2016, p.101) which is an idea that was imposed on her during her stay at the training centre. By describing herself as a national resource, she emphasizes the fact that she and the other Handmaids are valuable assets to the nation. However, their value is only measured by the current condition of their fertility. A woman is valuable as long as she is fertile. The body of the female:

[I]s treated as a fertile object, biology is another ideological implementation to oppress, silence, and alienate women. The female body is totally under the control of the patriarchy and considered as a means of reproduction. Women are confined and consigned to biologically-determined social roles: childbearing and breeding. The patriarchy misuses biology as an obstacle against women's liberation through positioning them as wombs, mothers, and viable ovaries. In other words, the biology is Gilead's ideological pretext for berefting women from social life, thereby locking them in a servile status. (Gayret, 2019, p.110)

In Gilead, the social roles of women are limited. If a woman is able to bear a child, her role in society reduces to a minimum. Carrying a child and breeding becomes the Handmaid's only social role. Gilead expects Handmaids to play the role of the biological mother. As Gayret discusses, women in Gilead "have been exploited by men especially Handmaids, who are obliged to play the maternal roles which is what society expects them to do. Women's oppression in biology is obvious in the Handmaids' life through such an institutionalized maternity" (Gayret, 2019, p.110). The heroine herself acknowledges her place in society and explains that they are for "breeding purposes" (Atwood, 2016, p.211). The Handmaids accept the role, acknowledge the expectations of Gilead and they wish to be impregnated by their Commanders. The regime of Gilead "differentiates the male body from the female body, associating the female body solely with its reproductive capacity to the point that the handmaids are thought of as two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (Howell, 2010, p.3). This perception proves that the social roles are biologically determined in Gilead.

The role of the Handmaid in Gilead's social pyramid is to serve as the surrogate mother. Considering the bond between a mother and a child, the Handmaids are trained not to attach to the newborn baby. Because in Gilead's reproduction system the body of the Handmaid is only used as a vessel to carry the babies. If they were to develop feelings for the babies their bond would have been hard to break. In training centers, they are taught and forced to accept the fact that the child that they will give birth to will not be theirs but belongs to the nation. The regime's new practices are applied to the lifestyle of

society by force and its citizens must follow these practices and rules without questioning them. Therefore, the Handmaids are taught to obey and understand the rules first. The narrator informs the reader about their cause of existence numerous times throughout the novel. For example, she describes the Handmaids in chapter twenty-three as “two-legged wombs”, “sacred vessels” and “ambulatory chalices” (Atwood, 2016, p.211-212). Offred is aware that they are regarded as ‘sacred’ by the nation, but this feeling does not make her feel more comfortable about being Handmaid since they are prisoners of the regime who are not able to fight against it. By making the Handmaids wear a color-coded uniform, enabling them not to see the outer world, not allowing them to read any kind of written material -even the signboards on the street or at the supermarket-, Gilead imposes them on the fact that their sole purpose is to reproduce for the Commanders. Considering these, it can be claimed that Gilead imprisons women to a strict role in society which makes it even harder to disobey or fight.

1.3.2 Re-naming Process of The Handmaid’s

Gilead adopts a whole range of new practices. Re-naming the Handmaids is one of them. As well as enforcing the Handmaids to obey customized religious doctrines and to follow a particular dress code, the renaming process is of vital importance in the way to alienate them from their own identities. The system prohibits the Handmaids to use their original names. Even saying them out loud is forbidden. Instead, they are given new names which are formed by combining the preposition ‘of’ with the name of the Commander they are serving at the moment. After a Handmaid gives birth, her residence and the Commander she serves change, therefore the name of the Handmaid never stays the same. The preposition ‘of’ is a symbol of possession. It means the Commander that the Handmaid serves is the master and the owner of her womb, body, and mind. Their new names reveal the fact that they are no longer free individuals but properties of the Commanders. Being the possession of a man and being reminded of the fact that you do not have an identity every time you hear the name given by the regime forces women to accept and obey the situation that they are in. Fragmentation of the identity begins with acceptance. The narrator comments on the situation in chapter fourteen as follows:

My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried. This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that's survived from an unimaginably distant past. I lie in my single bed at night, with my eyes closed, and the name floats there behind my eyes, not quite within reach, shining in the dark. (Atwood, 2016, p. 129-130)

As Offred reminisces about the times she was able to use her original name, she also tries to accept the fact that those days are long gone. She tries to convince herself that having another name does not matter anymore. Accepting the appointed name and identity shows that the regime succeeds in alienating the Handmaids. Throughout the novel, Offred never mentions her real name which is an indication of the loss of identity.

The entire re-naming process causes fragmentation in the Handmaid's sense of identity and it is an obvious example of psychological exploitation. By re-naming women who were once independent individuals, the regime aims to remove the Handmaid's identity so they can easily exploit them physically, and sexually. This process makes exploitation uncomplicated since it is always easy to manipulate a person without an identity. As the Handmaids take the name of the Commander after they are appointed to a household, they become that specific Commander's property. This objectification serves as a tool to remove women's individuality and identity.

A name is one of the most significant elements to define a person's identity and re-naming them helps the regime to take control over women's identity. Throughout the novel, Atwood uses the re-naming process of the Handmaids as a tool to create meaning:

The significance and value of names and naming in the human experience is an important focus in the novel where symbolic naming and the characters' use and awareness of names are tied to important thematic concerns, for example, the oppression of the weak by the strong, the struggle for identity, and the necessity of human communication and meaningful human relationships. (Templin, 1993, p.144)

In the first chapter of the novel, Offred comments, "We learned to lip-read, our heads flat on the beds, turned sideways, watching each other's mouths. In this way we exchanged names, from bed to bed: Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June" (Atwood, 2016, p.5). During their stay at the gymnasium, Offred tells how they learned to communicate with each other. They are exchanging names just like how they used to do in the past. However,

the novel never reveals the real name of the heroine of the novel. The narrator is known as Offred which might be a manifestation of the significance of names as a power in the patriarch's hands. This indirect form of communication emphasizes that "while some names may be given, some may be lost; while some may be named, some may be misnamed. In his essay on autobiography, Paul Hjartarson contends that Atwood's heroine, Offred, is nameless, since her name is a patronymic comprising the possessive preposition 'of' and a man's name, 'Fred'" (Givner, 1992, p.58).

The Handmaids' given names indicate how they are objectified by the oppressor. Their possessions are limited in number and their names are not one of them. Atwood takes each possession of fertile women and makes them another men's possession. The name Offred "also suggests the word 'offered.' She is indeed offered, or given away, with no control over her fate. As the Handmaids are transferred from one posting to another, their "given" names change. The significance of their namelessness - their interchangeability in the eyes of their masters (Templin, 1993, p.148). Whether it is intentional or not, the implication in the name of the protagonist is hard to avoid. As Templin suggests, the name Offred resembles the word 'offered'. It is a fact that the Handmaids are given to Commanders for breeding purposes, in fact, offered by the state. This allusion shows the reader that, it is almost impossible for the Handmaids to gain control over their own identities again. They are already offered to the Commanders and commodified by the erasure of their original names. Also, removing the names of the Handmaids can be considered as a practice of dehumanization. It serves as a tool to control women's autonomy by the regime. Changing the names is the first step of the assimilation process. The Handmaids are "dehumanized through the erasure of their names" (Latimer, 2009, p.219). The narrator's appointed name:

[R]eminds her that he is her sole identity, and her sole salvation, as the next handmaid in his house will share this name if she is unsuccessful in producing a child for him. She is told this is for her protection, as is the small tattoo she has on her ankle of 'four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse', which is supposed to guarantee she 'will never be able to fade, finally, into another landscape'. (Latimer, 2009, p.219)

Re-naming and replacement processes are constantly reminded to the Handmaids to force them to focus on their duty. The tattoos on their ankles are regarded as their passports. Moreover, the tattoo and the eye on the ankle can be interpreted as a barcode put there by the owner of the product to observe and track at all times. Throughout her narrative "the

Handmaid asserts that she is literally a prisoner, tattooed with a chattel number” (Dodson, 1997, pp.74-75). This practice is an obvious manifestation of the objectification of women. It also symbolizes the colonization of women’s bodies by male-dominant authority. The usage of the tattoo on the Handmaids’ ankles as if they are property reveals that the regime enslaves them.

As mentioned in the earlier sections, in Gilead’s discourse, the Handmaids are regarded as national resources. However, they constantly face the risk of being replaced. Gilead takes most of its power from the fear of interchangeability. Since the relationship between the Commander and the Handmaid is based on the boundaries of a master-slave relationship, the Handmaids are easily replaceable even though they are valuable to be regarded as “national resources” (Atwood, 2016, p.101). As Templin points out, “this woman, Ofglen, who has been active in the underground, suddenly disappears”. Ofglen’s disappearance is related to her illegal work. “Offred goes to meet her at the prearranged street corner and is met by her replacement. When the frightened Offred asks, ‘Has Ofglen been transferred so soon?’ the replacement replies, ‘I am Ofglen’” (Templin, 1993, p.149). Her shopping companion’s disappearance frightens Offred undoubtedly so long as she realizes how easy for the regime to replace them.

1.3.3 The Aunts

The formation of Gilead’s society is based on a simple cast system that regards men above all, as the superior class. Men of Gilead are divided into groups among themselves such as Commanders, Angels, and Eyes. Similar to men, women are also divided into groups among themselves. Gilead’s society includes Wives, Aunts, Handmaids, Marthas, Econowives, and Unwoman. The hierarchal system of Gilead is based upon the power relations amongst its residents. As Margaret Atwood herself points out:

[T]hose at the top have power, those at the bottom, don’t. And those at the bottom include men, and those at the top include women. The women at the top have different kinds of power from the men at the top, but they have power nonetheless, and some of the power they have is power over other women. (Atwood, as cited in Somacarrera, 2006, p.53)

The teachers and the woman guardians of Gilead, the Aunts belong to a higher class compared to other women whom they are responsible for teaching and tutoring. Usually, the Aunts are chosen amongst older women who are not able to produce children any longer due to menopause. Similar to all residents of Gilead, the Aunts also have a dress code that permits them to wear a long “khaki dress” (Atwood, 2016, p.173) The aunts

who are responsible for operating “the Handmaids’ training center, represent a quasimilitary class of women and dress appropriately in police-style uniforms. Thus, women’s clothing in *The Handmaid’s Tale* calls attention to the obvious class differences among women, based on their affiliation with corresponding male hierarchies of power” (Montelaro, 1995, p.244). In the book titled *Brutal Choreographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood*, J. Brooks Bouson comments on Gilead’s society as follows:

In the Republic of Gilead, a theocracy established in the United States by New Right fundamentalists, the masculine code is carried to its absolute extreme in the regime’s consignment of women to various classes; the Wives, the Handmaids, the Marthas, the Econo-wives, the Aunts according to their functions. Through its imposition of a rigid system of hierarchical classification, the Gilead regime effectively robs women of their individual identities and transforms them into replaceable objects in the phallogentric economy. (Bouson, 1993, pp.137-138)

Gilead classifies women ‘according to their functions and skills’. The Aunts can be classified as tutors and mentors who are responsible for teaching the Handmaids the rules and regulations that are formed by the newly established regime of Gilead. In a way, the Aunts can be regarded as the prophets of this system. As Somacarrera remarks, “[t]he function of the Aunts in this totalitarian regime is to disseminate the doctrine among women, exercising a matriarchal power which is disguised as a spirit of camaraderie, similar to that of the army” (Somacarrera, 2006, p.53). Resembling the Handmaids’ situation to being in the army aims to make them feel like they are serving their countries by being Handmaids. In this case, comforting the Handmaids is also the job of the Aunts besides teaching. However, classifying the Aunts only as teachers or mentors would be inaccurate since they are also the authoritarian subjects of the power-based regime of Gilead. In the first chapter of the novel, Offred mentions the Aunts are armed. She remarks, “Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts” (Atwood, 2016, p.4). The Aunts are allowed to carry instruments of violence such as electric cattle prods, which means they are allowed to use violence on the Handmaids when necessary. This permit makes the Aunts figures of fear which enables the Handmaids to obey the rules. The system uses and exploits these old, brainwashed women as tools to tame other women who are to be used as Handmaids. As Bouson points out, “[t]he Aunts, who ironically place a high value on ‘camaraderie among women’, uphold the male supremacist power structure of Gilead with its hierarchical

arrangement of the sexes, and they play an active role in the state's sexual enslavement of the Handmaids" (Bouson, 1993, p.141). Since the Aunts serve as the representation of male authority in Rachel and Leah Centers, they happen to be the highest authoritative figure amongst women. The Aunts "maintain the patriarchal values and control other women in Gilead" (Mythili, 2020, p.126). The regime uses the Aunts as the preachers of their doctrines which are patriarchal and traditional. As it is discussed in the Historical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*, "in the case of Gilead, there were women willing to serve as Aunts, either because of a genuine belief in what they called 'traditional values,' or for the benefits they might thereby acquire. When power is scarce, a little of it is tempting" (Atwood, 2016, p.383). The reason these preachers are women is that it would be easier for the Handmaids to relate if a certain doctrine was imposed by a fellow woman. The Aunts' commitment to the patriarchal values plays a significant role in imposing since the teacher should be a supporter and follower of the established regime so that they can manipulate others to follow and support. Considering the Aunts' behaviors, what is shocking is that even though they are women, they regard men as the superior gender and obey their patriarchal rules. Therefore, it is significant to emphasize that the Aunts are the ones who fully accepted Gilead's doctrines.

Resembling the Handmaids, the Aunts are also related to biblical canon in terms of their names. Lydia, Elizabeth, Sara, Helena, all are chosen from the names of biblical figures. The Aunts are "appropriately named for biblical women of importance. The names bring to mind Sara, the wife of Abraham; Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist; and Lydia, who was Paul's first convert in Europe. Helena is the mother of Constantine and the discoverer of the true cross" (Templin, 2013, p.150). All the names Atwood chose to use are related to the novel's theme. Atwood herself comments on naming her characters as follows:

I'm very interested in their names. By that I mean their names don't always readily spring to mind. I have to go looking for their names. I would like not to have to call them anything. But they usually have to have names. Then the question is, if they are going to have names, the names have to be appropriate. Therefore I spend a lot of time reading up on meanings of names, in books like Name Your Baby. (Hancock, 1990, p.55)

Apart from being related to biblical context, the names of the Aunts are also related to products that were used in the pre-Gilead period. "Helena Rubenstein and Elizabeth Arden cosmetics, Betty Crocker foods, Sara Lee frozen desserts, and Lydia Pinkham's

medicine for female complaints” (Templin, 2013, p.150) are the commercial products that the names were derived from. This relation between the names and the commercial products suggests the Aunts’:

[F]unction of manipulating other women in the interests of the dominant powers. The names suggest the complex ways in which women have been socialized to their roles as consumers, housewives, helpers, and sex objects - partly through the efforts of other women who have gained some status by allying themselves with men in power. Not incidentally, the fact that Atwood alerts us in the Epilogue to the significance of the Aunts’ names suggests that she is consciously using names in symbolic ways. (Templin, 2013, p.150)

In Gilead, the Handmaids are no longer allowed to consume or use these products, therefore, besides their references to the Bible, they are also symbolic because they represent the pre-Gilead period, the old world. The Aunts take joint action with the patriarchy and serve the male-dominant society’s best interests. The power that the Aunts have in a society that exploits women both physically and mentally is based on the alliance with men in power. Therefore, their duties and jobs are symbolic as well as their names.

