

T.C.
KARABUK UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

**INFLUENCE OF POLITICS AND RELIGION ON WOMEN IN MARGARET
ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE***

MASTER'S THESIS

Prepared By
Nihal TOPCU

Thesis Supervisor
Prof. Dr. Abdul Serdar ÖZTÜRK

Karabuk

JUNE 2018

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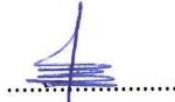



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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

To Karabuk University Directorate of Institute of Social Sciences

This thesis entitled "The Influence of Politics and Religion on Women in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" submitted by Nihal TOPCU was examined and accepted by the Thesis Board unanimously/ by majority vote as an M.A. thesis.

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Thesis Exam Date: 04.06.2018

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my work and all information included has been obtained and expounded in accordance with the academic rules and ethical policy specified by the institute. Besides, I declare that all the statements, results, materials, not original to this thesis have been cited and referenced literally.

Without being bound by a particular time, I accept all moral and legal consequences of any detection contrary to the aforementioned statement.

Name Surname: Nihal TOPCU

Signature: *Nihal Topcu*

FOREWORD

I was born in a patriarchal family who believed male domination. Beginning with my grandparents, everyone seemed to accept the traditional gender roles of men as the breadwinner and women as the mother as well as the wife. I clearly remember what my grandfather said there was no need for girls to get an education and it was a waste of time and money when my mother wished to send me to the high school. My mother fought against all the oppositions and oppression of our relatives despite all the financially harsh conditions. She did her best to enable especially my sister and me to get educated for the purpose of providing us with economic freedom eventually.

I am proud of myself and my mother because I became the first woman to attend the university and paved the way for my cousins' getting education because all of my relatives became aware of the undeniable significance of educating all human beings without any discrimination. My own story is just an example that must shed light on all the women who will undeniably change their world if they resist in all kinds of oppositions and oppression. As a woman who strongly supports women's natural rights to get all the opportunities and privileges as men, I wished to write a thesis on such a great novel that masterfully reveals women's all kinds of oppression and supports their fight as well as resistance. This thesis hopefully creates an awareness about women's value.

I would like to express my special thanks of gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Abdul Serdar Öztürk not only for the time he granted me for the completion of my thesis but also for his research and proofreading assistance as well as his invaluable guidance and inspiration. Moreover, I would like to thank my thesis committee members, Assist. Prof. Dr. Yıldırım Özsevgeç and Assist. Prof. Dr. Nazila Heidarzadegan for their proofreading assistance as well as their invaluable guidance. I wish to express my most profound gratitude to my mother for raising me as the supporter of the freedom, equality and justice for women as human beings. Furthermore, I would like to thank my father, my sister, my brother for their endless support and love. Finally, I am grateful to my beloved husband Cemil Topcu, who supported me a lot with his invaluable ideas, inspiration, motivation, and encouragement he so generously provided.

ABSTRACT

This thesis primarily aims to explore the influence of religion and politics on women in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) in the light of feminist criticism. *The Handmaid's Tale* is an example of a feminist dystopian novel in which women struggle to survive in Atwood's fictional country Gilead, which refers to America. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood portrays a terrifying future in which women are used as a means of reproduction in Gilead where women's lives are extremely harsh and full of unfairness, inequalities or immoralities. The Gileadean regime turns women into sex slaves or useful tools for the so-called salvation of the future of Gilead. In actuality, Gilead is a kind of hell for especially women who are totally controlled by the Commanders in the name of religion and politics, and these women are sentenced to eternal suffering in this hell.

The Introduction gives a broad outline of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood and the chapters of this thesis. Chapter I focuses on historical background of feminism and role of feminist criticism in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In Chapter 2, the existing political condition of the women in America at the time the novel was written and the influence of politics on the women of Gilead are pointed out. In Chapter 3, the existing religious condition of the women in America at the time the novel was written and the influence of religion on the women of Gilead are displayed. In Conclusion, it is highlighted that Margaret Atwood portrays a frightening world for women for the purpose of warning how devastating effects religion and politics may have on women if they are abused by malevolent people. Furthermore, it is highlighted that Margaret Atwood impressively raises awareness about the value of women in *The Handmaid's Tale* by masterfully using many historical, political and Biblical references.

Keywords: *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood, women, politics, religion.

ÖZ

Bu tez temel olarak, feminist eleştiri ışığında Margaret Atwood'un *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü* (1985) adlı romanında din ve politikanın kadın üzerindeki etkisini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*, Atwood'un Amerika'ya atıfta bulunduğu kurgusal ülkesi olan Gilead'da kadınların hayatta kalma mücadelesi verdiği bir feminist distopya örneğidir. *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*'nde Atwood, kadınların hayatlarının aşırı derecede zor ve adaletsizlik, eşitsizlik ya da ahlaksızlıklarla dolu olduğu Gilead'da kadınların üretim aracı olarak kullanıldığı korkutucu bir gelecek tasvir eder. Gilead rejimi, sözde Gilead'ın geleceğinin kurtuluşu için kadınları cinsel kölelere ya da kullanışlı araçlara dönüştürmektedir. Aslında Gilead, özellikle din ve politika adına tamamen Komutanlar tarafından kontrol edilen kadınlar için bir çeşit cehennemdir ve bu kadınlar bu cehennemde sonsuz ıstıraba mahkum edilmiştir.

Giriş kısmı, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood ve bu tezin bölümleri hakkında genel bilgi vermektedir. Birinci Bölüm, feminizmin tarihi gelişimine ve feminist eleştirinin *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*'ndeki rolüne odaklanmaktadır. İkinci Bölümde, romanın yazıldığı zaman diliminde Amerika'da var olan kadınların politik durumunun yanı sıra politikanın Gilead'ın kadınları üzerindeki etkisi dile getirilmektedir. Üçüncü Bölümde, romanın yazıldığı zaman diliminde Amerika'da var olan kadınların dini durumunun yanı sıra dinin Gilead'ın kadınları üzerindeki etkisi gözler önüne serilmektedir. Sonuç Bölümünde, din ve politikanın kötü niyetli insanlar tarafından suistimal edildiğinde kadınlar üzerinde nasıl yıkıcı etkilerinin olduğunu ortaya koymak amacıyla Margaret Atwood'un kadınlar için böylesine korkutucu bir dünya tasvir ettiği vurgulanmaktadır. Ayrıca, Margaret Atwood'un *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*'nde birçok tarihi, politik ve dini referansları ustalıkla kullanarak kadının değeri konusunda etkileyici biçimde farkındalık yarattığı vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*, Margaret Atwood, kadınlar, din, politika.

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SUBJECT OF THE RESEARCH

This study fundamentally examines the influence of politics and religion on women in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in the light of feminist criticism.

PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to find out the influence of politics and religion on women in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). This study also aims to illustrate how Atwood portrays a terrifying future for women who are mainly used as a means of reproduction in the name of politics and religion in Gilead, Atwood's fictional country by referring America.

This study displays how women are enslaved and tortured in the name of politics and religion and named as 'Unwomen' when they cannot give birth to babies in *The Handmaid's Tale*. By depicting how women are oppressed physically, psychologically, economically, socially, politically as well as religiously, this study underlines the importance of the value of women with Atwood's many historical, political and Biblical references.

METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

The Handmaid's Tale was deeply read and examined using many other related books, journals, databases, online studies and newspapers. The adverse effects of politics and religion on women were studied through feminist criticism.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH / RESEARCH PROBLEM

Margaret Atwood portrays such a chilling world for women with the aim of warning how devastating effects religion and politics abused by malevolent people will most possibly have on women by turning them into sex slaves or useful tools for the so-called salvation of the future of Gilead.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS / DIFFICULTIES

The Handmaid's Tale is examined as a novel regarding the influence of politics and religion. However, many Biblical, political and historical references included in the novel are also explored and elaborated from different sources. From time to time, it has been difficult to interpret especially the religious references.

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| BBC | : British Broadcasting Corporation |
| CIA | : Central Intelligence Agency |
| DBQ | : Document-Based Question |
| ed. | : edited by |
| ERA | : The Equal Rights Amendment |
| NOW | : The National Organization of Women |
| PK | : Promise Keepers |
| POW | : Prisoner of War |
| trans. | : translated by |
| U.S. | : United States |

INTRODUCTION

I'm sorry, there is too much pain in this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in a crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there is nothing I can do to change it . . . it hurts me to tell it over, over again . . . But I keep on going with this sad and hungry and sordid, this limping and mutilated story (301).

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts a terrifying future where women are used as a means of reproduction; moreover, a woman is believed not to be a true woman if she cannot give birth to a child, and it is named as 'Unwoman'. Atwood portrays a world in which especially women are oppressed physically, psychologically, economically, socially, politically as well as religiously, and they are forced to be the sex slaves of the Commanders. Therefore, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a perfect example of a feminist dystopian novel with its fictional characters and settings. According to Amin Malak, dystopias highlight the everlasting conflict between social necessity and individual choice; furthermore, dystopian societies are consumed as well as controlled by retrogressive dogmas.¹ Offred, the narrator and the protagonist, depicts her own terrifying experiences as a woman in Gilead, which refers to America. In Gilead, the Handmaids who lack even basic rights and freedoms like talking or reading suffer a terrible nightmare. The Handmaids are controlled physically, especially sexually, and psychologically by the Commanders in the name of religion and politics. The Handmaids must be silent and do whatever the regime demands, "all you have to do, I tell myself, is keep your mouth shut and look stupid. It shouldn't be that hard" (269). The preceding lines perfectly picture the unbearable situation of women in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Accordingly, there is a great disagreement between the regime's necessities and the women's choices controlled entirely by the Gileadean government with not only totalitarian but also theocratic dogmas.

Margaret Atwood masterfully defends the women's rights as a Canadian, postmodernist and feminist writer by revealing the worst possible scenarios for women in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Atwood, born in Ottawa, Canada in 1939, has a remarkably successful life as a novelist, feminist, poet or literary critic. Throughout her life, she wins a lot of national and international literary awards as well as doctoral degrees. Coral Ann Howells points out that Atwood is a media star, cultural critic, public performer, literary celebrity, spokeswoman of human rights, political satirist and

¹ Amin Malak, "Atwood in the Dystopian Tradition," *Bloom's Guides: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2004), 83.

historian environmentalist as well as a writer.² Furthermore, Jonathan Noakes and Margaret Reynolds portray Atwood's novels, essays or poetry as innovative, uncompromising, intelligent, challenging and original. They also depict her as one of the most significant writers in her generation. According to them, Atwood travels to strange places in her writings by keeping company with the people doing strange things and whom she does not know.³ It is crystal clear that Atwood is an incredibly versatile writer who also benefits from her striking skills in *The Handmaid's Tale* to raise awareness and consciousness for the possible devastating effects of improper practices of the politics and religion on women. Correspondingly, Atwood has a very solid "awareness of gender differences" in addition to her excellent observation skills.⁴ Furthermore, Atwood successfully writes *The Handmaid's Tale* from a feminist and postmodernist viewpoint like a historian who explicitly and effectively writes the history from a feminine perspective without leaving the powerless unvoiced including the marginalized, the colonized, ethnic minorities, and particularly women.⁵ The preceding lines highlight how Atwood attaches too much importance to voicing the oppressed women with the aim of clearing the way for the freedom and justice they deserve as well as their achievements in every field of life.

Fundamentally, *The Handmaid's Tale* is dedicated to Mary Webster and Perry Miller, who both most probably play very significant roles in the creation process of the story. Valerie Martin points out that Mary Webster as one of Margaret Atwood's ancestors is blamed for witchcraft in Massachusetts in Puritan New England in 1683, and Perry Miller as one of the professors at Harvard University makes her enthusiastic about the uses of history through his sermons.⁶ Therefore, it appears that Atwood wishes to highlight the cruel treatments towards women through Mary Webster and the significance of the use of the history in her writings through Perry Miller. Accordingly, Atwood is willing to emphasize that America is not always the 'Land of the Free', and it may not be in the future as well by referring to Gilead. Consequently, *The*

² Coral Ann Howells, "Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

³ Jonathan Noakes and Margaret Reynolds, *Margaret Atwood: The Essential Guide to Contemporary Literature; The Handmaid's Tale, Bluebeard's Egg, The Blind Assassin* (London: Vintage, 2002), 5.

⁴ Reingard M. Nischik, "Flagpoles and Entrance Doors: Introduction," *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*, ed. Reingard M. Nischik (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2000), 1.

⁵ Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 149.

⁶ Valerie Martin, "Introduction," *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), viii.

Handmaid's Tale can also be seen as a response to American exceptionalism, which believes the myth: America's history is different from the ones in other countries since America is believed to be not only a powerful and bigger country but also morally superior as well as the bearer of liberty and freedom.⁷ However, the history refutes this belief since many people including especially women in America were treated cruelly and even sentenced to death as it happened to Webster because of their religious or political beliefs as well as their race. According to Atwood, the Puritans did not come to America with the aim of establishing democracy; on the contrary, the Puritans aimed to establish theocracy with their own rules by taking part in the witchcraft persecutions and fundamentally persecuting everyone who did not share the common beliefs with them religiously.⁸ Barbara Hill Rigney also compares Gilead's future to "a ghost of Puritan America" where the witches are hanged, language is censored or sex for pleasure is banned.⁹ Atwood has fears about having a much worse future because of the political and religious situation in the 1980s of America. At that time, the Religious Right, which resulted in the conservative movements in politics, limited the women's rights to be free and equal; furthermore, the Equal Rights Amendment, whose target was to give women equal rights, was not approved by the existing American government at that time.

Accordingly, the Gileadean regime resorts to violence for the purpose of controlling and dominating everyone including particularly women as they wish, "it was after the catastrophe, when they shot the president and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on the Islamic fanatics at the time" (199). The regime wants everyone to keep calm; however, everything gets worse in terms of losing their natural rights and freedoms. The Gileadean regime forces families' lives, dreams, hopes to be shattered. They censor or close the newspapers by pretending as if all these prohibitions are for their security, "the roadblocks began to appear, and Identipasses . . . The Pornomarts were shut . . . Everyone was a little jumpy. There was a lot more music on the radio than usual, and fewer words" (200). The rebellions against all these tyrannies do not work because the

⁷ Ian Tyrrell, "What, exactly, is 'American exceptionalism'?" *The Week*, October 21, 2016, <http://theweek.com/articles/654508/what-exactly-american-exceptionalism>.

⁸ Danita J. Dodson, "An Interview with Margaret Atwood," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 97.

⁹ Barbara Hill Rigney, "Alias Atwood: Narrative Games and Gender Politics," *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*, ed. Reingard M. Nischik (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2000), 159.

rebels consist of a small group mostly including women as they are all scared. Moreover, the government itself explodes some places, “a few things were blown up, post offices, subway stations. But you couldn’t even be sure who was doing it. It could have been the army, to justify the computer searches and the other ones, the door-to-doors”. People are so terrified that even the neighbours avoid talking to each other, “when we met, outside on the street, we were careful to exchange nothing more than the ordinary greetings. Nobody wanted to be reported, for disloyalty” (206). The preceding lines highlight how the Gileadean regime forces all of its citizens to survive in a world full of hostility, distrust and fear.

Seemingly, the politics and religion collaborate to oppress women – mostly the Handmaids – physically and psychologically. The so-called holy duty of getting more and more babies is appointed to the Handmaids by justifying the decrease of the babies as well as the disappearances of the children, “no children walked to school anymore, there had been too many disappearances” (201). The schools are closed down as the time passes “for lack of children” (130). On the other hand, the regime blames the women for the decline of babies including their ways of birth control or abortion as well as their illnesses like R-strain syphilis and AIDS epidemic. However, many other factors cause infertility or stillbirths including “nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage . . . leakages from chemical and biological-warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites . . . and the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays” (341). It is undeniably brutal to place all the burdens on women for the salvation of Gilead though the dramatic decline of healthy-born babies is not totally caused by the women.

In Chapter I, rise and role of feminism as well as feminist criticism are examined in *The Handmaid’s Tale* since feminist criticism is undeniably one of the best ways to shed on light to not only all the oppression that women suffered in the past but also the possible upcoming oppression in the future. Indisputably, women have been thought as inferior creatures by not only men but also women who are brainwashed to be less valuable and robust than men. This humiliating perspective towards women has caused them to be deprived of their natural rights in education, economics, art, science, politics, sport or literature. However, women have fought against the patriarchy and their degrading position throughout the history. Their most effective fight against male domination is undeniably in literature, which causes

feminist criticism to appear with the aim of helping women to get their natural rights and freedoms as well as the value and respect they deserve. Women have also been seen as inferior in the literature by male writers throughout the history. However, in *Literary Women*, Ellen Moers perfectly proves this belief is incorrect by stating there is no use in saying women cannot be successful in literature because the history proves they can be perfect at the literature.¹⁰ Likewise, Maggie Humm depicts the three principal achievements of feminist criticism as highlighting gender stereotyping qua a significant feature of the literary forms, giving reasons for the continuous reproduction of these stereotypes, and discovering the ignored and lost examples of women's texts and women's literature up to now.¹¹ All the preceding lines prove how women's movement and feminist criticism play critical roles in women's struggle against male domination and degradation.

Accordingly, in almost every line of Offred's story, her loneliness, the degrading position of women as well as alienation can be seen clearly, "we were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. We lived in the gaps between the stories" (68). Almost every woman in the novel is oppressed by men mercilessly; however, the Handmaids are the most oppressed ones. They are "like a prize pig" for the Commanders (83). Like everyone else in Gilead, these women are indoctrinated to see their bodies as just instruments, and giving birth to more and more babies is the unique purpose of their existence, "each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others, which may have become my own" (88). Offred as the narrator and the protagonist of the story tells her own story to reflect how painful a woman's life is in Gilead. According to Joseph Porfert, Offred portrays women's existence and life under the oppressive Gileadean regime as well as the patriarchal theocracy ruled by religious fundamentalists.¹² Even her name Offred, which is literally 'Of Fred', does not belong to her but it is given by her Commander, presumably Fred. Alice M. Palumbo points out that overall the Gileadean society is controlled by the rules of patriarchy, and "Offred's name is derived from the

¹⁰ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1977), xiii.

¹¹ Maggie Humm, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 8.

¹² Joseph Porfert, "Hell on Earth: The Feminist Dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale*" (Old Dominion University: College of Arts & Letters, 2010), 1, <https://www.odu.edu/content/dam/odu/col-dept/english/docs/joseph-porfert-essay.pdf>.

man to whom she belongs”.¹³ There is an undeniable physical as well as psychological violence towards women in many forms such as sexual exploitation and humiliation. In addition, the Gileadean men do all these things in the name of religion and politics. Unfortunately, many people in Gilead believe this is the rightest way of life because religion and politics are perfectly abused to manipulate societies.

The Gileadean regime cruelly turns the clock back for the women in a negative way. It is a fact that numerous women have laid down their lives for their daughters to provide them with much better lives, “don’t you know how many women’s lives, how many women’s *bodies*, the tanks had to roll over just to get that far” (139)? Whereas their efforts to get equal, fair rights and privileges as men are fulfilled to some extent, the Gileadean regime mercilessly destroys all the women’s efforts and struggle up to now and dreams, beliefs and hopes. In Gilead, no woman except the Aunts as the representatives of the regime is allowed to get or use any information or property because the regime expects all the women to be submissive totally and obey the strict rules of Gileadean government. Each woman has a duty determined by the regime, and the Gileadean women are not permitted to have a voice. Moreover, it is undeniably ironical that all these sexual, physical or psychological violence, prohibitions and barriers are claimed to be for the women’s own well-being and protection. On the contrary, especially the Handmaids are so tortured to give birth to babies that they even experience fake pregnancy, “my breasts are painful, they’re leaking a little. Fake milk, it happens this way with some of us” (146). However, it can be said that even the Handmaids are luckier than the women in the Colonies and Jezebel’s. The Handmaids are at least seen as a tool for Gilead’s hopes and “a queen ant with eggs” (155). On the other hand, the women in Colonies and Jezebel’s are infertile or forced to be infertile due to their crimes and so the most useless and valueless for the regime. They are exposed to unthinkable ways of violence including rape, sexual harassment, beating or even death in the name of politics and religion.

In Chapter II, the influence of politics on women is studied in the light of feminist criticism in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which portrays a horrific future that is indisputably possible to come true because she refers to the historical, religious and political events in America by writing *The Handmaid’s Tale*. According to Jennifer

¹³ Alice M. Palumbo, “On the Border: Margaret Atwood’s Novels,” *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views: Margaret Atwood*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2009), 29.

Leigh Hodson, there is a severe backlash against the women's movement from the late 1970s to the early 1980s.¹⁴ Likewise, Paul Brians puts forward that election of Ronald Reagan, the rise of the Religious Right, the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment as well as many kinds of backlash cause the writers like Atwood to fear about the antifeminist efforts which damage the women's gains and turn the clock back.¹⁵ All the preceding lines prove that *The Handmaid's Tale* is not just a simple tale which aims to entertain the readers with its scenarios that seem impossible. Atwood warns her readers to be aware of the existing situation which may cause such a scenario, perhaps worse, to come true in the future. Consequently, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which has the element of historical truth, is indeed one of the terrifying stories. Correspondingly, Harold Bloom states that he has "a frightening experience" even when he rereads *The Handmaid's Tale* 13 years later even if he does not live in "Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the Handmaid Offred suffers the humiliations and torments afflicted on much of womankind in the Fascist Republic of Gilead, which has taken over the North-eastern United States".¹⁶ The preceding lines prove how even male writers are influenced by Offred's sufferings and pains in a socio-political system where women's lives are totally controlled by the Gileadean regime and any efforts to oppose this political system may result in their deaths.

In Gilead's political system, society is divided into many parts according to their missions. The Commanders control the overall society, and each Gileadean woman has to act as the Commanders – their owners – demand. These women are forced to live with many rules and prohibitions. They cannot read, write and speak. They wear clothes which show their mission; for example, the Handmaids whose purpose is to give birth wear red as the signification of fertility. Furthermore, no woman has a unique identity, and their real names are not known. There are the Handmaids, Aunts, Econowives, Daughters, Marthas, Widows, Wives as well as Eyes and Commanders. Consequently, alienation is one of the fundamental concepts that can be seen in many ways in the novel, and especially the Handmaids are alienated from the society and even their own lives. The best example of women's alienation

¹⁴ Jennifer Leigh Hodson, "American Trends and American Fears: An Analysis of the Women's Movement and the Religious Right as Envisioned in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" (Senior Honours Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1997), 22.

¹⁵ Paul Brians, "Study Guide to Margaret Atwood: *The Handmaid's Tale*," March 27, 1996, https://public.wsu.edu/~brians/science_fiction/handmaid.html.

¹⁶ Harold Bloom, "Introduction." *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Margaret Atwood*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), 1.

caused by the politics is the fact that immediately after they give birth to their babies, the Handmaids have to give them to the infertile Wives of the Commanders. Likewise, the Handmaids even cannot name their babies. Another example that illustrates alienation is the fact that the women in the Gilead are forced to forget their own past including their family or job as well as how to read and write. The regime skilfully uses its political powers to dominate all the society gradually, “nothing changes instantaneously . . . There were stories in the newspapers, of course, corpses in ditches or the woods . . . but they were about other women, and the men who did such things were other men” (67-68). The preceding line highlights how the regime forms strategic plans to terrorize women and turn them into useful slaves of Gilead for their political purposes.