1.3.4 The Wives

With their blue dresses, they are the symbol of purity. “Wives of officials or ‘commanders’ wear a kind of Virgin-Mary blue, perhaps an ironic reference to their infertility” (Rigney, 1987, p.116). The association with the color blue is related to the Old Testament. Tennant points out that “the ark of the covenant is covered in ‘a cloth wholly of blue’. Mary, who carries Christ, the sign of the new covenant, is thus associated with blue as well” (Tennant, 2019, pp. 33-34). Additionally, “blue is considered the color of the sky or the heavens and, therefore, is appropriate for the mother of Christ” (Tennant, 2019, p.34). The symbolic usage of the color blue might be a way to show that the unborn baby of the Wife and the Commander is considered as the savior of the nation, similar to Christ.

Unlike other women, the Wives are not categorized according to their skills since they are the wives of the leaders which means they already belong to a higher class. Compared to other female subjects of Gilead, the Wives might even be considered as fortunate regarding their social status. The reason for this is, they are closer to the ruling class even though they do not take an actual part in ruling the government. Being this close to the authority comes with certain privileges such as reaching products from the

pre-Gilead period more easily which is strictly forbidden to other women. This indicates that the Wives are socially powerful. Hierarchical systems like Gilead divide the subjects of society and categorize them according to their roles. Gilead uses a categorization system that is based on gender. As men being the superior gender, Wives, the superior of women subjects hold the closest position to men on a social base. The Wives are given control of the household. Even though they are labeled as “defeated women” (Atwood, 2016, p.73), they hold specific privileges such as having a garden of their own at home or being able to get products that are forbidden to women. In Serena’s case, a cigarette might be given as an example. Considering other female subjects of Gilead, at least such a social power is given to the Wives. Ironically, Gilead even bestows them a Handmaid to make them complete since they are deficient. Although, “[t]he Wives have a little more power than the Handmaids but are as trapped as the Handmaids in a lot of ways” (Tennant, 2019, p.76). In the novel, the Wives of Gilead are described as “defeated women” (Atwood, 2016, p.73). Offred makes sure that the reader realizes that they are defeated. She goes as, “They have been unable...” (Atwood, 2016, p.73). What Offred tries to emphasize here is their barrenness. She finds herself powerful and superior since she is not barren. This description is not valid for their social positions for sure. The reason the Wives are considered defeated is that they are barren, and they cannot have their own children. They require the help of the Handmaids. For example, the Commander’s wife Serena Joy “has an overwhelming desire for a baby who would raise her social value” (Muñoz, 2019, p.237). Their social value can only be improved by reaching motherhood. Hence, the Wives desire to “fill their empty arms with the most valuable possession in Gilead: a baby” (Muñoz, 2019, p.237). Being a mother if a Wife desires to be respected among her equals in society, is of vital importance. As stated above, even though the Wives seem like they are powerful on a social basis, they are also slaves in Gilead. Being a Wife does not mean that a woman is closely involved with decisions related to government. The regime silences these women by bestowing them a little power in social life which only can be useful when they are around other women but not men.

In the novel, Offred recalls the times when the Commander’s wife, Serena Joy, making speeches. In chapter eight, Offred talks about Serena Joy as follows, “she wasn’t singing any more by 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 making for the good of all” (Atwood, 2016, p.71). According to Offred, Serena Joy was a public figure who was trying to shape the thoughts of her community by making powerful speeches about home’s sacredness and how a woman should behave according to it. Supporting Offred’s views, Callaway remarks that, “Serena was an instrumental figure in the Gileadean takeover, a supporter of a culture based in traditional values that would return women to the home” (Callaway, 2008, p.55). Considering this, by the establishment of the new government, Serena Joy got herself the government of her dreams. Yet, they silenced Serena as well, even though she was a solid supporter of this kind of lifestyle. Consequently, Serena, an influential woman who was brave enough to speak her mind on television, lost the opportunity of making speeches. Offred remarks that “She doesn’t make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn’t seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she’s been taken at her word” (Atwood, 2016, p.72).

The totalitarian regime of Gilead forces the Wives as well to abandon their previous lives, their independence, their habits and to adapt to a patriarchal, misogynist lifestyle. For example, “Serena Joy once worked as an evangelist and television personality, first through a singing career and then as a speaker who focused on traditional family values and the need for women to stay home. Ironically, in the past, Serena Joy could travel and give speeches; now she also must stay home” (Tennant, 2019, p.78). With the new practices of the regime, Serena Joy becomes a woman who has nothing but her garden to amuse herself. As Offred points out in chapter three:

Garden is the domain of the Commander’s Wife. Looking out through my shatterproof window I’ve often seen her in it, her knees on a cushion, a light blue veil thrown over her wide gardening hat, a basket at her side with shears in it and pieces of string for tying the flowers into place. A Guardian detailed to the Commander does the heavy digging; the Commander’s Wife directs, pointing with her stick. Many of the Wives have such gardens, it’s something for them to order and maintain and care for. (Atwood, 2016, p.18)

Serena Joy and other women have to find themselves a way to spend time. Considering the fact that the Wives are not able to act according to their wills, these gardens serve as a place where they are in command. A simple garden is a blessing for the Wives given by the regime to keep them quiet and obedient. However, although the Wives are controlled by the regime, their households are at their command. They do not hold back in establishing their dominance and showing their superiority over the Handmaids. For

instance, when Offred first arrives in Serena and Fred's house, Serena makes sure that Offred behaves according to her rules. She specifically remarks that she is the one in charge. Serena says to Offred that she wants "to see as little of her as possible" (Atwood, 2016, p.24). Then she describes their relationship as a "business transaction" (Atwood, 2016, p.24), and warns her if she gets "trouble," (Atwood, 2016, p.24) she "will give trouble back" (Atwood, 2016, p.24). The term Serena used to describe their relationship indicates that, as a Wife, she needs Offred's presence at that house to reach motherhood and fill her empty arms. Their relationship is a compulsory one, they both have to be in situations that are obtrusive. Nevertheless, at the end of this transaction, both sides will be satisfied since the Wife gets to have a baby and the Handmaid will survive another day.

As much as Handmaids, the Wives are also victims in this business transaction. They have to be present when the ceremony between the Commander and the Handmaid takes part and observe the sexual intercourse which is highly irritating for a woman to see her husband with another woman even though it is a mandatory intercourse lacking emotions. This is a manifestation of how Gilead exploits and victimizes the Wives as well as other female subjects. The Wives are "totally brain-washed yet unhappily aware of their imprisonment within their self-created ideological system" (Rigney, 1987, p.116). Like Serena Joy, the other Wives have to act according to the enforced ideology of Gilead, at least, when around other people. It is clear from the conversation between Serena and Offred when they first see each other, that Serena is not very happy with the ideologies of the regime. In the past, she was a supporter of traditional values but Gilead's ideological system is too harsh, even for her.

Regardless of their social status and the power they have in their houses, the Wives are seen as incomplete women. Their infertility is considered a deficiency. The starting point of Gilead is based on this thought. Montelaro comments on this thought as follows:

The Handmaid's indoctrination occurs at the 'Rachel and Leah Training Center,' a reference to wives of two prominent Old Testament patriarchs. And part of the Handmaid's ritual includes chanting the prayerful refrain, 'Give me children, or else I die'. The childless woman's complaint echoes throughout the Old Testament and suggests that women are tragically incomplete without the experience of childbirth, a fitting ideological sentiment in the misogynist social context of Gilead. (Montelaro, 1995, p.234)

Gilead's misogynist context creates an environment that is solely corrosive only to women. It treats women who are infertile as deficient beings. Gilead's misogynist ideology leads the way to the psychological exploitation of women which is at some point unbearable. On the other hand, some men are also infertile just like the Wives due to the same environmental problem. However, men's infertility does not cause much of a problem compared to women's barrenness. Since the Handmaids are "routinely assigned as surrogate mothers to the childless households [...] many of the Commanders (as well as their 'Wives') are obviously infertile, an inside joke among the successive Handmaids who pass through different Commanders' households without conceiving a child" (Montelaro, 1995, p.234). Infertility caused by excessive pollution does not only affect women, it also affects men. Yet, the misogynist Gilead regards this problem as only women's.

At some point, the Wives have to take action to save themselves from public humiliation and arrange the Handmaids' sexual intercourse with men who are not infertile like their husbands. The desire to have a child is far more powerful than to think who actually is the biological father of the child according to this action. For example, Serena offers Offred a picture of her daughter if she sleeps with Nick since she thinks that her husband is infertile. This action shows that Serena is desperate to have a baby of her own, she does not even care if the father is not her husband. Only a baby could "fill her empty arms" and make her complete, therefore, she is willing to break the rules. When Offred reminds Serena that "it's against the law," (Atwood, 2016, p.315) she responds back by saying "I know you can't officially. But it's done. Women do it frequently. All the time" (Atwood, 2016, p.315). She then continues to explain the situation: "[t]hat's how Ofwarren did it. The wife knew, of course... I would help you, I would make sure nothing went wrong" (Atwood, 2016, p.315). Even in a society that is under constant surveillance, the Wives dare to break such a significant rule which forms the ideology of Gilead to gain prestige.

1.3.5 The Marthas, Econowives, and Unwomen

Gilead's Marthas are the group of women that are responsible for the jobs related to the household. To put it simply, the Marthas are the housekeepers. Like others, Marthas follow a dress code that allows them only to wear the color green. Similar to the names of other groups of people, the names of the Marthas include a biblical reference as well.

In her CBS Sunday Morning Interview, Margaret Atwood, explains why were the Marthas called Marthas as follows:

They were called Marthas after the Martha and Mary episode in the bible in which Mary is listening adoringly and sitting on the floor and the Martha is getting the dinner ready. And Martha rebukes Mary for not helping with the housework and gets a ticking off from Jesus. Rather unfairly, I've always thought. They actually have a pivotal role in this whole scenario because it is the Marthas that pass news from Martha to Martha and none of these people were allowed to have telephones. This is very useful. (CBS Sunday Morning, 2019)

As Atwood explains, the Marthas play a crucial part in women's society in Gilead. In an environment where women are not allowed to communicate publicly by using any kinds of technological tools, the Marthas take a step in to enable communication between the households. The Marthas might be known as housekeepers by the authorities of Gilead but their role is much more significant among women. In such places as Gilead, the slightest possibility of communication could lead the way to resistance. Therefore, some of the Marthas are the bravest among women who are constantly oppressed in this totalitarian regime because it is the power of the words and communication that Gilead is afraid of the most. In her article, Armbruster claims that; “‘Marthas, ‘the housekeepers’, have access to information that gives them some leverage over handmaids and wives” (Armbruster, 1990, p.147).

As it is mentioned in the previous sections, Gilead has a class system. The top part of this system is occupied by men. Men's place is the highest, unconditionally. Women occupy the lowest part of this system but without any doubts, among themselves, women are in a race for power. Anyone with a little bit of information about the outside world has the leverage over other women. For example, when Serena Joy offers Offred a picture of her daughter, a Martha brings the picture for Serena Joy. Offred says, “it must have been a Martha who got it for her. There's a network of the Marthas, then, with something in it for them. That's nice to know” (Atwood, 2016, p.352). As Offred states, the network of the Marthas provides any kind of information that enables them to have that leverage. However, in dystopias like Gilead, not everyone can be expected to be brave. The pressure exerted on women by the male-dominated authority is so heavy that for some of them it can be scary to even think about not obeying the rules that are imposed. In this system, all women are also spies of each other. Marthas are also part of this espionage mission, apart from serving the household. The fear of authority is extensive thus they might report

even the smallest mistake that Handmaids make. This causes an irreversible alienation from other women. Therefore, it might be safe to say that no one is trustworthy in Gilead even though they are women.

Apart from the Marthas, there is a group of women who are called Econowives. Compared to Handmaids and Marthas, they are amongst the lowest ranking members of Gilead. Offred describes these women as, “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. These women are not divided into functions. They have to do everything; if they can” (Atwood, 2016, p.38). Red, blue, and green dresses that the Econowives wear show that they are expected to fulfill all the responsibilities that are attributed to Handmaids, Wives, and Marthas. Yet, unlike Handmaids, Wives, or Marthas, their service is only for their husbands and the society itself.

Gilead’s class system’s lowest-ranking members are Unwomen. They are women who are sent to colonies to clean up the toxic waste. Generally, Unwomen are infertile women that have no use in the eyes of society or women who do not obey the rules that Gilead has established. Unlike Handmaids, Aunts, Wives, Marthas, or Econowives, Unwomen form a separate society that Gilead fails to tame. Therefore, they are sent to a duty that highly risks their lives. By sending them to clean up the toxic waste, Gilead aims to keep these unmeek women apart from their superior society and to show that their lives are dispensable. This implementation shows the fact that women are only important if they are useful. For example, Gilead does not send women who are able to reproduce to clean up the toxic waste in the colonies unless she does something unforgivable according to Gilead’s law. They always choose to educate the disobedient productive women but such an opportunity does not exist for the women who cannot be tamed by Gilead. A woman is either a part of the system or not. Otherwise, all are dispensable. Unwomen may also be depicted as women who do not fit any other category. If a woman is unable to function as a Handmaid, an Aunt, or a Martha, she automatically becomes an Unwoman.

Regimes like Gilead tend to seek assets that will benefit them in the best possible way there is. For instance, Handmaids have to offer their wombs, Aunts have to serve both as teachers and supervisors, and Marthas have to do the housekeeping. Gileadean regime requires its citizens to serve them in every possible way. However, it is always

women who have to make a compromise when it comes to satisfying the expectations of the Gileadean regime which requires sacrifice, service, and obedience. Such expectations might be either sexual or physical. Every asset must obey and serve the functions that its class requires.