In Chapter III, the influence of religion on women is studied in the light of feminist criticism in *The Handmaid's Tale*, in which religion is utilized as a tool to get more and more political power and control over the Gileadean society, mostly women. According to Palumbo, *The Handmaid's Tale* refers to the Puritan period of New England, which follows the theocracy.¹⁷ Manju Jaidka also points out that the Gileadean regime bans every form of expression of sexuality as well as a desire by dominating its citizens in all aspects of life and commits every form of cruelties in the name of religion like the early Puritans in North America.¹⁸ Similarly, Danita J. Dodson puts forward that the Protestant reformers create Gilead with their violent and brutal methods by ousting the previous leaders as well as hanging or enslaving everyone who is against their racial and religious ideology just as the Puritans did in the 17th century.¹⁹ The preceding lines prove how Atwood masterfully reflects the historical facts of not only 17th century Puritans but also 1980s' America in terms of the influence of Ronald Reagan in addition to the Christian Right on the rights as well as freedoms of women.

Accordingly, beginning from the late 1970s, the Christian Right with the Moral Majority by Jerry Falwell as well as the efforts of the televangelists like Pat Robertson has a great influence on the American politics. According to David John Marley, the supporters of the Christian Right celebrate Reagan's status much more passionately

¹⁷ Palumbo, “On the Border,” 29.

¹⁸ Manju Jaidka, “Women and Violence,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2009): 271.

¹⁹ Danita J. Dodson, “‘We Lived in the Blank White Spaces’: Rewriting the Paradigm of Denial in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*,” *Utopian Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1997): 70.

because Reagan is the man who enables these people to become influential in all areas.²⁰ The Christian Right seems against everything that is possible to destroy the traditional family values including abortion, pornography, gay rights as well as the ERA. Thanks to the political and religious powers including Ronald Reagan, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Phyllis Schlafly, the Equal Rights Amendment and the women's all the efforts to protect their natural rights are severely damaged. The real purpose is undeniably to hold the political power with the help of the religious authority. Moreover, they gain lots of money in the name of religion, "conservatives raised millions of dollars from an inaccurate vision of the Christian Right".²¹ The biggest damage of the Christian Right may be the grim fact that it neglects the importance of the separation of the religion and the state because it causes the government to discriminate the believers and the non-believers while serving to its citizens.

Atwood skilfully uses many Biblical references to highlight how the Bible is abused to brainwash women to believe that the religion commands their holy duty is to serve their owners in every respect. Furthermore, the Bible is locked away and merely the Commanders are allowed to read it, "there were Bibles in the dresser drawers . . . though probably no one read them very much" (62). On the other hand, the regime uses the Wall and the Eyes to terrorize women to obey all the rules without questioning. The Eyes as the Gilead's police force are everywhere and watch everyone by referring to the Eyes of God. If they do not obey the rules, they are sentenced to death and hanged on the Wall. Therefore, the women of Gilead are undeniably doomed to kill all their feelings, dreams and hopes even if their bodies seem to survive, "they force you to kill, within yourself" (221). They feel as if they are blanks "here, between parentheses. Between other people" (259), which proves how the Gileadean women feel themselves as passive, submissive and valueless. The women are seen as "the wandering womb" (168) by the regime, and if a woman even laughs as much as anyone from the representatives of the regime hears, she may be killed by believing she has an emotional problem, "hysteria. And then a needle, a pill. It could be fatal" (169). In a world where the women suffer from unthinkable painful treatments and expectations, religion may seem to heal the oppressed women's hearts and minds.

²⁰ David John Marley, "Ronald Reagan and the Splintering of the Christian Right," *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 48, no. 4 (Autumn 2006): 851.

²¹ Marley, "Ronald Reagan," 852.

According to Karl Marx, “religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people”.²² Likewise, the Gileadean women prefer to believe the religious way the regime shows to put up with their unbearable sufferings and hold on to the life.

To conclude, it is significant to emphasize that in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood's fundamental purpose is to raise awareness about the value of women; in addition, she strongly criticizes the adverse effects of religion and politics on especially women by using the example of Gilead. In recent American history, these two most potent ideologies seem to play significant roles in the oppression of women. At the time when the novel is written, the American society appears to experience a revival of Victorian beliefs with the appearance of the Religious Right, which limits women's natural rights to live freely and equally in a just world. By referring America, Atwood warns that the future may be worse if the existing situation does not change. In Atwood's portrayal of the future, the women are mostly desperate and hopeless because they are sentenced to a life-long prison, “there's no escaping it. Time's a trap, I'm caught in it. I must forget about my secret name and all ways back” (165). On the other hand, they naturally wish to be valued in a world where they do not possess even their names, “I want to be held and told my name. I want to be valued” (114). Moreover, they are aware of the fact that they do not possess anything but they are possessed body and soul by the Commanders, “I am his. Unworthy, unjust, untrue” (209). Therefore, Atwood wishes the overall women not to fear to show their oppositions against the unfair treatments to live freely and equally in the future since the physical and psychological violence against women never ends in a world where men are seen as the most powerful, gifted or talented creatures.

²² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2008), 42.

1. CHAPTER ONE: FEMINIST CRITICISM: TERRIFYING PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

1.1. The Challenging Path to Feminist Criticism: Women as the Non-Significant Other

Throughout the history, many people from different backgrounds regardless of their classes or races have believed that women are passive, weak or submissive creatures. Aristotle argues, “the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled”.²³ Similarly, women have been seen as non-significant by men, which causes women to suffer a lot throughout the history. Unfortunately, these beliefs could not be changed for centuries. Even today, despite all the efforts, women are thought as inferior by many people from different cultures. Furthermore, the sexual, psychological and emotional stereotyping of women starts as soon as they are born. Shirley Chisholm points out that men claim women possess more weaknesses than men to justify why they do not want to see women in dominant status like politics; likewise, they claim women as very talkative, illogical, touchy, and they also claim that women see politics as a kind of game.²⁴ No one can deny the biological differences between women and men; however, it does not mean women are less intelligent, less courageous, less logical or worse leaders than men. Although women have proved their limitless strength in lots of fields such as science, literature, sport and art, many people still think women are inherently inferior. Unfortunately, these people are still unable to get rid of their prejudiced ideas against women.

Indisputably, the movement of feminism aims to become a solution for the females oppressed by male-dominated societies because feminism believes in the equal rights and opportunities for women in education, employment as well as in the political, cultural and social life. Feminism aims to change the views of women as non-significant other who deserves less respect or value. Moreover, feminism wishes to prove each woman is a valuable person possessing the same privileges and rights as every man. Accordingly, Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker put

²³ Aristotle, *Politics* (350 B.C.E), trans. Benjamin Jowett, accessed May 20, 2016. <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.1.one.html>.

²⁴ Shirley Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed* (Washington D.C.: Take Root Media Edition, January 2010), 71.

forward that feminism has fought against the cultures that support male domination and for achieving sexual equality and ultimately getting rid of sexist hegemony in societies throughout the history.²⁵ In that challenging path, literature has been a perfect means of showing women are not non-significant others thanks to women writers like Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone De Beauvoir as well as Margaret Atwood. According to Humm, feminist criticism firstly confirms that literature is not “simply a collection of great texts”, but literature is “deeply structured by social/sexual ideologies, and secondly that certain preoccupations and techniques predominate in women’s writing about those social structures”.²⁶ In fact, the idea of feminism in literature may be traced back to the 18th century when the term ‘feminism’ is not known. Wollstonecraft is one of the earliest feminist writers who depict women as an oppressed class regardless of their social hierarchy and criticize the stereotypes of women as emotional and irrational in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792. Wollstonecraft states in her novel, “it is time to effect a revolution in female manners – time to restore to them their lost dignity – and make them, as a part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world”.²⁷ She strongly supports the belief that women should be provided with the same rights and privileges as men, which will turn the world into a better place because women possess enough power to change the world if they are given all the opportunities.

The women’s movement appears likely to be traced back to 1400s with the forerunners like Christine de Pisan and Anne Hutchinson; nevertheless, the movement of feminism begins in the late 19th century with Seneca Falls.²⁸ The first-wave feminism with women’s willing to gain the social, economic and political power including the right to vote for the purpose of fighting with patriarchy that supports the ideology of the male domination. Selden, Widdowson and Brooker point out that ‘Women’s Suffrage’ and ‘Women’s Rights movements’ are the essential determinants in shaping the first-wave feminism with the emphasis on economic, political and social reform.²⁹ In the first-wave feminism, many significant feminists including women

²⁵ Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 115.

²⁶ Maggie Humm, *Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*, 15.

²⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2008), 54.

²⁸ Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 65.

²⁹ Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, 117

writers like Elizabeth Robins, Rebecca West and Dorothy Richardson³⁰ as well as the activists who fight for women's rights like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in addition to the abolitionists like Lucretia Mott and Sojourner Truth are influential in changing social, political, economic conditions of women positively.³¹ On the other hand, feminist criticism appears to develop together with the women's movement. According to Humm, feminist criticism is not officially accepted as the representative of intellectual struggle in the academia until the second-wave feminism. However, women's writing and so feminist criticism may be said to start with Inanna, which is a text penned two thousand years before Homer and the Bible about the earliest hanged goddess that attacks sexual 'discourse'.³² Throughout the history, feminist criticism has struggled to analyse and reconstruct the ways how women are depicted through the male and mostly female points of view. Feminist criticism has also targeted to raise the consciousness about the significance and the value of women in the world, and even its influence on the reader, especially female ones using literature.

Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir are undeniably two of the most influential writers in the first wave of feminist criticism although Beauvoir is mostly believed to be one of the pioneers of the second-wave feminism. Especially Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) make great contributions to the feminism and feminist criticism at the same time. Like the other first wave feminist writers, Virginia Woolf fundamentally concerned with the material disadvantages of women compared to men.³³ Woolf states in her *A Room of One's Own*, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction".³⁴ According to Woolf, many people - notably men - underestimate the power of women; nonetheless, if a woman has economic and social power, she can be incredibly successful in many fields of life. Undeniably, literature is one of the best fields that prove the power of women thanks to the writers who are extremely successful in their novels, poems or stories. Woolf highlights in her novel, "literature is open to everybody . . . lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt,

³⁰ Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, 118.

³¹ Sarah Pruitt, "Seven Things You Might Not Know About the Women's Suffrage Movement," last modified January 12, 2016, <http://www.history.com/news/history-lists/7-things-you-might-not-know-about-the-womens-suffrage-movement>.

³² Maggie Humm, *Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*, 2.

³³ Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, 118.

³⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1977), 7.

that you can set upon the freedom of my mind”.³⁵ Woolf refuses the limitations against women’s freedom to write, to read and in particular to think. According to Woolf, women’s writings are seen as inferior; therefore, in particular men try to demolish women’s confidence in writing. Woolf gives Charlotte Bronte’s portrait of Rochester as an example, “we feel the influence of fear in it; just as we constantly feel an acidity which is the result of oppression, a buried suffering smouldering beneath her passion, a rancour which contracts those books”.³⁶ In her example, Woolf criticizes how women writers are disadvantaged and frustrated by male domination. However, as Woolf emphasizes, no one could prevent women’s freedom to read, to write or at least to think since literature is for everyone regardless of their gender roles. Indeed, Woolf highlights that feminist criticism needs to explore social and economic problems female writers experience; furthermore, female writers should examine female experience in their writings for their own sake because women are seen inferior due to their limited education and experience as well as limited social and economic rights.

Simone de Beauvoir is also a very influential women writer whose *The Second Sex* examines not only materialistic inequalities – notably in education and economy – towards women but also men’s psychological and biological discrimination against women, which are some of the most significant issues both in the first and second wave feminism. Thus, it can be said that Beauvoir reflects and influences both first and second wave of feminism. In her hugely influential book *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir states, “her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly”.³⁷ Beauvoir also emphasizes that if a woman is expected to be perfect at all the fields of life, she must be given all the opportunities and privileges as equally as men. Instead of being given any chance in their own lives, they are mercilessly oppressed and suppressed. According to Beauvoir, the reason may be the fact that men are afraid of losing their social, political and economic power in society, “no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility”.³⁸ In her most famous quote, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”, Beauvoir highlights that being a woman is not determined by her biology, intelligence or psychology but determined by society, their fathers or their husbands. Furthermore,

³⁵ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 83.

³⁶ Woolf, 80.

³⁷ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 574.

³⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 24.

she supports the belief that a woman is not innately passive, submissive or weak but “it is the civilization as a whole that produces this creature . . . Only intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other*”.³⁹ According to men, so-called rulers of the society, women must accept their roles as a mother or as a wife, and if women refuse these roles, they are not thought as ‘true women’. Indisputably, like other feminist writers, Beauvoir also wishes freedom from all kinds of prejudices and discriminations against women.

Correspondingly, *The Feminine Mystique* written by Betty Friedan in 1963 is a book that enables the researchers to identify the start of the second-wave feminism. Friedan is known for founding the National Organization of Women in 1966. Thanks to her organization and the feminist movements fighting for freedom of women, it could be said that feminism and feminist criticism attracted the world’s attention. According to Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, the primary focus of the second-wave feminism ranges from women’s experience and sexuality to the politics of reproduction and sexual difference despite the fact that the second-wave feminism goes on sharing the fight of the first-wave feminism for the rights of women in every area.⁴⁰ Indeed, it seems that in the second-wave feminism and feminist criticism, the main focus is biological differences that are used to prove men as superior and women as inferior. Moreover, women are seen as just a means of reproduction. Beauvoir points out in her book *The Second Sex*, “we must ask: what is a woman? ‘*Tota mulier in utero*’, says one, ‘woman is a womb’”.⁴¹ This saying proves that women’s value and gender validity are based on their menstrual cycle, which means if a woman does not have a menstrual cycle, she is not a true woman. Actually, this belief is incredibly humiliating for all the women. In fact, biological attributes of women must be seen something to celebrate since women are more sensitive, loving, tolerant, nurturing, supportive, forgiving thanks to their biological attributes. It is an undeniable fact that men and women possess biological differences, which affect their perspectives of life, their emotions or ideas; nevertheless, it is entirely wrong to show these differences as a proof to announce women as inferior or less valuable.

Second-wave feminism and feminist criticism also focus on the language used for and against women. Michel Foucault argues that the truth depends upon whoever

³⁹ Beauvoir, 273.

⁴⁰ Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, 120

⁴¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 13.

controls the discourse, and men's dominance over the discourse clearly traps women in the truths of men.⁴² Actually, owing to the male-dominated language, many people have been convinced that a woman does not deserve value as much as a man who holds every kind of power including political, economic, social and religious authority. If a woman tries to resist any of their so-called roles and men's superiority, she is most probably alienated from the society who are perfectly brainwashed by men's domination of discourse as well as the patriarchal perspective on life, which creates stereotypes like men are strong, active or dominant, and women are weak, passive or submissive.

Indisputably, all the women must resist the men's unfair treatment to them if they want to gain as much power as men. According to Foucault, "where there is power, there is resistance".⁴³ Women must fight against the physical and psychological violence if they are willing to gain the freedom that will save them from living like victims. John Rajchman puts forward that no one can gain the freedom when they discover or determine their identity, but they gain their when they rebel and fight against all kinds of discrimination.⁴⁴ Undeniably, one of the best ways to resist the oppression as well as suppression of women is to use the language effectively, especially the written language as it is more long-lasting. Throughout the history, through their writings, women writers have purposed to use the language for their own sake and to draw the readers' attention to how women are oppressed by male-dominated language by analysing women writers. According to Lois Tyson, feminist criticism fundamentally targets "to increase our understanding of women's experience, both in the past and present and promote our appreciation of women's value in the world".⁴⁵ By writing and analysing their writings from their perspectives, women writers have struggled to gain what they deserve, particularly equality and justice, and to appreciate women's value all over the world.

On the other hand, second-wave feminist movement in America gets its power from the protest movements, civil-rights and peace.⁴⁶ In this period, great books are published on behalf of the feminist movement. Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About*

⁴² Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, 121.

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1. An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 95.

⁴⁴ John Rajchman, "The Story of Foucault's History," *Duke University Press, Social Text*, no. 8 (Winter, 1983-1984): 15.

⁴⁵ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 119.

⁴⁶ Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, 123.

Women (1968) and Eva Figes's *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970), Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) as well as Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialect of Sex* (1970) are really influential in feminist movement and criticism. However, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) is most likely to be the most influential and the best-known book in her period as well as the contemporary feminism. According to Patricia Ticineto Clough, Millett's *Sexual Politics* provides "a theoretical foundation to the newly organized women's liberation movement" because her book remarkably seems to be a work of literary criticism.⁴⁷ Jane Gallop also states that Millett's *Sexual Politics* is "the first book of academic feminist criticism".⁴⁸ Similarly, Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison describe Millett's *Sexual Politics* as "one of the first major attempts to provide a thorough theoretical examination of the oppression of women using the concept of patriarchy".⁴⁹ In her book, Millett explains male domination and women oppression through political, historical, social, ideological, psychological, economic, religious, literary and biological perspectives. Millett is incredibly influential since she gives clear evidence and examples for the patriarchal torture against women. Millett defines patriarchy as "a political institution".⁵⁰ She pictures 'politics' in *Sexual Politics* as "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another".⁵¹ Therefore, it can be deduced that patriarchy is an institution established by men to hold all kinds of power and control with the help of religion.

Actually, men have dominated and oppressed women in technology, industry, finance and science by interpreting religion for their own sake with the religious statements such as "the father is the head of the family"⁵² and brainwashing the society regarding their superiority due to their biological strength. Men have also dominated the education because they are aware of the undeniable fact that "knowledge is power" as Millett highlights.⁵³ If a woman is educated and successful in all fields of life, she gets the power, which means men lose their total domination and ownership of women. Millet emphasizes the fact that "the history of patriarchy presents a variety of

⁴⁷ Patricia Ticineto Clough, "The Hybrid Criticism of Patriarchy: Rereading Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*," *The Social Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1994): 473.

⁴⁸ Jane Gallop, *Around 1981, Academic Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), 77.

⁴⁹ Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison, "Patriarchy and Relations of Production," *Feminism and Materialism*, ed. Annette Kuhn and Ann Marie. (London: Routledge, 2013), 12.

⁵⁰ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), xix.

⁵¹ Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 23.

⁵² Millett, 33.

⁵³ Millett, 42.

cruelties and barbarities: the suttee execution in India, the crippling deformity of foot binding in China”.⁵⁴ She also warns about patriarchy since it is not easy to destroy its oppression and dangers, but it is also crucial for humanity not just women to wipe the male domination out.⁵⁵ The preceding lines prove how women have been exposed to cruelties like persecution, rape, abuse, murder, sale and enslavement throughout the history with the aim of pushing male domination on the societies.

On the other hand, Socialist and Marxist feminism appears as the powerful approach of the second-wave feminism in especially Britain from the late 1960s to the late 1970s.⁵⁶ Socialist and Marxist feminists support the belief that patriarchy is not the only source of women oppression; moreover, they focus on the role of capitalism in the oppression of women. In her book *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, Michele Barrett explains Marxist feminist approach as “an emphasis on the relations between capitalism and the oppression of women”.⁵⁷ Barrett argues about women's domestic oppression as a ‘housewife’ that requires giving birth, caring for children, cleaning, cooking and serving the husband in the way he demands as an unpaid job, which tries to prove men are superior since they earn money, provide shelter, food and all other necessities.⁵⁸ Thus, according to Socialist and Marxist feminists, women cannot gain their freedom if they continue to be dependent on men financially since men abuse women's financial dependence to dominate them as they wish. Socialist and Marxist feminists also highlight that women must achieve their liberation in wage labour and private poverty in order to deal with the injustices against women in the capitalist system. Through their writings, lots of women writers have always struggled to earn their own lives and provide all females to get their natural rights to live financially independently by earning their own lives.

Accordingly, Elaine Showalter, who struggles to provide women's independence and autonomy as an influential American critic, focuses on both women readers and women writers in her *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) in which she mentions the term ‘gynocritics’ and ‘gynocriticism’. ‘Gynocritics’ is literally defined as the criticism of women. The term is coined by Showalter to enable feminist

⁵⁴ Millett, 46.

⁵⁵ Millett, xiii.

⁵⁶ Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, 125.

⁵⁷ Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (London: Verso Ed, 1986), 9.

⁵⁸ Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, 20-21.

criticism to focus on women writers' works.⁵⁹ Apparently, gynocriticism is a way of approaching literary works in a women-centered point of view. Actually, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir can be said to be the pioneers of the gynocriticism; however, in the second-wave feminism, women writers start to write about women writers by approaching the female experience as the primary source of creative as well as autonomous literary works. On the other hand, some writers like John Stuart Mill claim that female writers are the imitators of male writers but not original, innovator or independent. Mill claims in his *The Subjection of Women* that women cannot create much better literature of their own since to his belief, men already create "a highly advanced literature".⁶⁰ As a criticism to the belief of Mill, Elaine Showalter in her *A Literature of Their Own* points out that Mill paradoxically never admits women already get "a very important literary place" and the 19th century is seemingly "the Age of the Female Novelists".⁶¹ Though the female authors of the 19th century are admittedly influenced by male domination in writing, Showalter puts forward that especially in the 1960s, thanks to Women's Liberation Women in England and America, female self-awareness and self-discovery can be perfectly seen in literature.⁶² The preceding lines highlight that female writers are indisputably influenced by male writers for a while since female writers do not get educated or possess as many opportunities as men before the 20th century; however, it does not mean that they are the imitators of men. On the contrary, women prove that they can be much more successful and creative than many male writers when they are given as many chances and privileges as men.

Psychoanalytic Feminism is another significant and influential approach mainly to grasp how gender roles are innately given as 'woman' and 'man' as well as to find out how these gender roles affect notably women's lives. Humm highlights that psychoanalysis and feminist criticism share common themes such as the relationship between parents and children, sexuality and its interpretation as well as similar methods such as using texts for "representing the 'unsaid' in everyday life". Moreover, Humm points out both psychoanalysis and feminist criticism examine transference,

⁵⁹ Julian Wolfreys, Ruth Robbins and Womack Kenneth, *Key Concepts in Literary Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 49.

⁶⁰ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, first launched November 2009, 42, <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/mill1869.pdf>.

⁶¹ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3.

⁶² Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, 8.

displacement, dreams with the aim of explaining hidden truths and motivations.⁶³ Likewise, Judith Lorber points out that Psychoanalytic Feminism is one of the most significant gender resistant feminisms in the 1970s and 1980s⁶⁴ since it is crystal clear that women's sufferings as non-significant others begin as soon as they are born, which leads the feminists to examine psychoanalysis. According to Emily Zakin, every child is born as a bisexual "who physically is not yet either a man or a woman".⁶⁵ The biological differences naturally decide who is male and who is female. Nonetheless, gender roles which are mostly used to devalue women are innately given not physically but culturally, socially or economically. Likewise, Jeanne Willette puts forward that "women are the victims of the symbolic order".⁶⁶ Actually, it is because of the fact that symbolic order demands the child to abandon the mother who symbolizes the desires and to obey the father who symbolizes the rules and the law.

On the other hand, the child feels desire for the parent of the opposite sex according to the Oedipus Complex. In both theories, it is expected the child to abandon his/ her desires and dependence on their parents, which would make the child an individual who can establish his/ her superego that enables the child to know how to behave according to the laws and the social rules. Similarly, Zakin points out that both Oedipus Complex, Freud's psychoanalytic theory, and the symbolic order, Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, are necessary for the child's social, cultural, moral or linguistic development.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, to succeed this abandonment, castration anxiety which physically means the fear of the losing the genitals and metaphorically implies the fear of being degraded, insignificant or dominated is imposed upon the child.⁶⁸ According to Lorber, men demand to dominate women because they are unconsciously in need of women's emotionality and also reject them as possible castrators; on the other hand, women are willing to submit men because they unconsciously desire an emotional connectedness.⁶⁹ Furthermore, owing to the phallogocentric people who believe the

⁶³ Maggie Humm, *Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*, 23.

⁶⁴ Judith Lorber, *The Variety of Feminisms and Their Contributions to Gender Equality* (Oldenburg: BIS, 1997), 19.

⁶⁵ Emily Zakin, "Psychoanalytic Feminism," first published May 16, 2011, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/feminism-psychoanalysis/>.

⁶⁶ Jeanne Willette, "Julia Kristeva and Abjection," last modified October 11, 2013, <http://arthistoryunstuffed.com/julia-kristeva-and-abjection/>.

⁶⁷ Emily Zakin, "Psychoanalytic Feminism."

⁶⁸ "Castration Anxiety," *The Free Dictionary*, Farlex, accessed February 19, 2017, <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Castration+anxiety>.

⁶⁹ Lorber, *The Variety of Feminisms*, 20.

phallus is the essential element in ordering the world, women who lack the phallus seem to be sentenced to the life-long imprisonment of men. Unfortunately, plenty of men are innately taught to hold power to dominate societies, and plenty of women are innately prepared to accept their traditional roles, the men's power or domination as well as to give birth to a son as a replacement of lacking the phallus. All the preceding lines prove how the role of psychoanalysis is crucial in feminist movements not only to understand the reason underlying men's oppression against women but also to be able to change men's degrading perspectives on women beginning from the birth.

In her *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva uses the term 'abject' and 'abjection' to explain both the abandonment of the child from the mother and the degradation of the woman. Kristeva pictures the abjection as a violent rebellion against the threats coming from inside or outside in the process of 'being I'.⁷⁰ According to Kristeva, abjection is something that protects people from not only unclean or filthy things but also the shameful, unclean or sinful ones. Similarly, Kristeva highlights in the following lines that the abjection is not related to being unclean or unhealthy but it is something caused by rebels, traitors, rapists or killers who pretend to be saviors:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules . . . The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior.⁷¹

In addition, Samantha Pentony points out that bodily waste, perversion, cannibalism, incest, decay, human sacrifice, death, women's bodies, murder and religious hatred are the features of humanity that societies consider as abject.⁷² The male child seemingly begins to see the mother as the abject for the purpose of overcoming Oedipus Complex and abandon the mother. It may be acceptable that seeing the mother as an abject is necessary for the child to establish his individuality. However, women have been seen as abject by many societies with especially religious or political reasons. In fact, with psychoanalytic reasons, it seems that the abjection of the m(other) has been overgeneralized to the woman as 'the other' and 'the abject'.

Religiously, the woman body has been thought as the sinful, shameful, evil or alienated vessel. Moreover, politically, she has been seen as weak, powerless or

⁷⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.

⁷¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

⁷² Samantha Pentony, "How Kristeva's theory of abjection works in relation to the fairy tale and post-colonial novel: Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, and Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*." *Deep South*, vol. 2, no. 3 (Spring 1996), <http://www.otago.ac.nz/deepsouth/vol2no3/pentony.html>.

passive, and women must be governed by men. Moreover, the suppression of the woman causes her to be seen as the other who must be avoided or isolated and to feel fear against not only men but also her own body. It has been believed that she needs to be purified both physically and religiously; otherwise, her filth and sin may be contagious to both men and women. Actually, all these borders formed for women have resulted in the abandonment of their individuality and personality and living in the oceans of horror. According to Dan Burton and David Grandy, almost all the accused witches of early periods were women who are usually pictured as friendless, ugly, poor and old.⁷³ The reality of these women that are burned alive is a kind of crime against humanity beyond creating terror and horror in women as well as hostility between men and women. This horror is so high that even women hate women who do not behave as it is expected by their society or culture. Due to this horror, even mothers have suppressed their daughters and said for long years, ‘Marry a rich man and save yourself!’ or ‘Women do not talk too much!’.

Throughout the three-waves of feminism, many varieties of feminisms including Marxist, Socialist, Psychoanalytic, Cultural, Liberal, Radical, Anarchic or Postmodernist feminism have been discussed by people from all walks of life. Scholars and academicians appear on the stage of notably the third-wave feminism that emerges in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the pursuit of a more effective and global way to provide all women’s liberation without making any discrimination. Susan Archer Mann and Douglas J. Huffman point out the third-wave feminism ought to be portrayed as a stronger development with a new discourse to understand and frame gender relations which stem from an evaluation of the insufficiency of the second wave.⁷⁴ It appears that first wave and second wave feminists as mostly liberal feminists look for remedies for gender inequalities and injustices in religion, politics, economy, marriage, family, culture or art by caring the women from different cultures, religion or classes in the light of ‘sisterhood’ but without paying much attention to the women from different ethnicities or races as well as different life-styles like being lesbian or bisexual. Undeniably, the first wave and second wave feminists are the helpers of today’s acquired rights to get an equal education, the equal wage for the

⁷³ Dan Burton and David Grandy, *Magic, Mystery and Science: The Occult in Western Civilization* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 173.

⁷⁴ Susan Archer Mann and Douglas J. Huffman, “The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave,” *Science & Society*, vol. 69, no. 1 (January 2005): 57.

same job or equal political and religious status as well as to choose whom to marry or whether to get a baby or not. Nevertheless, it seems that their struggle is not enough to protect every woman's natural rights to live freely. According to Lorber, the radical feminists support the idea that women-centered way of life together with "women-only consciousness-raising groups and alternative organizations" is essential to defeat the patriarchy, men's oppression, violence, rape or sexual exploitation of women notably through pornography, but they ignore the women of colour.⁷⁵ The preceding line proves how the women seen as not 'normal' who are not heterosexual or belonging to the same ethnic origins have been alienated by the liberal or radical feminists.

In the challenging path of feminist criticism, Anarchic feminism may be a good solution to the problem of male domination in addition to all the other forms of feminism if it is desired to get rid of women's degradation, repression or oppression. Feminism adopts anarchism as a philosophical and political action to defeat the male dominance.⁷⁶ According to L. Susan Brown, "anarchism is inherently feminist" with its principal opposition to domination, hierarchy and every form of power since anarchism aims to fight for freedom and against all forms of power.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, as with everything else, Radical and Anarchic feminisms may have risks to cause the 'matriarchy' which creates a society woman holds power. No matter how difficult it appears, it is better to keep the balance of the power between men and women because the side whose power is higher tries to dominate the other, which is in fact the source of the oppression, suppression or violence that would turn all human beings' lives into a kind of hell. On the other hand, Lorber clarifies that women and men belonging to disadvantaged groups are oppressed in various ways in America where black women are thought as sexual objects and black men are punished for their masculinity.⁷⁸ For this problem, there has been Black feminism, Multi-ethnic feminism and Men's feminism, which proves feminism indeed fights for the freedom, equality and justice not only just for women but also for men regardless of their religion, race or ethnicity.

On the other hand, Postmodernist feminism is one of the broadest fields that bring many types of feminisms together. With the rise of third-wave and postmodernist feminism, there has been "multiperspectival version of feminism", "multivocality over

⁷⁵ Lorber, *The Variety of Feminisms*, 18.

⁷⁶ Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, 134.

⁷⁷ L. Susan Brown, "Beyond Feminism: Anarchism and Human Freedom," *Reinventing Anarchy Again*, ed. Howard J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press, 1996), 153.

⁷⁸ Lorber, *The Variety of Feminisms*, 26.

synthesis and action over theoretical justification” and “non-judgemental approach”.⁷⁹ Rebecca Walker, as one of the pioneers of the third wave feminism, states in her *Becoming the Third Wave* that there is a backlash against American women, a clear inequality between men and women, and there are efforts to limit “the boundaries of women’s personal and political power”.⁸⁰ Walker also supports the idea that women must not be silenced but must get educated and write as much as they could instead of sitting in front of the television and just watching.⁸¹ The third wave feminism and postmodernist feminism seem to be really interconnected as other kinds of feminisms are. According to R. Claire Synder, “third-wave feminist ideas about *identity* embrace notions of contradiction, multiplicity, and ambiguity, building on postmodern theory’s critique of ideas about the unified self and engaging with the fluid nature of gender and sexual identity”.⁸² Likewise, Linda Hutcheon calls postmodernism as “fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political”.⁸³ Likewise, Ihab Hassan puts forward that postmodernism “must be perceived in terms both of continuity and discontinuity . . . by evoking two divinities at once, engages a double view. Sameness and difference, unity and rupture, filiation and revolt, all must be honoured if we are to attend to history”.⁸⁴ All the preceding lines highlight that postmodernism and feminism go hand in hand to shed light on women’s ambiguous history that provides all the contrasts of the life by voicing women’s sufferings, inequalities or injustices through many different perspectives.

Actually, combining the history with the literature’s capabilities to give the most effective messages may cause a novel or short story to be more privileged as well as influential. Hutcheon calls this form of work as ‘historiographic metafiction’ and describes it as “its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs historiographic metafiction is made the grounds for its thinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past”.⁸⁵ To combine the undeniable realities of the history with the effectiveness of fiction is an excellent way to convey the significant messages

⁷⁹ R. Claire Synder, “What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay,” *The University of Chicago Press*, vol. 34, No. 1 (Autumn 2008): 175.

⁸⁰ Rebecca Walker, “Becoming the Third Wave,” *Ms*, vol. 2, no. 4 (January 1992): 39.

⁸¹ Walker, “Becoming the Third Wave,” 39.

⁸² Synder, “What Is Third-Wave Feminism?” 187.

⁸³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004), 4.

⁸⁴ Ihab Hassan, “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism,” *A Postmodern Reader*, ed. Joseph P. Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 277.

⁸⁵ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 5.

of women's movement. Similarly, thanks to applying postmodern feminism in literature, women writers succeed in raising awareness for the varieties of the culture and history of women with their differences of ethnic groups, sexual preferences, classes and race.⁸⁶ Moreover, since literature can unmask and reveal people's dark and deep sides, it is one of the best fields that the author can reflect his/ her anarchic, radical, liberal or postmodernist ideas to defend women's natural rights to live freely and hopefully in a peaceful atmosphere as Atwood does in her *The Handmaid's Tale*.

⁸⁶ Hutcheon, 67.

1.2. Feminist Criticism and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood is undeniably a great writer who strongly believes the natural rights and the freedom of humanity, in particular women because mostly their political, religious or economic liberty or autonomy as well as their individuality are limited by men, even sometimes by women. Undeniably, two of the best solutions for these inequalities or injustices is to show that you are aware of the sufferings of women and you are ready to end it by resisting. Accordingly, Atwood resists the existing situation of women and indeed tries to change it through her writings which are absolutely influential on particularly women readers. Howells emphasizes the importance of Atwood by stating that Margaret Atwood's novels are the international bestsellers, which are taught at colleges and schools all around the world in many courses including Canadian, English and American literature, postcolonial literature as well as gender studies and women's studies.⁸⁷ The more popular a writer is, the more possible her/ his thoughts reach to more people, which increases the possibility of changing people's prejudiced beliefs against women. According to Erin P. Knapp, Atwood is capable of exploring the minds of female characters and "their reactions to the world around them" by appropriating historical facts in the lives of women to highlight how the government as well as society work against gender equality and women's movement.⁸⁸ Rigney also puts forward that Atwood's poems and novels about sexual politics, men oppress and victimise women who naturally fight against men's oppression by exercising all their power in turn.⁸⁹ All the preceding lines prove how Atwood attaches importance to women's pains and sufferings and is incredibly influential in her fight against all the inequalities and injustices in her writings.

The Handmaid's Tale is the story of women whose feelings, desires, hopes do not have any importance. What is essential for the society Atwood portrays is the woman's body which is used as a means of reproduction and so women are called "two-legged wombs" (156). The Gileadean regime categorizes women according to their reproductive capacities. According to Palumbo, the Gileadean society is designed to maximize the probability of reproduction; therefore, women are evaluated only

⁸⁷ Howells, "Introduction," 1.

⁸⁸ Erin P. Knapp, "Appropriating History in Margaret Atwood's Novels: *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Alias Grace*" (Honours Thesis, Ball State University, 1998), 1.