CHAPTER 2

TRAINING OF THE HANDMAIDS AND THE CEREMONY

2.1 RACHEL AND LEAH RE-EDUCATION CENTRE: ‘RED CENTRE’

2.1.1 Operating The Red Centre

In most of the works related to the genre of dystopian fiction, a transition period between the old and new regimes is introduced. Mostly, the traditional democratic governments are replaced with governments that are highly delimitative. Margaret Atwood presents this transition to the reader in the novel. With the elimination of the previous administration that has actually been corrupted from within, the society meets a new authority, Gilead, while they continue to live their lives normally. In chapter ten, Offred recalls how ignorant they were back in the past, before Gilead's take over, and says, “we lived, as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it. Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it” (Atwood, 2016, p.89). Offred informs the reader that there were no instant changes in their social lives. Everything was normal, Gilead's takeover was slow and they were ignorant of the changes that does not involve them. Each aspect of society acknowledges and accepts the new regime and acts as if it is usual. Gilead introduces a new form of government and administration based on mostly religious doctrines, which enables the reader to label them as strict conservatives on their own terms. A new system based on class distinction is being imposed on a society that had individual rights and freedom and had been ruled by democracy throughout their lives. In the new form of administration which is dominated by men, women are in an inferior position. It categorizes and separates women from one another regarding their biological abilities. Since the world has been fighting the infertility problem, Gilead gives close attention to women who are still fertile. As Offred states: “[t]here are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law” (Atwood, 2016, p.95). The fertile women are now the Handmaids of this system.

Considering the changes in social pattern, an institution, a school is needed to teach fertile women who are sinners in the eyes of Gilead since in the past they were free to be with whomever they want, how to be a Handmaid. In this dystopian state that Margaret Atwood built, the institution that fulfills the duty of educating disobedient fertile women and turning them into proper Handmaids is named Rachel and Leah Re-Education Center. However, this school is quite different from the schools that we used to know considering its way of educating and taming women. Fertile women, -most of them are at

a certain level considering literateness-, from different ethnical backgrounds and various job sectors are taken to this center and re-educated according to the rules and laws of the new Gileadean administration. The theocratical system of Gilead, new rights that are given to women, how to behave, how to walk and how to act in public, how to serve the nation, and the Commanders and their Wives are being taught to Handmaids in Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre. The Red Centre is:

The institution which trains to inculcate those women who are new to Gilead to accept and absorb the rules and expectations of the Gileadean regime. It is a place which works on the malleability of these bodies so that they can willingly adapt to their new roles. They are brainwashed and reeducated to consider their bodies as a means of production and a property of the nation. (Khan, 2020, p.427)

Due to the new adjustments regarding the social and political orders, acceptance might be highly challenging. In order to reduce the adaptation problem to a minimum, Gilead uses Red Centre.

Gilead's newly formed education institution takes its name from the story of Rachel and Leah that was mentioned in the earlier chapters. However, the Handmaids, among themselves, give this institution a different name. In chapter seventeen, Offred mentions how they name the centre as follows; "[t]he Red Centre, we called it, because there was so much red" (Atwood, 2016, p.151) The reason the Handmaids call it "The Red Centre" is that all Handmaids are required to wear uniforms in the color red. When Atwood was asked if she had any interpretations or reasons for making red so prominent besides being a symbol for "blood, power, and rebellion" (The Symbolism, 2017), she answers as follows; "traditional Renaissance color scheme: blue = Virgin Mary. Red = Mary Magdalene + blood + also - used for prisoners of war in WWII Canada as red shows up well against snow!" (The Symbolism, 2017, emphasis in original). Besides symbolizing blood, sin, and fertility, the color red is specifically given to the Handmaids because they are the prisoners of Gilead. When they are out in public, or inside the walls of the Rachel and Leah Re-Education Center, it becomes easy for the Guardians, Eyes, and Aunts to detect where they are. As the color red is prominent in the surrounding of the Handmaids choose to re-name the Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre as The Red Centre.

As mentioned before, the education and training process of this so-called school is quite different than the normal schools. The Red Centre follows a specific curriculum while training the Handmaids. The Red Centre's curriculum is imposed by Gilead

according to their theocratical ideologies that are justified by their law. The Red Centre's curriculum is all about forgetting the past, adapting to a new life, and serving Gilead. Atwood explains that at the Red Centre the Handmaids "must learn to renounce their previous identities, to know their place and their duties, to understand that they have no real rights but will be protected up to a point if they conform, and to think so poorly of themselves that they will accept their assigned fate and not rebel or run away" (Atwood, 2017).

The re-education process at the Red Centre is monitored by the Aunts and they happen to be the only dominant power inside the walls of the Red Centre. The Aunts serve as the mentors for lost women whose minds still live in pre-Gilead. Their sole purpose is to train those women to become proper Handmaids and make sure that they are tamed enough to obey the rules imposed by Gilead. When necessary, the Aunts are even free to use violence to sustain order. However, preparing women for a new life as Handmaids is not the Aunts' only mission. They are also responsible to make the Handmaids remember the mistakes they have done and sins they have committed in the past. Therefore, the Red Centres are not only places to learn how to be a Handmaid but also an institution that requires women to face the past and in conclusion, to repent. Repentance is crucial in the way of re-education because when a person is forced to believe what they did in the past, and how they lived their lives were regarded as acts of sin, they will give up on their own truth and believe in the oppressor's toxic reality. The so-called repentance is the Red Centre's weapon for destroying women's self-identity. If a person's self-identity is destroyed, it will be easier to make them believe in the distorted truth. This is crucial to turn women into obedient Handmaids. In chapter nineteen, Offred states that in the past:

Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers. Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants, along the San Andreas fault, nobody's fault, during the earthquakes, and the mutant strain of syphilis no mould could touch. Some did it themselves, had themselves tied shut with catgut or scarred with chemicals. (Atwood, 2016, p.173)

By recalling the past, Offred might try to justify Gilead's actions towards her and other women. Considering what has happened before Gilead, as Offred states, Aunt Lydia cannot help herself but to ask: "How could they...How could they have done such a thing? Jezebels! Scorning God's gifts!" (Atwood, 2016, p.173). According to Aunt Lydia, what women did in the past is profaning God's gift. She believes that a healthy body and a

fruitful womb is a gift from God but before Gilead, people failed to use the gift honorably. What Aunt Lydia tries at Red Centre is to make sure that the same mistakes will not be done in the future and only obeying the system could make it possible. She calls those who spoil God's gift, "Jezebels" (Atwood, 2016, p.173), and according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word Jezebel means "an impudent, shameless, or morally unrestrained woman". Aunt Lydia's words manifest how the believers of this new system that Gilead introduced label women.

Gilead perceives women as guilty as if they are the only ones who are responsible for the infertility problem. At Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre, this idea is being imposed on women. Fertile women have to pay for their sins in the past and serve this system as Handmaids. Even though mankind is equally guilty of the current situation considering the environment, women are always the ones who pay a heavy price for it. Therefore, Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre serves as the institution that forces women to acknowledge their faults and make them ready to serve in order to pay for what they have done in the past. As mentioned above, Aunt Lydia was calling some women 'Jezebels' as they were not pious enough to honor God's gift and bear children. Offred recalls her memories from Red Centre and mentions Aunt Lydia's arguments:

There was no one cause, says Aunt Lydia. She stands at the front of the room, in her khaki dress, a pointer in her hand. Pulled down in front of the blackboard, where once there would have been a map, is a graph, showing the birth rate per thousand, for years and years: a slippery slope, down past the zero line of replacement, and down and down. Of course, some women believed there would be no future, they thought the world would explode. That was the excuse they used, says Aunt Lydia. They said there was no sense in breeding. Aunt Lydia's nostrils narrow: such wickedness. They were lazy women, she says. They were sluts. (Atwood, 2016, pp.173-174)

The quotation above from the nineteenth chapter reveals that the birth rate per year decreases. The reason for this decrease in the birth rates is believed to be the women who believe that having kids is not sensible since there is no future for them. However, according to Aunt Lydia and Gilead's new beliefs, this is wickedness and as mentioned before, ignoring God's gift to women's bodies. As Aunt Lydia educates the Handmaids at Red Centre, she emphasizes that this behavior is evil, those women were too lazy to bear a child, and even calls them "sluts" (Atwood, 2016, p.174). In fact, the quotation shows that, at Red Centre, Handmaids are taught that giving birth is something sacred

and the gift that God bestowed them should be used to revive and serve the nation. Thus, God's gift will be honored and the population problem due to infertility will be solved.

As it is discussed before, the sole authority at Red Centre, the Aunts, play a crucial role for the adaptation process of the Handmaids as they are the leading female figures:

[I]n establishing dominance over the handmaids through brainwashing and conditioning them to embrace socially instituted reproductive purposes. Miscalling the handmaids as 'ambulatory chalices' and 'sacred vessels', the Aunts delude and persuade them coercively that their self-sacrifice and holy body serves the common good as well as indoctrinating the over glorification of maternity, impeaching the women who do not bear a child as 'wickedness', 'lazy women', and 'sluts'. They take an active role in enslaving the handmaids to the patriarchy, bringing to their knees; therefore, the Aunts are the most striking figures applying strict pressures on their fellows. (Gayret, 2019, p.115)

In the quotation above, the power of the Aunts over the Handmaids is emphasized. As being the only female authority that the Handmaids encounter at Red Centre, the Aunts try to impose the idea of a holy sacrifice by defining the Handmaids as 'ambulatory chalices', and 'sacred vessels', also glorifying the concept of surrogate motherhood. The work that Aunts do at Red Centre is crucial for the process of brainwashing. The Handmaids must alienate themselves from their past, forget it completely and be ready to accept themselves as the commodities of the new regime. It is significant to underline that a Handmaid should be aware of her importance and behave according to it. Gilead introduces a new perception when it comes to the role of women:

The use of women as tools in industrializing domestic work requires that both genders internalize a new perception of women. In order to sustain the political system, women must be taught to regard themselves as commodities. This perspective, enforced on Offred at the Red Center, is evident in her self-descriptions: 'I will never be able to fade, finally, into another landscape,' she says, because 'I am too important, too scarce, for that. I am a national resource'. (Mirzayee, 2019, p.119)

The Handmaids are taught that they are the national resources and too valuable to live the way they did before Gilead. At the Red Centre, precious vessels of Gilead, the Handmaids, are constantly reminded of the fact that they are no longer free individuals but commodities of Gilead. Aunts try to make these women think they are much more valuable when they serve as Handmaids and their commitment will be rewarded with a real treasure which is a baby.

2.1.2 The Testifying Ceremony

The Handmaids are constantly reminded of their pasts and forced to repent which in the end makes the brainwashing process easier. Confession and forgiveness are the basis of the training of the Handmaids at Red Centre. The Aunts try to make the Handmaids believe that how they lived before Gilead was wrong and that they should be ransomed. What the Aunts do at Red Centre is disrupt the notion of the past and create a new reality for the Handmaids in order to make them serve the ideologies of Gilead. Callaway explains:

Within the confines of the Red Center, abuse is predominately psychological. Humiliation is a favorite technique of the Aunts. Janine, another Handmaid-in-training, repeatedly suffers public humiliation. For instance, an Aunt refuses to allow her a restroom break so she soils herself in front of the group. On another occasion, Janine is bullied into admitting she enticed the men who gang-raped her, resulting in the abortion that marred her teenage years. (Callaway, 2008, p.53)

In chapter thirteen, Offred introduces the reader to a ritual called “Testifying” (Atwood, 2016, 111). “Two-thirty comes during Testifying. Aunt Helena is here, as well as Aunt Lydia, because Testifying is special” (Atwood, 2016, p.111). She describes an environment where the Handmaids that are trained at the Red Center at that moment gather and testify to another Handmaid’s confessions. Offred states that “[I]t’s Janine, telling about how she was gang-raped at fourteen and had an abortion. She told the same story last week. She seemed almost proud of it, while she was telling. It may not even be true. At Testifying, it’s safer to make things up than to say you have nothing to reveal. But since it’s Janine, it’s probably more or less true” (Atwood, 2016, p.111). As Offred mentions, all Handmaids are required to reveal an unpleasant truth about themselves. More like a mistake that they made in their lives before Gilead’s takeover. The information they share during Testifying is something that now Gilead forbids. The idea behind Testifying is forcing the Handmaids to confess and make amends to be freed from that mistake. After Janine tells about how she was raped at the age of fourteen, “but whose fault was it? Aunt Helena says” (Atwood, 2016, p.111) The crowd full of other Handmaids “chant in unison”: “Her fault, her fault, her fault” Then Aunt Helena asks: “Who led them on?” (Atwood, 2016, p.111) Handmaids answer back in unison again: “She did. She did. She did” (Atwood, 2016, p.112). The Aunt goes on asking: “Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen?” (Atwood, 2016, p.112). Handmaids answer

back one more time: “Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson” (Atwood, 2016, p.112). The traumatic experience that Janine had when she was fourteen years old is explicitly mentioned as her own fault. But, the question should be ‘how can this be a fourteen years old’s fault?’ Aunts at the Red Center use public humiliation as a tool to break Handmaids’ self-esteem and it works perfectly. The ritual that is named ‘Testifying’ serves this cause.

People who are the victims of humiliation tend to be more obedient to their oppressors. According to Dr. Neel Burton, “it is in the nature of humiliation that it undermines the ability of victims to defend themselves against their aggressor or aggressors. In any case, anger, violence, and revenge are ineffective responses to humiliation because they do nothing to reverse or repair the damage that has been done” (Burton, 2014). Everyone around Janine knows what she has been through when she was fourteen years old is not her fault but they are forced to believe and tell otherwise. It is just a part of the brainwashing process. Teachings of Red Center disrupt the notion of reality so it becomes easier to make the Handmaids accept the new reality. Offred tells that:

Last week, Janine burst into tears. Aunt Helena made her kneel at the front of the classroom, hands behind her back, where we could all see her, her red face and dripping nose. She looked disgusting: weak squirmy, blotchy, pink, like a newborn mouse. None of us wanted to look like that, ever. For a moment, even though we knew what was being done to her, we despised her. (Atwood, 2016, p.112)

Offred’s and other Handmaids’ thoughts regarding Janine’s situation is a clear manifestation of the success of the teachers at the Red Center. It seems that the Aunts managed to remove normal humane thoughts from Offred’s and other Handmaids’ minds and replace them with Gilead’s tenets. As Gayret mentions, during Janine’s testifying:

The Handmaids cooperate with the Aunts to oppress Janine, jeering and returning a verdict of guilty instead of commiserating with their fellow. Intimidated and victimized from public humiliation, Janine bursts into tear, comes to unfair accusations, and confesses: ‘It was my own fault. I led them on. I deserved the pain’. [...] Janine is caught in limbo of internalized oppression which relapses into silence, poisons the mind, and incarcerates the soul in self-humiliation as a result of lameness of female solidarity. (Gayret, 2019, p.116)

During the testifying ceremony, it is obvious that a Handmaid is publicly humiliated. However, this ceremony is not only detrimental to the Handmaid who makes the confession, but also to other Handmaids who are forced to despise their fellow. Just like

in every practice that Gilead brings, the testifying ceremony is also a traumatic experience for all parties involved.