⁸⁹ Barbara Hill Rigney, *Women Writers: Margaret Atwood* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987), 3.

according to their reproductive organs.⁹⁰ *The Handmaid's Tale*, which is released in Canada in 1985 as well as in America in 1986, portrays how women are oppressed and suppressed mercilessly by the men in Gilead, Atwood's fictional country referring to America. Howells points out that *The Handmaid's Tale* focuses on the probable consequences of conservative political and religious movements in America in the 1980s.⁹¹ Offred's story appears to be so terrifying that Pamela Cooper portrays *The Handmaid's Tale* as the "science fiction horror story".⁹² In Gilead's society, women have no choice or freedom; they can go to the places where they are allowed or they can wear the clothes which they are asked. Therefore, they compare themselves with a trapped animal, "a rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze" (190). The Handmaids even cannot read or write, and they are punished even with death unless they obey the rules which are determined by the men of Gilead.

Accordingly, Margaret Atwood pictures a terrifying future for the women of the world referring to the women of Gilead; therefore, *The Handmaid's Tale* can be regarded as an excellent example of the feminist dystopic novel. Brians portrays dystopia as a sort of experiment that makes clear the most negative qualities of certain social movements by means of isolating and exaggerating them.⁹³ Likewise, Malak points out, "dystopian societies, consumed and controlled by regressive dogmas, constantly appear static: founded on coercion and rigid structures, the system resists change and becomes arrested in paralysis".⁹⁴ Malak also states that dystopias are correlated with the fear for the future but not with progress and innovation.⁹⁵ Similarly, Gilead is invaded by the Commanders who call themselves as 'the Sons of Jacob' by firstly executing the President and then creating a new social order. People are divided into categories in this social system regarding their mission including the Handmaids, Marthas, Econowives, Widows, Aunts, Eyes, the Commanders who control the overall society and the Commanders' wives. According to Dodson, although many Gileadean men are not also truly liberated, the women of Gilead are the most oppressed,

⁹⁰ Palumbo, "On the Border," 29.

⁹¹ Coral Ann Howells, "Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Visions: *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 161.

⁹² Pamela Cooper, "'A body story with a vengeance': Anatomy and struggle in *the Bell Jar* and *the Handmaid's Tale*," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1997): 92.

⁹³ Brians, "Study Guide to Margaret Atwood."

⁹⁴ Malak, "Atwood in the Dystopian Tradition," 83.

⁹⁵ Malak, 84.

suppressed, subjugated and exploited ones “who are either Handmaids (sexual slaves), Marthas (cleaning slaves), Unwomen (enslaved workers in a toxic-waste camp), Wives and Daughters (properties of Commanders), or Jezebels (underground prostitutes)”.⁹⁶ In this new social order, the Handmaids are used as a means of reproduction and have no right or freedom; they are isolated and forced to live in the land of slavery. In the following lines, Rigney highlights how these women are oppressed and suppressed by the regime:

The price for non-involvement in fact is slavery, and Offred, along with almost all other women in Gilead, has forfeited, not only freedom, but her identity and even parts of her memory as well . . . All civil rights, including even the ownership of the most insignificant personal property, are cancelled.⁹⁷

The preceding lines prove how the Gileadean regime forces women to turn into sex slaves of the Commanders by seizing all their possessions including even their names, memories or bodies. These women are seemingly the properties of the government body and soul.

Correspondingly, women are marked with different colours to show what they are used for as if they are any objects or tools. According to their functions, each woman wears a uniform with a specific colour. The Handmaids wear a long red dress that may symbolize their fertility as the colour of blood, and their faces are covered with a red veil which prevents them from seeing anything. Rigney portrays the Handmaids as “personifications of a religious sacrifice, temple prostitutes doomed to a kind of purdah in perpetuity”.⁹⁸ The Commanders’ wives wear blue uniforms that may symbolize their infertility, and the Marthas as well as the housekeepers wear green. Moreover, the Widows wear black as if they are always required to mourn the death of their husbands. The Aunts wear brown uniforms as being responsible for the ‘Rachel and Leah’ Re-education Centre in which the Handmaids are firstly brought to be indoctrinated to be a “worthy vessel” (78) for their Commanders. One of the most important missions of the Aunts is to brainwash the Handmaids to believe the Gileadean regime provides them with a more peaceful and safer living space. The Aunts want them to watch some pornographic movies including “women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart” as well as women who are beaten, raped,

⁹⁶ Dodson, “We Lived in the Blank White Spaces,” 71.

⁹⁷ Rigney, *Women Writers: Margaret Atwood*, 116.

⁹⁸ Rigney, 117.

killed, and even cut into pieces (135) to prove their previous life was a kind of hell. After they are forced to watch such movies, the tragic irony is that the Handmaids are expected to be grateful to the Gileadean regime for saving them from living such a horrible life.

Offred, who is the protagonist and the narrator of the novel, actually lived in a place “where women had jobs, and money, and a degree of autonomy”.⁹⁹ She was married and had a daughter; however, she was kidnapped and brought to Gilead where a woman is totally described according to her body, whether she can give birth or not, and forced to be a Handmaid if she can bear a baby. Compelled to be a Handmaid, Offred has no idea about the fate of her husband or her daughter whom Offred constantly dreams at different ages and misses (75). Firstly, the Gileadean regime sends Offred to the Rachel and Leah’s Centre in which women are taught to be a Handmaid. Next, she is assigned to the Commander Fred’s house and gets her name ‘Offred’ to label that she is owned by him. She is not allowed to use her real name, which proves Offred like other women in Gilead to have no identity or autonomy. What they think or believe has no importance since women in Gilead are like tools for specific purposes. Offred says her name is not Offred and she indeed possesses “another name, which nobody uses now because it’s forbidden”; however, she tries to comfort herself by telling herself her name is “like your telephone number, useful only to others” (99). Even the names of the Commanders’ wives are not real, and they are oppressed as they cannot give birth. In fact, if a woman cannot give birth, she is seen as ‘unwoman’. The Handmaids are forced to give birth to the Commanders’ babies, and their wives have to see all this process which is seemingly a torture for them.

Ignoring the tortures that the Gileadean women are exposed to, the regime tries to justify why they demand women to give birth to more and more babies by clarifying fertility rates are incredibly low in Gilead in addition to showing the Biblical precedents. However, it is undeniably ironic that the regime behaves as if the Handmaids are the saviors of Gilead’s future whereas they utterly destroy these women’s natural rights and utilize them as if they are the sex slaves as “two-legged wombs” (156). Indeed, the Gileadean regime desperately needs the Handmaids since many women are infertile and the most of the fertile ones give birth to the unhealthy babies owing to the pollution, chemical leaks, toxic waste and the previous

⁹⁹ Valerie Martin, “Introduction,” xiii.

environmental catastrophes, which causes many places in Gilead to be uninhabitable. Regarding the existing situation of Gilead, the healthy born babies and so the Handmaids are vital for the future of Gilead. Moreover, the vital importance of the pregnant Handmaids often causes them to be attacked by the other jealous women because they are seen as “the carrier of life” and “closer to death” (35). The reason why other women feel this desire and envy is indeed “she’ll never be sent to the Colonies; she’ll never be declared Unwoman. That is her reward” (145). In the Colonies, many alienated women seen as useless and infertile are compelled to live in incredibly harsh conditions spending “their time cleaning up” in the inhabitable parts of Gilead with full of “the toxic dumps and the radiation spills” (283). These women’s life is much more hellish than the Handmaids because the regime entirely disregards these women by calling them as ‘Unwoman’.

In Gilead, there are strict rules that both men and women must obey. With the aim of showing the results of their rebellious actions, they use ‘the Wall’ in which they hang people who disobey the rules. Furthermore, the regime shows their hanged bodies for days to strike a constant terror in their hearts, “six more bodies hanging, by the necks . . . Sometimes they’ll be there for days . . . so as many people as possible will have the chance to see them” (42). In order to find and catch the guilty ones, the regime uses the Eyes whose mission is to keep everyone under 24-hour surveillance as today’s police force. If the Eyes realize anything wrong, they arrest the criminals and in the Salvagings, these criminals are punished with the death penalty by being hanged on the Wall to give the message that their rebellious actions result in the merciless death. Actually, the Wall perfectly reminds to them “of the unjustness and brutality of the regime” (319). Whereas the Gileadean regime mercilessly murders whoever they wish, they ironically forbid the women even to commit suicide. Since most of the Handmaids may wish to kill themselves, there is nothing dangerous to help them commit suicide in their rooms. Therefore, even the glasses in their windows are shatterproof (63). Indeed, Offred chooses to survive despite her tale of the captivity; nonetheless, her friend, Ofglen cannot put up with their conditions and commit suicide by hanging herself, and also a new Ofglen is found instead of her quickly.

On the other hand, the Gileadean women’s bodies are seen as the ‘abject’ that means these women are unclean, shameful or sinful vessels and they pose a threat to the Gileadean system or order as Kristeva talks about. Therefore, the Handmaids are

required to be regularly purified, which forces them to visit their doctors with the aim of checking for any disease. At the right time in the Handmaids' menstrual cycle, they are also forced to have sexual intercourse with their Commanders as a kind of duty for both of them. Abortion, pornography and any sexual intercourse for the people apart from the ones belonging to the upper class are fatally illegal. The Handmaids are just allowed to go shopping together with another Handmaid. These women cannot even close the doors of their rooms, "the door of the room – not *my* room, I refuse to say *my* – is not locked" (14). It is crystal clear that the women of Gilead do not have their freedom or autonomy even in their rooms. Though Offred does not have a mother she dreams of or a father whom she does not even know, she could establish her individuality and autonomy in her past. However, the Gileadean regime does not let her maintain her identity and independence as this regime is full of phallogocentric people who believe the phallus is the essential element in ordering the world. Thus, the Gileadean women, especially the Handmaids, are sentenced to the life-long imprisonment and degradation of men.

Accordingly, a Latin sentence written by one of the previous Offreds echoes the miserable and unbearable conditions of the Gileadean women: "nolite te bastardes carborundorum" (63) which means "don't let the bastards grind you down" (214). She suffers so much that she seems to scratch this sentence with her fingernails for the purpose of telling the next Handmaids to fight against these cruelties. However, Offred cannot understand what this sentence means at the moment she reads. Moreover, it is too dangerous even to read this sentence since their natural rights to read, write and speak are forbidden by the regime. The Gileadean government is aware of the power of knowledge and language which can be used as a weapon to control the future; as a consequence, the Eyes and the Angels protect the library as if it is a temple (191). According to Lois Feuer, the prohibition of the Handmaids' access to books proves that the Gileadean regime fundamentally targets "the next generation of Handmaids" to behave more docilely since these women will not possess any memories of different alternatives or possibilities.¹⁰⁰ The Gileadean government is perfectly aware of the fact that they can manipulate the Gileadean women much more easily when they erase their past, their memory or their dreams.

¹⁰⁰ Lois Feuer, "The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 85.

Accordingly, the Gileadean regime tries to eliminate all the risks of the power of knowledge by closing the universities and forbidding the books, newspapers or magazines. Therefore, the Gileadean citizens know whatever the government wants them to know. According to Knapp, Gilead takes all the rights “guaranteed by the First Amendment and the Freedom of Information Act away from its citizens. No information is released to the people without governmental knowledge”.¹⁰¹ Moreover, both feminist activists like Offred’s mother and religious fundamentalists share a common purpose, and it is the same kind of censorship of women though the goals are different. Indeed, Offred’s mother is a radical feminist activist as a single mother who is against all kind of women oppression. In one of Offred’s memories, her mother is angry with a naked woman shown on a magazine and commands Offred to throw it away immediately (49). Offred’s mother and her mother’s friends feel happy when they burn magazines including such pictures, and Offred is unable to understand their joy. Feminists like Offred’s mother, in fact, wish to prevent women’s bodies to be used as sexual objects, and they are against pornography. However, burning the books or magazines may help the supporters of every censorship applied to the women in a way, which proves it is crucial for feminists to watch their steps while trying to protect women’s rights and freedom since their actions may be misunderstood or may help those who do not support feminism.

The Handmaid’s Tale is indisputably a feminist novel that criticizes all kinds of oppression towards not only women but also men. Hodson puts forward, “one must note that the narrator’s mother is a product of the women’s movement of the 1970s”.¹⁰² Offred’s mother appears to be a strong supporter of radical and anarchic feminism, and she believes she does the most righteous thing on behalf of women. Moreover, she does not fit the traditional gender roles as passive, powerless or submissive, which is something good for her; however, it seems with her radical thoughts, she adopts matriarchy that is also as wrong as patriarchy. Actually, Offred’s mother pictures men as the tools to give birth to other women, “a man is just a woman’s strategy for making other women” (138). Atwood may criticize such beliefs and behaviour through Offred’s mother because seeing women as objects is just as wrong as seeing men as

¹⁰¹ Erin P. Knapp, “Appropriating History in Margaret Atwood’s Novels,” 11.

¹⁰² Hodson, “American Trends and American Fears,” 15.

objects. Every kind of inequality, injustice, oppression or suppression cannot be accepted if it is wished to have a world of hope and peace.

On the other hand, Atwood appreciates and adopts postmodern feminism to *The Handmaid's Tale*, which reflects the essential elements of postmodernism. Synder portrays these elements as multivocality, multiplicity, non-judgmental approach, ambiguity as well as awareness of the variety of the culture and history.¹⁰³ In this respect, *The Handmaid's Tale* possesses many different meanings that can be interpreted in many ways with its ambiguities and historical as well as Biblical references. Furthermore, Atwood's novel seems to try not to be critical of the thoughts and actions of her characters since she most probably wishes all her readers to become more open-minded in their ideas or interpretations of the book. Likewise, Atwood prefers to deliver her story through Offred's narration as the person who exposes to all these sufferings in the strictest sense of the word. According to Hutcheon, a typical postmodern text rejects the third person who is omnipresent and omniscient, instead it prefers dialogues between a projected reader and a narrative voice.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, Offred puts forward in her story, "whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can't be helped. And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (331). In the preceding lines, Atwood reflects both the ambiguity and the narrative voice talking to a projected reader as the elements of postmodernism.

Atwood takes advantage of the endless power of the history combining it with the power of fiction, which also makes her story postmodern and also incredibly impressive. *The Handmaid's Tale* appears to echo the likely devastating results of the defeat of the ERA and rise of the 'Religious Right' in America. According to Margaret Atwood, these emerging developments would most likely cause America to regress particularly regarding women's rights and equality. Hodson points out that the Gileadean regime forces women to experience the similar or much worse troubles like the ones in 17th century Puritan Period or the 19th century Victorian Age when women are sentenced to traditional gender roles at home, which proves how the clock is set back in Gilead.¹⁰⁵ Noakes and Reynolds also put forward that there is a historical rightness in which Canada represent a safe place whereas the United States is a

¹⁰³ Synder, "What Is Third-Wave Feminism?" 175.

¹⁰⁴ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Hodson, "American Trends and American Fears," 22.

corrupted place where people wish to escape since they are persecuted.¹⁰⁶ However, it can also be said that this tale aims to echo the history as well as the future of not only America but also all the world.

Similarly, *The Handmaid's Tale* skilfully portrays all the periods of time: the past, present and future with its ambiguities, fragmentations, dreams and flashbacks that are also the characteristics of the postmodernism. The Gileadean women suffer from almost every kind of oppression mentioned in all three waves of feminism. They are treated like the government's slaves – indeed worthless public properties – just because they are born as women. For the Gileadean government, women are inherently inferior, less intelligent, less logical, passive or submissive creatures. They cannot produce works of art or cannot be good leaders since they are too emotional, sensitive and irrational. The Gileadean women serve the men of Gilead in every way they wish like cleaning, cooking or giving birth to healthy babies. These women receive no recompense for their works since they are believed to work for the welfare of their own country in the name of religion and politics; thus, they are brainwashed to have a divine goal. Nevertheless, the reality is the fact that the women in Gilead have no social, economic, political or religious right, let alone equal rights and opportunities although there are also some disadvantaged and oppressed men who have to obey the strict rules of Gilead.

In the last part of the novel, the future is clarified by a professor, James Darcy Pieixoto, in a symposium on academic studies about Gilead “held at the University of Denay, Nunavit, on June 25, 2195” (335). Actually, Atwood gives the message of ‘deny none of it’ to her readers with the name of the university. To give his lecture about *The Handmaid's Tale*, Professor Pieixoto uses the tapes recorded by Offred at the times when they believe she may be kept in a cellar or attic in a safe house. Even though it is thought that Offred's sufferings are told just through her inner voice at the beginning, it seems that they are successfully recorded by her to enable to shape the women's future. The fact that she can record her story makes her free from Gilead; in other words, she could escape from all her sufferings in a way, perhaps not physically but at least psychologically, emotionally or spiritually. By means of Cambridge University Professor Pieixoto's revealing Offred's story years later, Atwood emphasizes the importance of hearing the echoes of the history however dark it seems.

¹⁰⁶ Jonathan Noakes and Margaret Reynolds, *The Essential Guide to Contemporary Literature*, 9.

The people in the symposium are all academicians, and they may see Offred's fate just a part of their academic studies. Nonetheless, despite all the impossible conditions, by achieving to tell her story, Offred's main purpose – surely Atwood's main purpose – is undeniably to shed light on the future and warn people about the possibility of such a terrifying fate. As Valerie Martin points out, “history will catch up with us, it isn't dead any more than we are, it lives in and upon us . . . If you want to see the future, keep looking steadily behind you, because the future, no matter how much we may pretend we don't know it, is history”.¹⁰⁷ Atwood also emphasizes the significance of the history of women's movement by stating that women's movement influences how the societies read.¹⁰⁸ All the preceding lines prove how digging into history is crucial to shed on light on the future as well especially in order to achieve women's purposes to gain or protect their natural rights, justice, equality and freedom.

To conclude, Offred may not be the ideal woman to fight against the male domination; nevertheless, she is powerful and has faith in herself even though she cannot mostly act according to the way she believes. On the contrary to the common misconception that woman body is shameful, sinful, evil or abject in Gilead, Offred does not feel any shame or abjection against her body. However, she does not want to look at her own body not because she sees her body as immodest or shameful but because she sees it as “something that determines” her completely (75). She is so eager to get rid of her chains by trying to control her own body and mind. For instance, she has a love affair with Nick, the Commander's chauffeur even though there is a great risk for Nick to be an Eye and for her to be executed. Furthermore, by telling her own story, she believes that she has enough power to change her future in addition to the future of other women, “by telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you, I believe you're there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are” (301-302). Apparently, Offred is successful in attracting the readers' interest and attention by telling her own story not only because they may feel the horror due to the possibility of such a terrifying future for women but also because they could feel the hope while reading the tale of a survivor. Fortunately, Offred is able to reach her story to all the world despite all the limitations or prohibitions. According to Angela Laflen, “the repeated line ‘I compose myself’

¹⁰⁷ Valerie Martin, “Introduction,” xviii.

¹⁰⁸ Margaret Atwood, “Spotty-Handed Villainesses: Problems of Female Bad Behaviour in the Creation of Literature,” *O.W. Toad*, accessed December 22, 2014, <http://gos.sbc.edu/a/atwood.html>.

throughout *The Handmaid's Tale* also supports the interpretation that Offred maintains her identity through making her record".¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Atwood emphasizes in her essay *An End to Audience* that the importance of telling the stories, "the story of the disaster which is the world; it is done by Job's messengers whom God saved alive because someone had to tell the story. *I only am escaped alone to tell thee*. When a story, [true] or not, begins like this, we must listen".¹¹⁰ The preceding lines highlight how essential that someone must tell the sufferings that people get through and also how they react to those miseries and agonies since these stories will undoubtedly shed light on the future of all the women regardless of their race, ethnicity, religious or political beliefs.

¹⁰⁹ Angela Lafren, "'From a Distance it Looks Like Peace': Reading Beneath the Fascist Style of Gilead in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2007): 95.

¹¹⁰ Margaret Atwood, "An End to Audience," *Dalhousie Review* (October 8, 1980): 427.

2. CHAPTER TWO: INFLUENCE OF POLITICS ON WOMEN IN ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S*

2.1. The Equal Rights Amendment and Gilead's Totalitarianism

The Gileadean regime is based on a political system where ordinary people do not have any power and are totally controlled by the government; nevertheless, ironically, its citizens are brainwashed that they still have freedom and autonomy. In the past called as the days of anarchy by the government and its true believers, women could wear whatever they want, go to the university, have the job they want or marry the person they wish, which means “women were not protected then” for the Aunts. On the other hand, according to Offred, there were still rules that all the women knew: “Don't open the door to a stranger . . . If anyone whistles, don't turn to look” (33). Though they were required to protect themselves from the external dangers and threats in the past, they were contended that they possessed the control of their own lives. However, the Gileadean regime destroys all the Gileadean women's freedom, autonomy and rights by pretending as if they aimed to protect the women. Therefore, Offred, who represents all the other women in Gilead, longs for possessing her clothes, her soap or her own money that she earned herself. In Gilead, the fact that the women do not have to protect themselves from all the external dangers is seen as a kind of freedom because the government protects them by restricting all their natural rights, “there is more than one kind of freedom . . . Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it” (33-34). The regime is so merciless in the punishments that no man can dare to speak or touch the Handmaids, and they do not even whistle in the streets. Even though the regime seems as if they protect the women from all the external threats, its supporters themselves inflict unbearable pains on these women.

Correspondingly, the Aunts portray the women of the days of anarchy as ‘undone’, and the people of the past were dying from “too much choice” (34). On the other hand, Gileadean regime does not offer any choices to the women of Gilead where the rest of the world pictures these women as “secret, forbidden”. According to an interpreter of the Japanese tourists, “to stare at them through the lens of a camera is, for them, an experience of violation” (39). Though these women do not

have even simple liberties such as the right to speak, read and write, they are brainwashed that they have the freedom to protect themselves from any sinful or illegal actions such as rape or sexual exploitation forbidden by the government. However, ironically, the Handmaids' so-called privileged service for their government is indeed a kind of rape or sexual exploitation. Moreover, Gileadean regime believes that all the Gileadean people must be grateful for the government because they do everything for their own society's sake and aim to protect everyone with their strict rules as well as laws that everyone must unquestionably obey.

Indeed, the Rachel and Leah's centre – the Handmaids call it as 'the Red Centre' – is the perfect place to brainwash all the women to convince them to be true believers. In the Red Centre, the most of the potential candidates for being Handmaids are exposed to an intensive – especially religious – education about how they could perfectly serve their country. The Aunts who are the representatives of the government purpose to erase all their memories and brainwash them to accept everything they wish unquestionably. In the end, most of these women turn into a kind of robots because they become paralysed by the fear to be alienated, to be devalued or even worse to be killed. However, unlike many women in Gilead, Offred tries to keep her memories alive by constantly dreaming her past; therefore, she does not believe a word of what they tell whole-heartedly but pretends to believe under the circumstances. Unfortunately, most of the women as well as men trust the Gileadean regime blindly, and as the true believers, they mostly report the illegal actions of the non-believers since their memories are perfectly cleared or they are extremely terrified, and now they see Gilead's regime as their best chance.

On the other hand, *The Handmaid's Tale* skilfully reflects the historical facts, which indeed indicates it is not just a simple tale that aims to entertain the readers or fill in the time. For the purpose of understanding the influence of politics on women in Gilead's totalitarianism better, it is essential to see these historical details. According to Andrew H. Malcolm, some of the historical references and details in *The Handmaid's Tale* might be inspired from the following practices;

A Berlin-type wall, slave-breeding practices, chemical pollutants that affect human reproduction. Government birth and enforced-abortion decrees that draw from similar rules in

Romania and China . . . The white hood placed over the head of those being hanged in her tale is derived from 19th century Canadian executions.¹¹¹

Correspondingly, Atwood verifies Malcolm's statements about Berlin Wall by picturing her harsh living conditions at the time when she begins writing *The Handmaid's Tale* in Germany in 1984:

I was living in West Berlin, which was still encircled by the Berlin Wall: The Soviet empire was still strongly in place . . . 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.¹¹²

The preceding lines highlight how Berlin Wall influences her novel and her characters as the people who live in Germany at that time by terrorizing them, keeping them under surveillance and forcing them to be silent with their attacks and repurposed buildings. Furthermore, through the novel, the places such as Maine, Salem, California, Florida, Detroit or New York indicate that the setting of Gilead is indeed America. Particularly 'The Historical Notes' part proves that the setting of the novel seen as the hell for women is the United States of America, and the place where Offred with her husband, Luke and her daughter want to escape but get captured on the border is Canada. Atwood warns her readers that America may have such terrifying future if the current conditions are not taken into consideration, which creates reactions among Americans as well as other countries. About the reactions to her novel, Atwood points out, "in Canada, they said, 'Could it happen here?' . . . In the United States, they said, 'How long have we got?'"¹¹³ Accordingly, Gorman Beauchamp puts forward that Canadians feel some anxiety about their future, but Americans feel much more worried or frightened since America is portrayed as the setting of the tale.¹¹⁴ Seemingly, whereas Canadians are more cautious about the possible disasters in the future, Americans are aware of the fact that they are at the threshold of having such a frightening future.