2.1.3 The New Daily Routines

In chapter thirteen, Offred recalls her memories from the Red Centre and says that Aunt Lydia used to tell the Handmaids that they “can always practice...Several sessions a day, fitted into your daily routine. Arms at the sides, knees bent, lift the pelvis, roll the backbone down. Tuck. Again. Breathe in to the count of five, hold, expel” (Atwood, 2016, p.108). Obviously, Aunt Lydia aims to keep the Handmaids’ bodies healthy and steady since they are expected to carry babies for the Commanders. The exercise routine is advised to be performed in the Handmaids’ spare time which they have plenty of during their time at Commanders’ houses. Offred talks about blank time practice in the Red Centre as follows:

In the afternoons we lay on our beds for an hour in the gymnasium, between three and four. They said it was a period of rest and meditation. I thought then they did it because they wanted some time off themselves, from teaching us, and I know the Aunts not on duty went off to the teachers’ room for a cup of coffee, or whatever they called by that name. But now I think the rest also was practice. They were giving us a chance to get used to blank time.
(Atwood, 2016, p.109)

The place where was a school gymnasium before Gilead is now used as the bunkroom of the Handmaids in the Red Centre. Offred mentions that in the gymnasium, all the Handmaids are required to lay in beds for some time. She believes that the free time that is given to them by the Aunts is also a part of their training. Once they are placed in a Commander’s house the Handmaids will have a lot of blank time since they are only expected to be present during the ceremonies and go out for a walk to get groceries with a fellow Handmaid. Considering the job definition of the Handmaids, blank time overrides the time that they are actually busy with something. Hence, the Handmaids are trained to get used to blank time in the Red Centre. Since the Handmaids were people who had actual jobs, and busy lifestyles before Gilead’s take over, it is no surprise that a special training is needed to get them to adapt to their new way of life. In the following quotation, Offred also mentions that they needed the rest:

Many of us went to sleep. We were tired there, a lot of the time. We were on some kind of pill or drug I think, they put it in the food, to keep us calm. But maybe not. Maybe it was the place itself. After the first shock, after you'd come to terms, it was better to be lethargic. You could tell yourself you were saving up your strength. (Atwood, 2016, p.109)

Offred states that they were tired most of the time in the Red Centre. She is even suspicious about being drugged to be calm. Then she realizes that the place itself might be the reason for the tiredness. A sudden change in their way of life puts the Handmaids in such a situation that even their bodies refuse to be vigilant. In a way, their bodies are protecting them from the danger that is present outside when they are awake and not lethargic.

During their stay at the Red Centre, the Handmaids also witness some new arrivals of other women to be trained as Handmaids as well. In Offred's third week in the Red Centre, the Aunts bring her friend Moira into the gymnasium while the Handmaids are having a nap. For several days, two friends could not even talk to each other because as Offred mentions "friendships were suspicious" (Atwood, 2016, p.110). Offred and Moira were able to talk on the fourth day of Moira's arrival during the daily walk which was performed in pairs as training for the shopping trips. To walk in pairs was something that is taught in the Red Centre. One was bad, three was too much but two was always safe. The Handmaids could never know if their walking partner was a person who is safe to talk to freely or a believer, so they would walk in silence, without planning anything that will hurt Gilead. This was the idea behind walking in pairs. When Offred and Moira stand next to each other during the walk Offred was concerned that someone might report them because in the Red Centre, "some were believers" (Atwood, 2016, p.110). In a place like Red Centre, even though it might sound awkward to have believers of the system and its doctrines, what Gilead's doing is to prevent disorder and rebellion by brainwashing these women and placing the fear of being reported in their minds. Considering that all the Handmaids are trained the same way and face misconduct through the same process, it is expected of them to unite and be one against the oppressor. Yet, they do not even try to do so because they were also taught not to trust each other at Red Centre. By doing so, Gilead prevents any kind of rebellious activity.

The outcomes of the teaching of distrust are revealed later at the Commanders' houses in the daily shopping walks. The Handmaids would not talk to each other until they are absolutely sure about their walking partners are not spies. They have to make

sure that their partners will not report them if an inappropriate idea slips from their mouths accidentally. Until then, the Handmaids greet each other with the same words and talk in a specific manner which was again taught in the Red Centre. ‘Under his eye’, ‘may the lord open’, ‘praise be’, ‘we have been sent good weather’ were the phrases that they were taught and forced to use. For all of the Handmaids that stay in the Red Centre, it is “forbidden to show confidence, to look anyone in the eye, or to speak without permission; even when allowed to speak, they can only use formulaic quasi-biblical phrases (e.g. ‘Praise be’). In short, their new social role after the mandatory brainwashing is to ‘[j]ust do your duty in silence’. (Kiss, 2020, p.61) Gilead was imposing fear on Handmaids from the first day of their training by putting rules that are not to be disobeyed under any circumstances. There was always someone to supervise them. The danger of being reported and ending up at the wall was always reminded to the Handmaids. Hence, when they finally graduated from the Red Centre, the Handmaids were not able to trust anyone but themselves in the outside world. Not being able to trust a fellow Handmaid is making these women feel mentally exhausted therefore believing and trusting the system becomes much easier. As a result, due to the training they received at the Red Centre, the Handmaids are never united against Gilead and cannot get rid of the situation that they are unwillingly in. The walking in pairs system that was taught in Red Centre was preventing the Handmaids to act against Gilead and scaring them. Although some teachings of Red Center seem like minor details, they can actually be regarded as Gilead’s self-protection mechanism.

2.1.4 A Fantasy for The Handmaids: Moira

In Offred’s Red Centre memories, a significant character, Moira, is introduced to the reader. Her actions highly affect other Handmaids’ perception of the Red Centre. Moira is an activist, a feminist, and also a homosexual woman who advocates for gender equality. As mentioned in earlier chapters, homosexuality is a sin and is prohibited by the law. Homosexuality in Gilead is seen as gender treachery. The way Moira was living her life before Gilead is the opposite lifestyle that Gilead tries to impose on women. Unlike other Handmaids at the Red Centre, Moira is a non-complying and rebellious supporting character. She even tries to escape Red Centre more than once.

In oppressive regimes like Gilead, characters such as Moira are the ones that threaten and damage the authority the most. The way Moira behaves at Red Centre, how

she mocks the Aunts, and how she refuses to follow the order damages the authority and makes other Handmaids believe that there is always a way out. What even matters the most is that Moira does not stop trying to escape even though she gets punished for it. It is clear that the Aunts use physical violence as a tool for re-educating the Handmaids and they use it on Moira as well after she tries to escape. For the first offense, the Aunts beat Moira's feet with "steel cables" (Atwood, 2016, p.143). For the second offense, it is the hands that are punished. Offred states that "they didn't care what they did to your feet and hands, even if it was permanent. Remember, said Aunt Lydia. For our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential" (Atwood, 2016, p.143). This shows that, at the Red Centre, physical violence is conducted by the Aunts to tame the Handmaids. While this is a violation of human rights, it is also an example of physical exploitation. Offred describes what Moira's feet look like after they brought her in as follows; Her feet did not look like feet at all. They looked like drowned feet, swollen and boneless, except for the colour. They looked like lungs" (Atwood, 2016, p.143). Offred's description gives the reader a clear example of how violent was the Aunts' actions against a simple offense. The harder the punishment the easier it gets to scare the Handmaids. It is crucial to state that the Aunts do not avoid causing permanent damages unless it does not have an effect that will keep the Handmaid from carrying a baby. The Handmaids are only considered as a vessel, not as individual human beings. Their womb is what matters, not their entire bodies.

Even after being beaten and hurt, Moira tries to escape from the Red Centre again and actually manages to. Then, she becomes a legend for other Handmaids at the Red Center. Because Moira is so much more than a Handmaid. She is a ray of hope for women who are trapped in Gilead. Offred describes Moira as follows; "Nevertheless Moira was our fantasy. We hugged her to us, she was with us in secret, a giggle; she was lava beneath the crust of daily life. In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd. Their power had a flaw to it. They could be shanghaied in toilets. The audacity was what we like" (Atwood, 2016, p.207). Besides giving the Handmaids pleasure, Moira's escape damages the authority that is built in the Red Centre as well. It becomes a symbol for the Handmaids and such symbols are the biggest enemy of Gilead. Bouson explains, after her escape from the Red Centre, Moira becomes a fantasy for the other Handmaids. Because of her brave act of rebellion, the Aunts are "'less fearsome and more absurd,' for their power is somehow flawed. However, the Handmaids also find something frightening in

Moira's freedom. (Bouson, 1993, p.151). As Offred states "Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure. In the upper reaches of the atmosphere you'd come apart, you'd vaporize, there would be no pressure holding you together" (Atwood, 2016, p.207). The Handmaids find Moira's escape frightening. Offred describes Moira as a fantasy, but she also states how frightened the Handmaids are because of her escape. She likens Moira to "an elevator with open sides" (Atwood, 2016, p.207) which makes them "dizzy" (Atwood, 2016, p.207). The psychological and physical violence that the Handmaids face at Red Centre since Gilead's takeover made them forget that they were once free individuals. Prisonlike life caused them to lose 'the taste for freedom' and adapt to their new lives at Red Centre. This situation is a clear manifestation of how destructive the effects of psychological exploitation that they face at the Red Centre are.

The Red Centre is an education center but it also seems like a military camp where women are trained to survive outside as the first responders to the infertility crisis, follow certain rules, forced to wear uniforms just like soldiers. Just as a camp, the Handmaids must follow a tight schedule. Training hours, testifying hours, diner times, all activities are done according to a schedule. The Handmaids have to follow the rules that are enforced by the administration and obey them as well. The state is like a war-camp:

Its heart, i.e. the Red Centre and homes of the elite, are continuously guarded by armed soldiers, protected by barbed wire and searchlights. Handmaids are guardians of biological survival, and their task is, in this sense, similar to that of soldiers. The similarity is enhanced by imagery, e.g. they sleep in military cots, covered with US army blankets. Part of the indoctrination in the Red Centre is presented in a crude military phrasing: 'you are the shock troops, you will march out in advance into dangerous territory. The greater the risk the greater the glory' says Aunt Lydia. Her words could be called a manifesto of Gileadite ideology which entails risk and personal sacrifice. (Filipczak, 1993, p.178)

Handmaids are forced to adapt to the new order and most importantly to be a part of this order willingly. In short, Red Centre's aim is to make the Handmaids concede to live this way and begin serving the nation's best interest. Filipczak defines Handmaids as the guardians of biological survival. Like soldiers, they have a crucial duty which is to serve the biological survival of their country. Considering the Handmaids' situation this duty requires a personal sacrifice as in sharing their bodies with Gileadean ideology. Aunt Lydia calling the Handmaids the shock troops reveals the idea of militarism and the aim of the Re-education Centre which is to raise loyal and obedient servants for the nation.

2.2 THE INSEMINATION CEREMONY

Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.

-Margaret Atwood

In the genre of Utopian and Dystopian fiction, some parts test the patience of the reader. In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, this part contains the insemination ceremony which occurs between the Commander and the Handmaid in the presence of the Commander's wife. The monthly ceremony occurs when the Handmaid is most 'fruitful' considering her menstrual cycle. The night of the ceremony begins with the arrival of the Commander. The entire household which includes Offred, Rita, Cora, Nick, and Serena Joy must come together and wait for the arrival of the Commander to initiate it. Offred mentions that she waits, "for the household to assemble on her knees" (Atwood, 2016, p.124). She then explains that "[t]he Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, till death do us part" (Atwood, 2016, p.124). The entire household must attend this event no matter what they are busy with at that moment. As Offred remarks, "they need to be here, they all need to be here, the Ceremony demands it. We are all obliged to sit through this, one way or another" (Atwood, 2016, p.124). As the quotations from the novel suggest, the ritual that takes place before the actual ceremony requires the entire household to be present. Later, the members of the household leave the Commander, the Wife, and the Handmaid in their bed chamber and let the ceremony begin. Gathering the household together to initiate the ritual might signify that they all are in this together. Whether it is a sin or a blessing the household must gather and have to be a part of it. Since the ceremony comes from a story that takes place in the bible, it is regarded as a sacred action. Therefore, for the members of the household, the ritual before the ceremony is an obligatory religious event that they all have to attend. When each member of the household comes together, the Commander takes the holy book which lays inside of a locked box, and begins reading the story of Rachel and Leah. Offred comments on the story as follows; "God to Adam, God to Noah. Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. Then comes the mouldy old Rachel and Leah stuff we had drummed into us at the Centre" (Atwood, 2016, p.138). Here, Offred mocks the story by calling it "mouldy old Rachel and Leah stuff" (Atwood, 2016, p.138). She is aware that the text which the Commander reads before the ceremony shows that Gilead uses the holy scripture to cover the obnoxious side of the ceremony and show it

as a religious obligation. Thus, the process that the Handmaid has to go through with the Commander and the Commander's Wife is reinvented as a religious act. In fact, by making the Commander read the story of Rachel and Leah, Gilead works on imposing an idea that emphasizes that the ceremony cannot be named as an act of rape but is a sacred duty. Gilead manages to impose the idea successfully that in later chapters, even Offred avoids naming the Ceremony as rape. Just like Rachel and Leah, the Handmaids are making a holy sacrifice for the sake of the nation since the nation is desperately in need of fertile women to fix the population decrease. Even though Gilead tries to show the ceremony as a sacred duty, it is a formidable practice and a terrorizing experience for women. Undoubtedly, such an experience demolishes self-love and leaves unfixable injuries in one's soul. For Offred, it results in hating her body which is a crucial step for Gilead to achieve their goal of alienating women from the sense of self by making them hate their own bodies:

Offred detaches from her body and disembodies herself during the Ceremony, forced sexual interaction with Commander Fred under the eyes of the Wife Serena, in order to alleviate her pain: 'I would steel myself. I would pretend not to be present, not in the flesh'. As the female body is shattered into sexual functions and degraded into commoditized vagina, womb, and ovaries, the system bulldozes into the female self-conception, thereby aggravating bleeding in her soul. (Gayret, 2019, p.111)

The heroine's words show that the requirements of the Insemination Ceremony disturb her perception of the body. The Ceremony displays how women are commodified and degraded regarding their individuality.

The traumatic effects of the Ceremony also erase the sense of self. In chapter twelve, Offred's description of how she feels shows her state of mind clearly; "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" (Atwood, 2016, p.98). Here in this quotation, Offred informs the reader how she is affected by the ceremony and that she does not have any control over her body. Her body became the only thing that determines her. It can be stated that:

[T]he condition of female emancipation is to retrieve total control over their own bodies; however, Offred abhors and detaches from body which is abnegated as merely a womb. She is slammed with a fertile identity, thereby leading her to self-rejection, self-loathing, and reiteration of her inferiority. (Gayret, 2019, p.111)

In fact, the quotation given from chapter twelve manifests Gilead's objectification of women's bodies. The Handmaids are only identified as biological objects that are used to reproduce. The body which should be the most private part of a person is now the most violated part. Therefore, the owner of this violated body hates looking at it. Considering Offred's words, after what she has been through, it can be said that her own body is now a burden for her to carry to death. What makes the ceremony cruel is that it is a threat to one's autonomy.

The legalized rape which is systematically conducted by Gilead is an act of violence that damages the Handmaid's state of mind and self-autonomy. During the Ceremony, the Commanders do not only rape the Handmaids physically but also rape their self-identity. In chapter thirteen, Offred reminds herself that she used to see her body as an "instrument of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplish of 'her' will" (Atwood, 2016, p.115). She remembers how her body was "one with her" (Atwood, 2016, p.115). She remembers being in harmony with her body and how she had control over it. However, in Gilead, a Handmaid does not have the freedom to decide over her own body. The fruit that Offred and the other Handmaids have which in Gileadean discourse is the most valuable possession of women that allows them to reproduce, is not theirs to use or control anymore. The body of women is owned and controlled by the androcentric administration of Gilead.

Along with the Handmaids, also the Wives have to go through the same process as they have to be in the same room when the ceremony takes place. The "monthly rape 'Ceremony' follows the scriptural 'and she shall bear upon my knees, and grotesquely requires the presence of Wife, Handmaid, and Commander. It synthesizes the institutionalized humiliation, objectification, and ownership of women in Gilead" (Cavalcanti, 2000, p.166). In chapter fifteen, while the Commander reads the story of Rachel and Leah, Offred tells the reader that Serena Joy cries and she always does that on the night of the ceremony but she tries to hide her tears to be able to "preserve her dignity" (Atwood, 2016, p.141). Similar to Offred's, the situation that Serena Joy is in is also humiliating. She is desperately in need of a child but being barren makes her vulnerable. This vulnerability weakens Serena Joy and other women who are unable to procreate. Wives are seen as deficient women by society. Yet, the desire to have a baby surpasses the humiliation that they feel during the Ceremony. This is how they are able to tolerate it.

During the ceremony, Offred informs the reader that she lies between Serena's legs. Her "head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thighs on either side of me. She too is fully clothed" (Atwood, 2016, p.146). As it is stated above, during the ceremony, everyone involved is fully clothed. Being fully clothed means that the ceremony's aim is only to procreate. Later Offred informs the reader that the ceremony "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, at least for me, and certainly not for Serena" (Atwood, 2016, p.147). As Yousefi and Moosavinia suggest, "[d]etachment from sex turns it into a commodity in control of the government. In this context, taking pleasure in sex will not be necessary, but only 'a symptom of frivolity' and a distraction" (Moosavinia and Yousefi, 2018, p.165). The quotation above also conveys the message that Offred is aware of the fact that like herself, Serena Joy is also not very happy to be in such a situation. Yet she gets mad at how Serena acts when the Ceremony is finished and asks "which of us is it worse for, her or me?" (Atwood, 2016, p.149). Serena wants Offred out of the room straight away. She tells Offred to "get up and get out" (Atwood, 2016, p.149). According to the rules, Serena must let the Handmaid "rest for ten minutes" (Atwood, 2016, p.149) with her "feet on a pillow to improve the chances" (Atwood, 2016, p.149). Offred realizes that at that specific moment, Serena despises her "as if the touch of" her "flesh sickens and contaminates her" (Atwood, 2016, p.149). These women, Offred and Serena Joy, have to be together for a common purpose. Serena, as a Wife who is seen as a defeated woman, dreams to be completed with the birth of a baby and Offred wishes to get pregnant, otherwise, she will be sent to the colonies to clean up toxic waste. A Handmaid is required to give birth in order to serve Gilead. If she fails, there is a chance to be sent to colonies. In chapter thirteen, Offred explains her situation as follows; "Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfill the expectations of others, which have become my own" (Atwood, 2016, p.115). Offred mentions that she fearfully waits for the blood every month. If a Handmaid menstruates, it is regarded as a failure. What is crucial the most is that not being able to get pregnant is only regarded as the failure of the Handmaid. If a Handmaid cannot get pregnant -the sentence is never formed as 'If a Commander fails to impregnate the Handmaid'- she is posted to another Commander's house and the former Commander of the Handmaid is given another Handmaid. Gilead never blames the man even though both man and woman have to be fertile to reproduce.

Offred expecting the blood fearfully every month shows that she accepts the nature of the ceremony and is willing to get pregnant. Failure could cost Offred her life.

Another significant point is that Offred admits that the expectations of others have become her own. She expects her body to do what it suppose to do and have a baby. Not that she is expecting this baby with a maternal instinct but fear of failure shapes her thoughts. Offred completely “surrenders to the Ceremony adopted by Gilead. Both Serena Joy and Offred are desperate for a child. Serena Joy may be just for the sake of motherhood and Offred to escape the wretched situation that would follow her in the Colonies” (Mythili, 2020, p.127). Regarding Offred’s state of mind, acceptance is quite significant since it enables her to continue to live. As pointed out above, Offred surrenders to the system completely, not because she wanted to, but she had to. She consistently reminds herself that she chose to be a Handmaid. In chapter sixteen, Offred tries to convince herself that nothing happens during the ceremony without her consent:

My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he’s doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven’t signed up for. There wasn’t a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose. (Atwood, 2016, p.146)

Offred’s definition “of the Ceremony confirms the cruelty and the violence exerted on the handmaid and that the handmaid suffers from both physical and psychological injuries” (Sadeghi and Mirzapour, 2020, p.3). The quotation shows that to cope with this toxic reality, Offred tries to justify Gilead’s vile practices. However, this does not mean that she takes their side or loves being a part of it. Her words might be interpreted as if Offred blames herself for her current situation. This is why she avoids describing the insemination ceremony which is legalized by Gilead as ‘rape’. Offred was once an independent woman who was able to decide for herself. Her life was in her control in the past but with Gilead’s take over she loses her privileges in life such as being able to decide on her own. A completely different class system is introduced by Gilead and the place of Offred in society immediately changed. Degrading in social status by force made Offred forget how she lived before and accept that being a Handmaid was her choice. It can be said that this is why she even avoids feeling sorry for her situation and accepts it as it is.

As remarked before, Gilead introduces a brand new hierarchy based solely on gender. In each practice that is imposed by Gilead, the notion of men's superiority over women is justified. Ruling class being consisted only of men, women's existence only to serve The Sons of Jacob and Gilead are the examples that can be given considering those practices. As in social life, Gilead's most significant and vile practice, the Ceremony, manifests the fact that women are in an inferior position compared to men. Male dominance is emphasized even in women's manner of action during the ceremony. Regarding this:

Sex in the Ceremony somehow consolidates the gender hierarchy that exists in the society. Sexual intercourse in this manner requires women to be passive and subordinate, and men to be dominant and in control. Radical feminist, Andrea Dworkin, in her book Intercourse argues that in a patriarchal society, the purpose of laws on intercourse is to further men's dominance over women and maintain women's submission. Therefore, she concludes these laws 'work by creating gender'. Men are the subjects of sex while women are regarded as sexual objects. The sexual behavior of both genders at the Ceremony reflects their social place in society. Women have a submissive role in this society, while men have more control and more chances of survival. And these roles are being reinforced in the Ceremony more explicitly. The Handmaid lies down passively, while the man always stands up. He has the agency to act while the woman always remains passive. (Moosavinia and Yousefi, 2018, p.165)

Men's dominance over women shows itself even in the rituals of the ceremony. In the novel, "women's sexual desires are oppressed, and women's inferiority and man's superiority are presented in Ceremony" (Zarrinjooee & Kalantarian, 2017, p.70). How to act and stand during the ceremony is taught by the Aunts in Red Center which can be described as a school that tutors women on 'How To Be A Handmaid'. This means how they stand during the Ceremony is not coincidental. It is reinforced by Gilead. Even though there are simple details that limit the Commander such as being dressed or being not allowed to show any sign of pleasure, they control the body of the Handmaid during the Ceremony. The Handmaid has to wait submissively till the ceremony is done just like they have to wait submissively to be governed by the male authorities of Gilead.



CHAPTER 3

TWO-LEGGED WOMBS: GILEADEAN PERCEPTION OF MOTHERHOOD AND THE APPLIANCE OF THE SURROGACY SYSTEM

3.1 GILEAD'S APPROACH TO MOTHERHOOD AND THE NEW FAMILY UNIT

Motherhood or being a mother is generally perceived as a blessed feature. It is regarded as a sacred notion and deeply respected. Besides being regarded as a sacred notion, it is also one of the most natural features that a woman possesses. Normally, this feature is not the only aspect that defines a woman. However, in Margaret Atwood's dystopic universe Gilead, the concept of motherhood takes an important place as an aspect that determines women. Nevertheless, Gilead's approach to the concept of motherhood and maternity is a little different than usual. It may be useful to divide the concept into two groups to give a clear comprehension; there are women who are forced to bear children for the elites, and there are women who are responsible for raising the baby that has been carried for them. The first group are the surrogate mothers, also known as the Handmaids and the second group are the intended mothers, also known as the Wives. In previous chapters, Gilead's classification of women according to their abilities and biological functions was mentioned. This classification includes; The Aunts, the Marthas, the Economiwives, the Handmaids, and the Unwomen. Considering their functions, the Handmaids are the ones that are classified as a distinguished group since they are biologically superior compared to other women in Gilead. The biological superiority in question is the Handmaids' ability to reproduce.

Declining birth rates due to environmental disasters make the existence of fertile women quite significant for Gilead. According to Miceli, "[i]n Gilead, patriarchy is what defines both the personal and the public life and the most oppressive issue, that of infertility and the possible extinction of humanity, is solved by using the last fertile women as 'productive wombs'" (Miceli, 2018, p.96). The role of being the two-legged wombs of the Gilead is "created in combination with Gilead's patriarchal surrogate system, alongside its dehumanizing education [...] system as a way to control the Handmaids, making them reproductive machines or commodities for Gilead's upper-class community to consume" (Sion, 2021, p.5). As mentioned in earlier chapters, Gilead uses Red Centre to convert independent women into selfless reproductive machines. The Handmaids are prepared to be surrogate mothers in Red Centre. The sole purpose is to adapt the Handmaids to the new concept of motherhood in which they will take part as surrogates. The best way to achieve this is to show previous practices that were adapted to society before Gilead and condemn those practices.

During her stay in the Red Centre, Offred mentions that she sees her mother in an Unwoman Documentary. According to Offred's implications, it is known that her mother was an activist who fought for women's rights. The scene that was being shown to the Handmaids is from a protest march that Offred's mother took part in. The protest march was organized for women to have control over their bodies as in having a right to get an abortion. Offred states that even though the Handmaids are not allowed to read, some of the slogans in the video were never censored because they were meant to be seen by the Handmaids in order to remind the mistakes that were made by women. Some specific slogans that were not removed from the video are; "FREEDOM TO CHOOSE. EVERY BABY A WANTED BABY. RECAPTURE OUR BODIES. DO YOU BELIEVE A WOMAN'S PLACE IS ON THE KITCHEN TABLE?" (Atwood, 2016, p.185, emphasis in original). The slogans in question defend the right to get an abortion and women's control over their own bodies. As Offred remembers after seeing her mother in the documentary, women used to organize such protest marches to defend their rights as free human beings. However, having an abortion and organizing such events are now strictly forbidden since Gilead is against the idea of women having control over their own bodies. All white fertile women in Gilead are obliged to bear children. If a woman is able to reproduce, she must give birth to healthy babies for the Commanders and their 'barren' Wives whether they want to carry a baby or not. The decision is not up to the Handmaids. There are authorities who do the deciding part for them.

Surrogacy is a common practice that allows couples to reach parenthood. All around the world, couples often require surrogacy agreements for various reasons. In today's world:

In so-called traditional surrogacy, the surrogate mother is impregnated through artificial insemination with the sperm of the husband in gestational surrogacy, the wife's ova and the husband's sperm are subjected to in vitro fertilization, and the resulting embryo is implanted in the surrogate mother. (Surrogate Motherhood, 2022)

However, in Gilead's case, the Handmaid who is supposed to be the surrogate mother is impregnated by the Commander during the insemination ceremony since the Wife is not able to reproduce. Consequentially, both the surrogate and biological mother of the baby is a Handmaid. The Wife is not genetically related to the child at all. In other words, the Wife does not have any role in the creation process of the baby. To make the Wife feel more connected to the baby, insemination and birthing ceremonies are organized. Unlike

the traditional process of surrogacy⁷, the surrogate mother lives in the same house with the intended parents of the baby. The process includes monthly ceremonies till the Handmaids get pregnant, nine months of pregnancy, and a few months after birth for nursing the baby. As Offred mentions in chapter twenty-one the Handmaid will be “allowed to nurse the baby, for a few months, they believe in mother’s milk. After that she’ll be transferred, to see if she can do it again, with someone else who needs a turn. But she’ll never be sent to the Colonies, she’ll never be declared Unwoman. That is her reward” (Atwood, 2016, p.196). Giving birth to a baby strengthens the Handmaids’ status in society. However, the Handmaid is still the prisoner of the system but because of the baby, she is not to be sent to colonies or declared Unwoman unless she commits an unforgivable crime. Offred mentions it as the reward. Just as women are commodified by Gilead and become their property, “the children they produce are commodified” (Stein, 2001, p.134) as well. “In *Tale*, bearing a child insures the handmaid’s survival, while handmaids who fail to produce progeny after three postings are exiled to the toxic waste colonies”. (Stein, 2001, p.134)

The Handmaids’ relationship with the baby is limited. Even though they are the biological mothers of the baby they are not allowed to be in the same house with them and to raise them as their own. The baby becomes the property of the Wife. The Handmaids are only ‘vessels’ for the babies. The person who is going to raise the baby is the Wife of the Commander. The Wives who are defined as “defeated women” (Atwood, 2016, p.73) by Gilead, go through the whole process of insemination ceremony and birthing ceremony together with the appointed Handmaid. They share the same household during the entire process which might be a disturbing situation. As Miceli claims, the:

‘Handmaids,’ must live with the Commanders of the State of Gilead and their Wives ‘in a parody of a family unit’ and attend a monthly ‘ceremony’ where they have sex with the Commander, in the presence of the Wife. If the intercourse results in a pregnancy, the baby will be relinquished to the couple as soon as he/she is born. This arrangement creates a new kind of family that seems to make obsolete the previous one, producing ‘that dangerous, creeping normalization, the utterly unordinary becoming ordinary’. It creates a new ‘balance,’ new bonds, and it deals with current issues such as surrogacy and the role of women both in the family and in society. (Miceli, 2018, p.96)

⁷ The surrogacy process that is used in today’s world, not in Gilead.

The innovations brought by Gilead deeply affect the social order and family structure as well as the management style. Unlike the formation of the traditional family unit, Gilead's family unit contains the Commander as the father and the Wife as the mother. However, Gilead also introduces a third party involved in their family unit which is the Handmaid, who is both the biological mother and the surrogate mother of the child in this new formation of the family unit that Kuźnicki calls a "parody" (Kuźnicki, 2017, p.68). This new family model causes a creation of a new balance, a new system.

Gilead's family unit is quite different from the traditional family structure that changes the bonds of a family and the roles of women entirely. Ironically, the new system works only for the benefit of the male rulers. It is designed for the Commanders to procreate by exploiting innocent fertile women who are forced to be used as surrogates. The process changes the place of fertile women in society by making them a part of the surrogacy system but not a mother. Also, the Wives go through a painful and humiliating process to reach motherhood. Even though Gilead justifies the process by using religious doctrines, it does not change the fact that the baby is a product of rape, if discovered, it might traumatize a person for her/his entire life.

3.2 PRE-PREGNANCY CARE AND THE PROCESS OF SURROGACY

3.2.1 Foundation of Gilead's Surrogacy System

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* not only displays a world where fertile women are used as sexual objects and servants by infertile couples but also the Republic of Gilead introduces a completely new system regarding motherhood, family, and birth. Traditional order in the households is rearranged. The concept of family changes completely with Gilead's take over.

The novel "demonstrates what occurs when a society adopts the theme that 'anatomy is destiny,' in that every woman in this text is defined and regulated in terms of her ability and willingness to bear children. Handmaids, of course, are the sacred vessels who have signed up for their duties as surrogate mothers for wealthy white families" (Gulick, 1991, p.55). In Historical Notes On *The Handmaid's Tale* section, the concept of surrogacy is discussed as follows:

The need for what I may call birth services was already recognized in the pre-Gilead period, where it was being inadequately met by 'artificial insemination,' 'fertility clinics,' and the use of 'surrogate mothers,' who were hired for the purpose. Gilead outlawed the first two as irreligious, but legitimized and enforced the third, which was considered to have biblical precedents; they thus replaced the serial polygamy common in the pre-Gilead period with the older form of simultaneous polygamy practiced both in early Old Testament times and in the former State of Utah in the nineteenth century. (Atwood, 2016, p.468)

In the new surrogacy system that Gilead introduced, the Handmaids are not only the surrogates or 'vessels' as they are depicted in the novel and this is what makes the surrogacy system even more bizarre than it is. Leaders of the patriarchal order of Gilead believe that they are being punished by God for the implementations that were used in the past regarding birth control, and the disrespectful usage of the blessings from God.

As a result the administration completely crosses out the idea of the usage of artificial insemination technology since it is regarded as inappropriate on a religious basis. The untraditional system of surrogacy that Gilead applies results in the Handmaid being the real biological mother of the Commander's child. The Wives do not have any biological contribution to the process, yet they take part in the insemination ceremony to be able to feel more connected to the children to be born just as exemplified in Rachel and Bilhah's story. The Wife positions herself behind the Handmaid and grabs her wrists as if she is the one who is having sexual intercourse with the Commander. Unlike the traditional surrogacy process, the surrogate takes part in sexual intercourse during the insemination ceremony. Hence, they become the sexual partners of the Commanders as well.

Gilead bases its re-arranged surrogacy system on religious ideologies which come from the Old Testament. The story of Rachel and Leah stands as the idea behind surrogate motherhood. The epigraph that is given at the beginning of the novel "constitutes the Biblical origin of surrogate motherhood" (Miceli, 2018, p.97):

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. (Genesis, 30:1-3)

Like the piece from Genesis, 30:1-3 tells, Rachel is in misery since she cannot bear children for Jacob. Thus, she offers Jacob his maid Bilhah to impregnate and have

children through her. Gilead's surrogacy system is based upon this story. By giving the example of Rachel and Bilhah, Gilead justifies its actions using a religious text and manipulates women. This way of manipulation is an example of spiritual opportunism. However, Gilead exploits women in every possible way but not just spiritually. What is worse is that fertile women are exploited in a way that contains sexual harassment. While doing that, Gilead uses the story from the Bible and distorts the facts in it "to disempower and sexually exploit fertile women" (Banerjee, 2015, p.55). The idea of sacrificing Handmaids' bodies for a divine purpose reveals itself even in the daily speeches. Gilead has a discourse of its own, therefore, "[t]he handmaids can only speak to each other responses suitable to their positions as surrogates, such as, 'Blessed be the fruit,' 'May the Lord open,' 'Under his Eye,' and 'Praise be'" (Gulick, 1991, p.107).

The Handmaids are regarded as women who carry precious fruit in their wombs. The idea of being a surrogate and the importance of their womb is embedded in the very essence of their daily speeches. Based on this fact, it is significant to pay attention to the word 'vessel' which is among the words that are used to describe the Handmaids in the novel. Gilead identifies the fertile Handmaids as holy carriers or vessels for a sacred duty. The word 'surrogate' is never used in the novel directly. Atwood makes the Aunts use the word 'vessel' to signify the same meaning as in surrogacy. Gilead's exploitative way of ruling reveals itself even in their discourse. By using such a word as 'vessel', Gilead reveals the fact that the Handmaid does not mean anything to them as an individual. What makes the Handmaid important is her body, specifically her womb which is open to exploitation to be used as a vessel for Gilead's best interest.

3.2.2 Surrogate's Health Care & Nutrition

Atwood builds a society that is centered around reproduction and surrogate motherhood. In Gilead, surrogate mothers' health status holds utmost importance. Thus, each step of the Handmaids is being followed not because Gilead cares about their safety or wellbeing as individuals but because regards them as precious vessels too valuable to lose. Fertility and the ability to reproduce are crucial for Gilead's development, hence, the health of the Handmaids is taken care of in extra measures. The interest in the Handmaids' health is too high because the baby that she will give birth to is a treasure that belongs only to Gilead.

In chapter eleven Offred mentions her visit to the doctor's office; "I'm taken to the doctor's once a month, for tests: urine, hormones, cancer smear, blood test; the same as

before, except that now it's obligatory" (Atwood, 2016, p.92). It is significant to underline the word 'obligatory'. Back in the days before Gilead's take over, every person was responsible for their health. When one feels necessary, it was their choice to go to see a doctor. In Gilead, the oppressors even control the check-ups. As stated before, the body of a Handmaid is too valuable. Besides the monthly check-ups, the Handmaids must also follow a special diet that forbids any kind of unhealthy food from going into their bodies. Being a surrogate in Gilead means constant observation and having dozens of rules that must be followed. They have to obey those rules to keep their bodies healthy as much as possible. It is how Gilead prepares them for the surrogacy process. In chapter twelve, Offred mentions that the Martha of the house prepares her food which is different than other residents' food, and brings it to her room; "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" (Atwood, 2016, pp.102-103). It is indeed a requirement for any responsible mother to look after her body to bring a healthy baby into the world. She should eat healthy food, do exercise regularly to keep her body ready for birth. Yet, considering a Handmaid's life, the extreme precautions begin even before they got pregnant. They are obliged to keep their bodies ready to be "worthy" (Atwood, 2016, p.102) vessels. Offred remembers Aunt Lydia calling them that. Due to these reasons, every substance that goes into the Handmaids' bodies is being controlled. They have to eat healthy food, and they have to eat what is been prepared for them at the house. Offred states how she feels after being delivered food by Cora as follows:

I'm not hungry tonight. I feel sick to my stomach. But there's no place to put the food, no potted plants, and I won't chance the toilet. I'm too nervous, that's what it is. Could I leave it on the plate, ask Cora not to report me? I chew and swallow, chew and swallow, feeling the sweat come out. In my stomach the food balls itself together, a handful of damp cardboard, squeezed. (Atwood, 2016, p.103)

In the quotation above, Offred mentions that she tries to eat even though she is not hungry because she is not sure if Cora will not report her. Both Offred and Cora have responsibilities that should be fulfilled. Offred has to eat. Otherwise, Cora has to report Offred's actions. Cora has to report Offred because it is how the Handmaids are protected and taken care of in Gilead. The Handmaid needs to be looked after in the best possible way because she is "too important, too scarce", she is a "national resource" (Atwood, 2016, p.101). It is the Marthas who have to make sure the Handmaid is eating healthy at

home. If the Handmaid does not eat the food given to her, it means that the rules are not obeyed properly. Martha's job is to monitor her and report her when she does not follow the rules. Considering the oppression that both these women face every day, it is not a surprise that they become more alienated from each other. As it is seen, even Cora is an object of fear in the eyes of Offred. Such actions that remind constant observation, serve as the tool that makes everything work in Gilead's system. It is the constant surveillance that keeps the Handmaid physically healthy to be able to reproduce. Mental health is never in question.

The nutrition plan of the Handmaids is not the only thing that is being controlled. Menstrual cycles of the Handmaids are also observed by the Martha of the house. The most natural feature of a woman's body is seen as a failure in Gilead. A Handmaid on her period is a failure. In chapter thirteen, Offred depicts her feelings about menstruation as follows: "Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfill the expectations of others, which have become my own" (Atwood, 2016, p.115). The psychological pressure on women is unimaginable. Once the most natural feature of their body is their worst nightmare now. What is bizarre in this situation here is that, even though labeled as their failure, the Handmaids are not the ones to be blamed. They are women who are clinically approved as fertile. Yet, it is never thought by others that the Commander might be the one who fails to impregnate the Handmaid. The pressure is all on the woman.

Although the process of surrogacy is painful for the Handmaid, this period is considered as a business transaction between the couple and the Handmaid. The:

[V]iew of surrogacy as mere business is, according to Offred, also shared by the commander and his wife in the novel. For him, even 'The Ceremony' in which he has to inseminate his handmaid 'has nothing to do with sexual desire [...] is not recreation [...] is business', whereas Serena Joy affirms that 'as far as [she is] concerned, this is like a business transaction'. (Muñoz, 2019, p.239)

As it is clear in Muñoz's discussion, both the insemination ceremony and the process of surrogacy are regarded as a business. According to the Commander and the Wife, it is a job that should be done that does not involve feelings at all. What is bizarre is, that even Offred, at a certain point, accepts this humiliating process as an act of business. Oppressor's distorted reality becomes Offred's reality as well. Offred has distanced herself from her body because of the training she received at the Red Centre, the constant psychological pressure on her, and the fear factors. She has forgotten the fact that she was

once a free woman. Like every other Handmaid, she believes that she has to obey the new rules brought by Gilead. Otherwise, she might be sent to the colonies. It is her life that is at stake. Gilead has made Offred accept its reality. This is what is meant by distorted reality. In short, the severe traumatic events such as the insemination ceremony, and the constant monitoring by the state she experienced caused Offred to shut herself off from reality, alienate herself from the outside world, and accept Gilead as it is and adapt to its reality. For these reasons, Offred also sees the surrogacy process as a business deal because she has no choice but to accept. This acceptance reveals that Offred and other Handmaids are subjected to severe physical and mental violence. Considering the pressure Gilead puts on the Handmaids, it is impossible to keep the reality intact.

The method of surrogacy is not a “democratic way to reach motherhood/parenthood, either in the novel, or in present-day society” (Muñoz, 2019 p.239). In present-day society, most infertile couples can not afford surrogacy since it is not an easy way to reach parenthood for everyone considering financial issues. This is the main reason that it is not a democratic way in present-day society. Yet, in Gilead, reaching parenthood does not have anything to do with being able to afford it financially. The infertile couples are given Handmaids who are serving them unwillingly. What makes Gilead’s way of surrogacy undemocratic is that it is a system which is based on the slavery of women. If a couple does not belong to the upper class in Gilead, they cannot have children as well. Thus, being unable to afford surrogacy in present-day society and being a member of the lower class in Gilead has the same result; no children. If the present-day surrogacy and Gilead’s surrogacy processes are to be compared, it can be seen that present-day surrogacy is a “profitable business [...] that is [...] beneficial for all the parties involved: surrogate mother, intended parents and intermediaries” (Muñoz, 2019, p.239). In Gilead’s case, it is only the intended parents that benefit from this business transaction. The intended parents are supposed to have the ‘best baby’ possible from a white Handmaid because “[i]n the novel there are only white handmaids, since Gilead is a racist white theocracy” (Muñoz, 2019, p.239). It is obvious that Gilead divides women not only according to their biological abilities but also according to their races. The society in Gilead consists of only white people. Women of color are never even thought as Handmaids. This proves that Gilead is driven by racist ideologies and its aim is to create a so-called perfect white society that does not consist of any people of color. Therefore, it is obvious that Gilead has a ‘white babies only’ policy.

Another aspect that concerns the surrogacy system of Gilead is that the baby must be genetically related to the Commander. For example, a Handmaid “pregnant by a man other than her commander, if discovered, is sentenced to death. In that sense, the survival of Gilead’s society as a whole becomes only an excuse: it is the rulers’ offspring that is at stake. The Commanders only want their babies, not ‘any’ Gileadean baby. (Muñoz, 2019, p.239) This can be interpreted in two ways. The first one is that the Handmaid is regarded as a possession of the Commander. She is an object that only belongs to her appointed Commander at that moment. Even the name of the Handmaid comes from him. For example, ‘Of-Fred’ or ‘Of-Warren’ as in ‘belongs to Fred’, ‘belongs to Warren’. The Commander might not be very eager to share his Handmaid with another man.

The second reason might be the desire for the protection of the bloodline of the Commander. The baby that is genetically related to the Commander is the only way that the Commander’s bloodline is protected. However, as it is revealed in the novel, Offred’s Commander, Fred, might be sterile. In chapter thirty-one, Serena Joy asks Offred if she is pregnant and reminds her that she is running out of time. The Handmaids have a limited time at each Commander’s house. If they fail to get pregnant they are most likely to be posted to another house. But this is already Offred’s third posting, if she keeps failing she might also be sent to the colonies. In this case, she is desperate and needs to get pregnant as soon as possible. “Maybe he can’t” (Atwood, 2016, p.314) Serena Joy claims. Yet, Offred cannot figure out what Serena means by saying “[m]aybe he can’t”; “I know who she means. Does she mean the Commander, or God? If it’s God, she should say won’t. Either way it’s heresy. It’s only women who can’t, who remain stubbornly closed, damaged, defective” (Atwood, 2016, p.314) Then, Serena offers Offred to sleep with Nick to get pregnant. Thoughts of Offred after hearing Serena’s claim of the Commander being sterile, manifest the pressure on the Handmaids. Although it is the Wife of the Commander that claims the infertility of the Commander, Offred cannot make sense of it. The claim confuses her because she thinks women are the ones who ‘cannot do it’, the ones who are ‘damaged’ and ‘defective’. Perhaps Offred would not have thought it that way back in the days before Gilead. After all, she was the daughter of an activist who advocated for equality. However, as a result of the constant psychological pressure and the brainwashing process that she had faced in the Red Centre after Gilead’s take over, Offred now believes that the truth is as Gilead imposes. Serena’s claim sounds like heresy. This is an example of Gilead’s mental exploitation of women. After Serena makes her

heretic offer, she also mentions that many Wives use the same method to get their Handmaids pregnant. As it is seen, the Wife does not care if the Commander is genetically related to the child. While the Commanders want babies genetically related to them, not any Gileadean baby, the Wives fight against the system discretely to reach motherhood. In any case, the baby will not be biologically related to the Wife. So, it does not matter to the Wife whether the baby is any Gileadean baby or not. Attempting to do such a thing in a society that is under constant surveillance shows that there may be some cracks in the authority that Gilead has set up.

3.3 THE BIRTH AND POST-PARTUM PERIOD

3.3.1 Birth Day Ceremony: ‘God wants you to suffer’

Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* mostly revolves around ceremonies based on certain religious contexts or newly arranged made-up doctrines that Gilead forces to obey and obligates its assets to participate in. It was already mentioned in the earlier chapters that the Handmaids take part in a ‘testifying’ ceremony at Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre which concentrates on the confessions of the Handmaids, and the monthly ‘insemination ceremony’ that occurs between the Commander, his Wife, and the Handmaid, also the ‘participation’ event where they gather to beat a man to death who is accused of rape.

Another event that Gilead made participation mandatory is the Birth Day Ceremony. The ceremony begins with the arrival of the Birthmobile which is a red van used for the transportation of the Handmaids that are obliged to witness the birth. Offred defines Birthmobile as follows; “The red Birthmobile is parked in the driveway. Its back door is open and I clamber in. The carpet on the floor is red, red curtains are drawn over the windows” (Atwood, 2016, p.171). The color red is associated with the Handmaids, therefore, the Birthmobile is also red. After Offred finds out it is Ofwarren who is in labor, she cannot help herself but think whether Ofwarren will give birth to a baby or an ‘unbaby’. The ongoing siren of the Birthmobile reminds Offred of the sound of death. The day that is named the ‘birth day’ in the novel is stressful for all the participants since no one knows if the Handmaid will give birth to a healthy baby. For the Handmaid in labor, it means that she will soon be separated from the baby and posted to another Commander’s house to reproduce again. Moreover, the possibility of giving birth to an

unhealthy baby which will immediately be declared a ‘shredder’⁸ puts both the Handmaid in labor and other Handmaids who are present to witness under stress. If the Handmaid gives birth to an ‘unbaby’, she will be considered a failure since providing Gilead with healthy babies is her duty and reason for existence.

In chapter nineteen, when the Handmaids arrive at Commander Warren’s house which is the house where Ofwarren will give birth, they see “[t]he big Emerge van, the one with the machines and the mobile doctors, is parked farther along the circular drive” (Atwood, 2016, p.175). Offred mentions seeing doctors waiting in the van. According to the narrator, the service of the doctors is not required during birth and they are only allowed to come in if it cannot be helped. However, Offred also reminds herself of the times when the doctors were in charge and recalls a memory of Aunt Lydia showing the Handmaids a film when she was at Rachel and Leah Re-education Centre:

[A] pregnant woman, wired up to a machine, electrodes coming out of her every which way so that she looked like a broken robot, an intravenous drip feeding into her arm. Some man with a searchlight looking up between her legs, where she’d been shaved, a mere beardless girl, a trayful of bright sterilized knives, everyone with masks on. A co-operative patient. Once they drugged women, induced labour, cut them open, sewed them up. No more. No anaesthetics, even. Aunt Elizabeth said it was better for the baby, but also: I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children. (Atwood, 2016, p.176)

Although Gilead has doctors available just outside the house and possesses technological pieces of equipment that may help lessen the pain of the woman who is in labor, using such types of equipment or allowing doctors in are not preferred. While showing the video of a pregnant woman from the pre-Gilead era at Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre, The Aunts state that giving birth in a safe hospital environment under close observation of doctors was a shameful act. However, Gilead now makes sure that the process of birth is completely natural. The oppressor forbids going into labor under the effects of any medication. Instead of doctors, women in labor have their fellow Handmaids around them. Although there is not a legitimate explanation for the course of proceeding considering any of the regime’s practices, Gilead tries to justify its actions regarding the ‘birth ceremony’, by claiming that it is the best for the baby to use natural methods only. However, not allowing doctors to help may be interpreted as a punishment for the person giving birth at that moment. It is a fact that a baby is a treasure for Gilead. Yet, the

⁸ A nickname used by Gilead to describe babies that are born with physical deformities.

individual that carries the baby is not that important during the Birth Day ceremony. Her body is expected to fulfill its duty whether it suffers or not. Having such an experience is most likely painful, but also psychologically exhausting. After all, the childbirth might result in the death of the Handmaid. Therefore, seeing a doctor in the room might help the Handmaid feel less frightened. However, that is something Gilead strictly forbids.

Besides claiming that the natural methods used in birth are good for the baby, a religious text is also used to justify the peculiar ceremony of birth. Aunt Elizabeth quotes a piece from the Bible, specifically Genesis 3:16⁹. As in all their practices, here, Aunt Elizabeth tries to provide a reasonable explanation for Gilead's actions by using religion. It is known that a similar religious text is used to justify the insemination ceremony as well. After all, 'faith' is a powerful tool for fear and manipulation. Gilead is good at using the power of faith and religion against its assets.

Birth Day is not a ceremony that gathers only the Handmaids to witness. Two groups participate in this ceremony which include Handmaids and Wives. The first group includes the surrogate mother and other Handmaids, and the second group includes the intended mother and Wives of other Commanders. Birth Day is considered a blessed day for all women and it requires to be celebrated by coming together. However, the Handmaids and the Wives are placed in different rooms. They do not share the same atmosphere but both groups help the woman in labor. In the Insemination Ceremony chapter, it was mentioned that the Wife also takes part in the ceremony yet does not provide any biological contribution. The situation is almost the same for the birth ceremony as well. This time, the Wife pretends to be pregnant. Offred describes what she sees at Commander Warren's house as follows:

They're gathered in the sitting room on the other side of the stairway now, cheering on this Commander's Wife, the Wife of Warren. A small thin woman, she lies on the floor, in a white cotton nightgown, her greying hair spreading like mildew over the rug; they massage her tiny belly, just as if she's really about to give birth herself. (Atwood, 2016, p.180)

Although it is the Handmaid that gives birth to the baby, the Wife of the Commander, also known as the intended mother, pretends to be in labor in order to feel connected to the baby. Perhaps this little game of fake pregnancy is a way to make the process just a little bit bearable. After all, it is not only the Handmaids that go through the entire reproduction process. The Wives also take part in the insemination ceremony and see

⁹ Genesis 3:16 "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

their husbands having sexual intercourse with another woman. Even though the husband is not romantically involved with the Handmaid, it might still be a moment that is hard to witness for the Wife. Since the Wife witnesses the process firsthand, she may find it hard to accept the baby as her own. Therefore, the reason for pretending to be pregnant is to be able to give the baby the best possible care in the future and make the Wife feel like the real mother of the baby.

During the Birth Day ceremony, the Handmaid is placed in a room that Offred defines as the master bedroom “where this Commander and his Wife nightly bed down (Atwood, 2016, p.180). The Handmaids are gathered around Ofwarren and chant “breathe, breathe [...] hold, hold, expel, expel” (Atwood, 2016, p.190) as they were taught back in the Red Centre. The Handmaids try to help Ofwarren and ease her pain by chanting. Offred will not be left alone under any circumstances. All Handmaids are obliged to be there with her. Since Gileadean society disowns the concept of individuality, such ceremonies are always performed en masse. For example, the shopping trips are always done in pairs. Also testifying and participation ceremonies are performed in groups as well. Thus, during the Birth Day ceremony, the Handmaids unite and be one for Ofwarren as if they are the ones who are giving birth. The Handmaids who gathered in:

Ofwarren's room feels as though they were 'transported' into the body of Ofwarren, experiencing her pain as one collective entity. As Offred claims, '[i]t's coming, it's coming, like a bugle, a call to arms, like a wall falling, we can feel it like a heavy stone moving down, pulled down inside us, we think we will burst. We grip each other's hands, we are no longer single'. (Sion, 2021, p.12)

Here, it almost feels like Offred is taken by the beauty of the moment and embraces Gilead completely. The joy that they feel as a group displays that Gilead manages to adapt the Handmaids to the environment successfully by using coercion, religious doctrines, and violence. When it is time, Ofwarren is taken to the ‘Birthing Stool’ which is basically a chair with a “double seat, the back one raised like a throne behind the other” (Atwood, 2016, p.181). The birthing stool is a Puritan practice that is known to be used in childbirth in the 17th century. Ofwarren is placed “on the lower of the two seats” (Atwood, 2016, p.193) and the Commander’s Wife “sits on the seat behind and above Janine, so that Janine is framed by her” (Atwood, 2016, p.194). The Wife pretends to give birth just like she pretended to have labor pain before she takes place on the birthing stool. The Wife is seated above the Handmaid as an indication of her superiority. The Wife’s place on the

birthing stool reveals that she is the actual ‘owner’ and mother of the baby. After the Handmaid delivers the baby safely, the baby is “placed ceremoniously” (Atwood, 2016, p.195) in the Wife’s arms. The Handmaid does not get to see her baby which is an upsetting situation.

The moment of birth is usually associated with happiness and joy. Even in Gilead, it is a joyful occasion. It makes the Handmaids happy and makes them smile at that moment as Offred states: “We smile too, we are one smile, tears run down our cheeks, we are so happy” (Atwood, 2016, p.195). Even though the Handmaids do not aware, feeling happy at the moment of birth is what they are programmed to do in Red Centre. Through their education in Red Centre, they have been taught to accept Gilead’s doctrines and distorted truth as their own. According to Gilead having a baby is a blessing and what they should all be feeling at the moment of birth is pure happiness. However, this does not change the dehumanizing function of the Birth Day ceremony. This practice “converts the handmaid into a breeding machine by covering her upper body with the skirts of the Commander’s Wife. All these regulations and practices expose Gilead’s unethical administration” (Sion, 2021, p.15) and every step of the practice causes irreversible psychological damage on the Handmaids.

3.3.2 Post-Partum Period

In the previous section, it was mentioned that the Handmaids are separated from the babies in the postpartum period. After the pregnancy is completed and the baby is born, the Handmaids are allowed to stay with the baby in the same house for a few more months. It would be absurd to claim that this is a practice that benefits the Handmaid by allowing her to spend more time with her baby. The time that is given to the Handmaid is to ensure that the baby is fed with breast milk. After all, a baby is a treasure for Gilead. The entire system, including the enslavement of fertile women, postings to the Commandes’ houses, and the new surrogacy system, is for providing Gilead with healthy babies. Therefore, the Handmaids are allowed to stay for a few months to feed the babies with breast milk. Later, the Handmaid is reassigned to another Commander so that she can be used to procreate again. However, the fact that should be underlined is that the Handmaid will not be able to see the baby ever again. Even though the baby is conceived through rape, the complex emotional situation of the Handmaid may cause her to become more attached to the baby emotionally. Under normal circumstances, a mother becomes emotionally attached to her baby even before it is born. She acts with an instinct to protect

her baby from everything in the outside world even if the baby is still in her belly. This is called a mother instinct. It is a natural bond that cannot be broken by others. Therefore, separating the mother from her baby might be quite stressful considering its psychological effects. Perhaps, this might be the most challenging moment for the Handmaid throughout the entire process which begins with the insemination ceremony and ends with the childbirth.

Considering the traditional surrogacy process, Christine Overall, “an influential feminist ethicist”, questions “whether the choice to enter a surrogate contract could be a free one and postulated that a surrogate cannot be fully informed of the full potential of the traumas they could experience upon surrender of the child” (Busby & Vun, 2010, p.17). In modern society, the surrogacy agreement which is mostly arranged as a business agreement can be a quite stressful process for the surrogate mother. As stated in the quote, it may not be entirely possible to inform and warn the surrogate mother about the traumas she may experience when she is separated from the baby. However, this is an agreement in which the surrogate mother consents to be a part of it. In Gilead’s case, such an option is never given to the Handmaid. So, she is not only forced to be a part of this process without her consent but also after the separation she is sent to another house where she will go through the exact same process all over again. Gilead does not care about the well-being of a Handmaid. They do not care if the Handmaid is going to experience trauma or psychological breakdown. A Handmaid is treated as a piece of land waiting to be colonized and exploited and regarded as a breeding machine. All that matters to Gilead is that the Handmaid fulfills her biological function properly and continues to do so as long as her body allows it. Thus, it would be bizarre to expect a government that only regards women as a commodity to provide psychological support to prevent the traumas they could experience and the psychological problems that may arise because of the surrogacy process. The only thing that matters is to exploit the Handmaid’s body as much as possible before she becomes disposable. Gilead’s surrogacy practice reveals that:

[T]he rights of [...] the surrogate mother is [...] never [...] taken into consideration, as the child is not told about his/her biological mother, and the Handmaid is forced to detach herself—both emotionally and physically—from the child once it is born. Furthermore, there is no post-pregnancy support but rather another enforced pregnancy as long as the Handmaid is still biologically capable. (Sion, 2021, p.5)

What Ofwarren experiences in the novel can be given as an example of how devastating the process till birth and post-partum period could get. If the Handmaid fails to give birth

to a healthy child without physical deformities and birth deficits, the baby is classified as ‘unbaby’ or ‘shredder’. Offred explains the situation in the novel as follows; “To go through all that and give birth to a shredder: it wasn’t a fine thought. We didn’t know exactly what would happen to the babies that didn’t get passed, that were declared Unbabies. But we knew they were put somewhere, quickly, away” (Atwood, 2016, p.173). Dehumanizing an individual is the easiest thing to do for Gilead. The same kind of a name is also given to ‘Unwomen’. The prefix ‘un’ serves as a tool to show how easy it is for Gilead to cast out a person from their perfect society. Offred mentions that they do not know what happens to those babies who were declared Unbabies. It may be presumed that the babies are exterminated immediately. After all, it would be absurd to expect Gilead to use its resources to provide care for babies that are not even considered as human beings. Regarding this aspect, Gilead’s vile practices considering the term ‘unbabies’ and ‘shredder’ remind the eugenic policies of Nazi Germany that passed a law for preventing hereditary diseases¹⁰. As if it is not enough to be exposed to constant physical and emotional violence, the Handmaid also has to experience the fear of giving birth to an unhealthy baby. What the Handmaids experience without any psychological support is tough enough considering the period till birth. Therefore, giving birth to a baby that Gilead declares as an ‘unbaby’ and witnessing the baby’s removal might cause even bigger psychological traumas than that they already have. In the novel, Ofwarren gives birth to a baby girl named Angela. Angela is declared a ‘shredder’ and dies. The baby’s biological mother Ofwarren goes insane due to the lack of any psychological support. Ofwarren’s situation in the novel reveals the fact that:

[P]regnancy accompanied by reproductive labor is beyond what we think is a mere biological process. Instead, it is also a social and psychological process, as the mother creates an intimate bond with her fetus during the pregnancy. In this respect, Gilead’s dismissal of women’s pregnancy’s social and psychological aspects is unethical, inhuman, and patriarchal. (Sion, 2021, p.15)

The Handmaids are only perceived as vessels and their ability to reproduce becomes the only thing that determines them. Gilead removes their self-identity while re-educating them and converts them to breeding machines for the elites of Gilead. Therefore, mental

¹⁰ The German government passes the “Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases” (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*), mandating the forced sterilization of certain individuals with physical and mental disabilities. This new law provides a basis for the involuntary sterilization of people with physical and mental disabilities or mental illness, Roma (Gypsies), “asocial elements,” and Afro-Germans. (“Law for the “Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases” — United States Holocaust Memorial Museum”, n.d.)

health care for the Handmaids does not exist in Gilead since they are seen only as wombs to serve Gilead's best interests. Also, the ruling class of Gilead, the Sons of Jacob, aims to create a perfect society. The society of Gilead centers around a reproductive system that will eventually enable them to reach their so-called perfect society. It was mentioned before that the surrogacy system that was introduced by Gilead is often regarded as a business transaction that only benefits the elites. As the system works on behalf of the elites of Gilead who are placed on top of the new class system, the transaction should be done in the best possible way which is to provide healthy white babies to them. What matters is a healthy baby, not the Handmaids well being since they are only the providers and tools to reach parenthood.

The humiliating situation that the Handmaid is in -the obligation to attend the insemination ceremony every month until she gets pregnant, being constantly monitored, and living a slave's life in fear- is an indication that she is exploited both mentally and physically. As Busby and Vun state, Christine Overall asserts that in traditional surrogacy agreements the:

[S]urrogate mothers 'often have little education, little or no income, and very little personal security' and are therefore ripe for exploitation. She described the practice as 'reproductive prostitution' and stated that 'the argument here is not that selling babies leads, via the slippery slope, to slavery; the claim is that the practice is slavery'. (Busby & Vun, 2010, pp. 17-18)

While Overall claims that even the traditional surrogacy system is a practice of slavery that captures uneducated women who need money, Atwood turns this claim into Gilead's reality in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Handmaids, most of whom are educated and viable individuals, are turned into vessels, or sexual objects that are constantly exploited by Gilead because of their biological abilities. First, Gilead takes everything that these women have, then re-educates them, gives them a roof over their heads, and provides security. By providing the Handmaids with everything they have lost, the patriarchs of Gilead entitle themselves to turn the Handmaids into slaves on their own terms.

CONCLUSION

The genre of dystopian fiction allows the author to create an environment that may be considered as a warning and reveals a series of possibilities for what might happen in the future. Margaret Atwood builds such an environment in her notable work *The Handmaid's Tale* as well. However, while Atwood was creating *The Handmaid's Tale's* universe, she based the foundation of Gilead on various historical events. Considering its publishing date, what makes the novel still relatable today is Atwood's ability to blend reality into a work of fiction very well. Although the Gileadean universe in some ways surprises the readers with its way of operating, it does not look unfamiliar at all. As readers, we acknowledge the fact that where there is power, there is a conflict of interests along with the tendency to exploit. It is also a fact that it is women who are exploited the most as a result of such conflicts.

Throughout history, due to sexist practices of regimes, women are mostly regarded as inferior compared to men and exploited physically, sexually, and psychologically. In Gilead's case, considering its puritan past, it is not a coincidence that Atwood chooses to set the novel in New England and employs puritan elements in most of Gilead's practices. Throughout the novel, the author pushes the reader to acknowledge the idea that employing puritan elements in Gilead's discourse is serving as a tool to oppress women as well as maintain order. In the novel, Atwood combines old customs with extensive new prohibitions. This attitude in writing may be interpreted as an aim to create awareness by using the concept of 'what if' as pointed out in the introduction. As Bouson states, "The Handmaid's Tale [...] exposes female anxieties about male domination and sexual exploitation that have always plagued women. 'I didn't invent a lot' in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood remarks. 'I transposed to a different time and place, but the motifs are all historical motifs.'" (Bouson, 2001, p.42).

This study shows that *The Handmaid's Tale* should not only be interpreted as a work of dystopian fiction. The novel has a deeper meaning that concerns the socio-political order and it is just like a giant warning sign for societies to operate in a better way. Regarding this aspect, a series of analyses were made throughout the thesis. The novel compasses a transition period concerning the social and political orders. The reader witnesses the abolishment of a democratic state and its replacement with a totalitarian theocratic regime. Moreover, the novel displays an environment ruined by conflict of interests which leads the way for the state to exploit its citizens, mostly women.

Segregation of citizens according to their genders and then placing them in a hierarchical social pyramid benefits only the regime in the way of exploitation. Once the power is distributed hierarchically, the one at the top of the social pyramid begins to exploit the person that is placed lower. For example, in Gilead's social pyramid, the Commanders are the sole possessors of the power and might be labeled as the colonizers of the lower groups. This power, which was obtained through violence, leads to the physical, sexual, and psychological exploitation of both women and men that are placed at the bottom of the new hierarchic order. Obtaining power bedazzles human beings. By its very nature, humankind tends to exploit others when he/she possesses the power. What affects the usage of this power is the conditions of the environment that he/she is in at that moment. In Gilead's case, the people who are placed at the top of the pyramid choose to use this power to exploit the female assets of Gilead. However, there are various kinds of exploitation in the novel. This study's main focus has been on the physical, sexual, and psychological exploitation of women. Concepts of physical, sexual, and psychological exploitation were analyzed jointly since most of the time physical and sexual exploitation or abuse leads to psychological traumas. As a result, exploiting someone physically or sexually may also mean exploiting him/her psychologically as well. As pointed out in the introduction, the main concern of the thesis is the exploitation which is a result of the abusive handling of power, and also the concept of motherhood. Throughout the thesis, it has been revealed that the novel was built upon the concept of exploitation as a result of the authority-based oppression of the Gileadean regime. The novel compasses the concept of exploitation along with the concept of motherhood.

As mentioned above, the concept of exploitation may be divided into three; physical, sexual, and psychological. First of all, examples of physical exploitation can be seen in the expulsion of disobedient female assets from society. Gilead exploits the healthy bodies of these women who are called 'Unwomen' by deploying them to the colonies to clear up the toxic wastes. Women are sacrificed unless they serve the state's best interest. However, it must be underlined that this sacrifice does not mean killing them at once. By forcing women to clean up toxic waste in the colonies, the state aims to exploit these women as much as possible which means they have to work until they die due to radiation poisoning. Moreover, the colonies are an example of psychological exploitation as well since women have to live with the fear of being deployed to work there all the time. Living with such fear is clearly an example of psychological exploitation.

Throughout the thesis, it has been discussed that Gilead is a state that is centered around reproduction. This reproduction system operates to exploit fertile women sexually. The examples of sexual exploitation and its effects on women were discussed thoroughly in chapters three and four. As it is mentioned in the Historical Notes section of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead does not approve of artificial insemination or fertility clinics. Therefore, they have removed the old ways to reach parenthood and applied their own corrupted reproduction system which basically humiliates its female participants in every way. As discussed in detail in the second and third chapters of the thesis, by using religious coercion, specifically Genesis 30:1-3, Gilead proves that the entire system was built to exploit fertile women. All the Handmaids are “subjected to sexual exploitation masquerading as religious fervor and worship of procreation, experiences herself as utterly subordinated to the procreative function” (Rubenstein, 2001, p.13).

Throughout the second and third chapters of the thesis, it was discussed that the Handmaids were in emotional pain as the narrator states she is no longer the owner of her own body. This also shows that sexual exploitation leads to psychological traumas that have irreversible effects on a person. Since fertile women are exploited sexually, they become more and more alienated from their bodies and lose their sense of individuality, which is proven to be Gilead's sole purpose. Just like the Insemination Ceremony, the Birth Day Ceremony displays the features of exploitation on its own terms. As discussed in the third chapter, through the Birth Day Ceremony fertile women are objectified and face psychological exploitation. Mental or psychological exploitation is also a form of control and manipulation. The exploitative authority uses its power to manipulate and control the emotions of the person who has been exploited. The most common way is to use the elements of fear. As stated in the third chapter, the Handmaid in labor fears giving birth to a shredder. However, this fear is also shared by other Handmaids who are present during the Birth Day Ceremony. The oppressor is responsible for the creation of such fear. The oppressor manages to use his ability to control the feelings of the oppressed well by threatening them. Thus, the Handmaids live with such a fear throughout their lives. The Handmaids, who have already been commodified, and regarded as breeding machines are also forced to cope with such a mentally exhausting fear. Considering all of these, it can be claimed that *The Handmaid's Tale* “acknowledges female anxieties about pregnancy and motherhood” (Bouson, 2001, p.48). As readers, we are aware that Janine goes mad because of the ill policies of Gilead regarding its reproduction and surrogacy

systems. In this sense, the main aim of this thesis has been to analyze the consequences and effects of such policies. Contrary to what Gilead dreamed of, only a poor imitation of a family unit was formed under their administration. As it is analyzed in the thesis, the perfect family unit that Gilead formed contains women who are psychologically damaged and traumatized due to the exploitative policies of the state.

However, this study also focused on the fact that the concept of exploitation is not limited to ceremonies only. The training that the Handmaids receive at the Red Centre, which is based on brain-washing methods, coercion, and physical violence, reveals that it is very easy to alienate a person from herself. By using the religious doctrines and elements of fear, they manage to make the Handmaids believe that they have no control over their lives and they have no purpose other than serving Gilead's best interest. Considering these, it is clear that Gilead also exploits personal identity and individuality. By destroying the sense of self and the perception of reality, the state aims to create an obedient society. As it is observed in the novel, the best way to reach this goal is to exploit women as much as possible. It has been shown in this study that the exploitative methods of training introduced at the Red Centre play a significant role in the loss of identity. As examples of psychological exploitation; constant vilifying and condemning of the past, forcing the women to acknowledge that their past is full of mistakes only serve as tools to destroy the perception of reality and eliminate self-identity. Women's individuality is being exploited by forcing them to define themselves only as 'vessels'. As Staels suggests:

People's identity is supposed to coalesce with the coded concepts and the predicated state by which they are defined. Handmaids are supposed to merely think of themselves 'as seeds,' as objects with a procreative function that should save the world from the threat of sterility, as 'two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices.' The 'deadly' regime paradoxically aims at creating new life. (Staels, 2001, p.116)

Throughout the novel, the concept of exploitation is used to create a new reality and a new life for the Gileadean society. Therefore, it can be claimed exploitation is a perfect way to manipulate and keep the citizens under control. However, it is not only the state that uses its power to exploit and manipulate others. The hierarchical system that Gilead introduced also divides women among themselves. For example, the Wives possess a respectable amount of power over the Handmaids and other members of the household. As it was discussed before, power corrupts even the most honorable person. Especially in Gilead's case, as being the inferior gender, female assets are starving for some power.

Therefore the one at the top uses it to exploit and oppress others. For instance, Serena Joy is the ultimate power in the house after the Commander. She uses her power to manipulate Offred and reach parenthood by arranging an affair with Nick, the driver of the Commander. When she sees fit, she does not hold back to use her status and power in society to reach her goal. Serena Joy's actions prove the main argument of this thesis; Every entity tends to exploit others when it seizes power.

Another focal point for this study has been the concept of motherhood. This concept compasses the entire book as the state of Gilead was based on it. As discussed in the third and final chapter of the thesis, the perception of motherhood in *The Handmaid's Tale* is a little unorthodox. The Handmaids who act as the biological mothers of the baby in the surrogacy system are the ones who have been hurt the most psychologically during the birth and postpartum periods. The concept of motherhood is also related to the concept of exploitation, which is the other focus of the thesis. The reason for this is that, in the novel, motherhood can only be reached after fertile women are psychologically, physically, and sexually exploited. Atwood is trying to show the reader how devastating the process of surrogacy could get as in Janine's insanity as discussed in the third chapter. This is where Atwood answers the following questions; 'What would happen if the state exploits women to the full extent?', 'Would she be able to cope with her worst nightmare which is giving birth to a shredder coming true?' In Janine's case, she fails to cope with this situation. However, it is not clear if other Handmaids would be able to do it either.

To conclude, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* reveals the devastating effects of uncontrolled power and the exploitative way of governing on each part of society, especially women. Throughout the novel, Atwood warns her readers and pushes them to think about what might happen if our society faces such a scenario where the individual loses her/his freedom and sense of self due to the exploitative way of ruling. *The Handmaid's Tale*, just like the dystopian fiction novels written long before it, once again reveals how far the oppressor might go when given the chance.

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