¹¹¹ Andrew H. Malcolm, "Margaret Atwood Reflects on a Hit," *The New York Times*, April 14, 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/14/movies/margaret-atwood-reflects-on-a-hit.html>.

¹¹² Margaret Atwood, "Margaret Atwood on What '*The Handmaid's Tale*' Means in the Age of Trump," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html>.

¹¹³ Malcolm, "Margaret Atwood."

¹¹⁴ Gorman Beauchamp, "The Politics of *the Handmaid's Tale*," *Midwest Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 1 (2009): 11.

By referring to America as the setting of her novel, Atwood seems to focus on the possible consequences of the existing situation in America in 1980s when Ronald Reagan was elected in the United States, which causes the rise of conservatives who do not like changes in ideas or politics but indeed favour traditional values and family structures. As with any political structure, people support or do not support a political leader and political party regarding to the advantages or disadvantages. According to Doug Rossinow, conservatives achieved a lot on behalf of American life in the 1980s. Rossinow also points out that conservatives reshaped American politics by lowering income taxes, supporting entrepreneurs and gaining the military strength.¹¹⁵ Rossinow is also attracted by Ronald Reagan owing to his intense patriotism, his demand for military supremacy, his unconditional support for the United States.¹¹⁶ It is an undeniable fact that Reagan did lots of things for the welfare of his own country and its citizens as the other American presidents did. However, it is hard to say the same thing for the good of the women though Rossinow claims Reagan has faith in “the idea of an equal partnership between men and women” but not the “government – mandated equality in public life”.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, Reagan embraces “the pro-life cause – meaning he now opposed keeping abortion legal”, and he is against ratification of the ERA to the American Constitution.¹¹⁸ The preceding lines prove how Reagan and his followers do not support the idea of women’s equality and justice must be protected by law, which causes women’s rights and freedom to be left to the mercy of men. However, protecting women’s rights by law gives women permanent power and faith for fighting against all the oppression they suffer from.

The Equal Rights Amendment has been crucial for the women who target to have equal rights and opportunities in their political, educational, economic or social lives including reproductive rights, which would be all guaranteed by the government as the symbol of power. 1923 is the first year the National Women’s Party proposed the ERA in the Congress with the aim of convincing the government to accept that women’s “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex”. However, the ERA was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives in 1970, and its approval was voted by the U.S.

¹¹⁵ Doug Rossinow, *The Reagan Era: A History of the 1980s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 2.

¹¹⁶ Rossinow, *The Reagan Era*, 1-2.

¹¹⁷ Rossinow, 15.

¹¹⁸ Rossinow, 15.

Senate in 1972 and ratified by thirty of the required thirty-eight states in 1973.¹¹⁹ Particularly with the ratification of the ERA, women must have been more hopeful for their own as well as their daughters' future. The women movements like NOW as well as the ERA indisputably gave women strength, creativity and hope to get better in every field of life. According to Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, "the feminist boast that 'we are everywhere' could no longer be taken lightly".¹²⁰ They also put forward that there was a sudden and quick increase in feminist publishing in the 1970s; furthermore, all the feminist organizations founded their monthly report, newsletter or journal about Jewish women, older women, working women, lesbian feminists, women of colour or women in different professions and academic disciplines.¹²¹ Amy Erdman Farrell also points out that until the start of the 1970s, "there were hundreds of feminist periodicals, newsletters, and magazines in the United States".¹²² All the publishing clearly reveals the fact that women became much more aware of their own capabilities and struggled to inform the next generation about their achievements as well as failures at that time with the help of most possibly the ERA and similar efforts to gain the equality of rights and freedom in all the fields of their own lives.

Indisputably, the women movements especially when protected and supported by the government have given the women the power to fight with harassment, rape, physical or psychological violence which they are forced to endure for their children or due to the severe shortage of economic independence and insufficient governmental support for the divorced and single mothers. Therefore, women's movement with its feminist organizations has been significant in changing numerous women's lives in a positive way. According to Ferree and Hess, an critical success of the women organizations in the 1970s was to attract everyone's attention in the United States to the necessity that women should be able to feel secure at their workplaces and homes as well as to walk on the streets safely.¹²³ Correspondingly, Betty Friedan as the founder of NOW which is one the most influential women organizations, points out

¹¹⁹ "The Equal Rights Amendment," *Women Studies Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 2/3 (The 1970s, Fall/ Winter 2015): 271.

¹²⁰ Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement Across Three Decades of Change* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 75.

¹²¹ Ferree and Hess, *The New Feminist Movement*, 78.

¹²² Amy Erdman Farrell, "From a Tarantula on a Banana Boat to a Canary in a Mine: 'Ms. Magazine' as a Cautionary Tale in a Neoliberal Age," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 395.

¹²³ Ferree and Hess, *The New Feminist Movement*, 165.

that NOW aims to provide women's total participation on the purpose of getting equal responsibilities and privileges with men. Friedan also states that NOW targets to overcome discrimination as well as prejudice against the women in the industry, labour, churches, education, religion, medicine, political parties, law and all other significant fields in American society.¹²⁴ All the preceding lines highlight how women's organizations make efforts to provide all the women with the equal, just or liberated life they deserve regardless of their race, language, colour, ethnicity or religious and political beliefs.

Correspondingly, women have proved their limitless power in every field of life when they have been given the opportunities throughout the history. Who can claim men are superior to women in a world where a woman can be more successful in sports, science, art or music than a man? Furthermore, *The DBQ Project* emphasizes during World War II, "women played a key role" and women's real power begins to be understood, which also causes Shirley Chisolm to become "the first black women ever elected to Congress" in New York.¹²⁵ The preceding lines prove how women's power can be increased, decreased or worse destroyed thanks to the government, in other words the political power. Therefore, the National Organization for Women makes "ratifying the ERA their top goal" like many other women's organizations.¹²⁶ *The DBQ Project* also categorizes some of the causes why supporters wished the ERA to prevent unequal pay referring men earn much more than women, unequal hiring for jobs referring women are mostly teachers whereas men are mostly principals and unequal sharing of property referring husbands control all the wealth.¹²⁷ In her *The Feminist Mystique*, Friedan perfectly exemplifies why women must resist their existing situation with a mother who has four children and leaves the university at nineteen for the purpose of getting married,

I never had any career ambitions. All I wanted was to get married and have four children. I love the kids and Bob and my home. There's no problem you can even put a name to. But I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I'm a server of food . . . and a bedmaker, somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I?¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Betty Friedan, *NOW Statement of Purpose*, adopted at NOW's first National Conference in Washington D.C. (October 29, 1966): 1.

¹²⁵ "Why Was the Equal Rights Amendment Defeated?" *The DBQ Project* (2008): 273.

¹²⁶ The DBQ Project, "Equal Rights Amendment," 273.

¹²⁷ The DBQ Project, 274.

¹²⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, June 1979), 16-7.

The preceding lines highlight how desperate a woman feels when she is sentenced to a life in which she has no use other than giving birth to babies or fulfilling both their children and husband's demands. It is natural that a woman like a man wishes to feel and also use her creativity, capabilities or personality.

However, women's movement and organizations as well as the ERA have been forced to be defeated by the opposing organizations throughout the history. Ferree and Hess put forward that the oppositions against the ERA begin with an incredibly right-wing foundation called as 'John Birch Society', which succeeds its purposes to increase the anti-ERA supporters thanks to Phyllis Schlafly, an activist of the Republican party from Illinois.¹²⁹ Moreover, according to Douglas Martin, she founds an organization named as 'Stop ERA' in 1972, and it becomes the Eagle Forum in 1975 with the aim of coordinating her campaigns with their volunteer members.¹³⁰ Likewise, the Eagle Forum portrays their missions as protecting marriages, roles of the mothers, fathers as well as homemakers and their economic rights.¹³¹ The Eagle Forum also claims that the women's movement and the ERA aim to picture men as a continual danger against women, force women to participate in military battles against enemies and to provide women with "tax-funded abortions and same-sex marriages", which is the ERA's hidden agenda.¹³² On the other hand, one of Schlafly's sons ironically acknowledges being a gay as the member of Eagle Forum as well.¹³³ The members of Eagle Forum also claim that they enable conservative women and men who support pro-family to get involved in the politics with the aim of supporting America to remain the land of freedom, ensures respect for the integrity of the families, private enterprise and private as well as public virtue.¹³⁴ When the meaning of 'pro-family' is examined, it can be deduced that this organization is not aware they turn the clock back for women. By supporting pro-family, Eagle Forum favours or encourages "traditional family structures and values" and also opposes "abortion and

¹²⁹ Ferree and Hess, *The New Feminist Movement*, 149.

¹³⁰ Douglas Martin, "Phyllis Schlafly, 'First Lady' of a Political March to the Right, Dies at 92," *The New York Times*, September 5, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/06/obituaries/phyllis-schlafly-conservative-leader-and-foe-of-era-dies-at-92.html?_r=0.

¹³¹ "Our Mission," *Eagle Forum*, accessed 16 March, 2017, <http://eagleforum.org/misc/descript.html>.

¹³² Eagle Forum, "Our Mission."

¹³³ "Phyllis Schlafly, conservative US activist who opposed ERA, dies at 92." *CNBC*, September 5, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/05/phyllis-schlafly-conservative-us-activist-who-opposed-era-dies-at-92.html>.

¹³⁴ Eagle Forum, "Our Mission."

often birth control”.¹³⁵ In other words, with their 80.000 men and women members¹³⁶, they seem to support the traditional roles of women as submissive, weak or passive because if the aim of woman’s existence is to give a birth to a baby and look after both her children as well as her husband on whom they are economically dependent.

Accordingly, the Equal Rights Amendment is defined by the members of Eagle Forum as a poorly phrased amendment that restricts all practices and laws which draw distinctions between sexes.¹³⁷ They claim that the ERA would cause especially stay-at-home women to lose their financial benefits, to work in heavy jobs though they are pregnant and to join the military forces; moreover, they see abortion as harm to unborn children.¹³⁸ Feminism, in real terms, supports the equal rights and opportunities as well as justice for everyone regardless of their sex discrimination; therefore, the ERA must have looked for a political and legal power supporting as well as protecting women. The essential aim of feminism has never been to harm children or men; on the other hand, destroying all women’s natural rights to work or get educated cannot bring peace and happiness since most men cannot resist abusing the power that the government gives by seeing women as inferior. Women could improve themselves and work in every field thanks to the rights and the opportunities especially provided by the government though some women may prefer cleaning, cooking or looking for their children instead of working outside. In an interview by Michel Martin, Schlafly, who is an author, editor, and an icon of the America’s anti-feminist movement, a conservative activist as well as the founder of the Eagle Forum, states that a husband is obliged to support his wife financially, and by the way, she frightens all women if the ERA is passed, they will lose their so-called rights.¹³⁹ Despite the ironic fact she has a master’s degree in political science and includes herself in antifeminist organizations so eagerly, it is really shocking how she expects all women live as a homemaker only supported by their husbands. If a woman prefers to live as a homemaker, there is no problem for the feminists who attach importance to the women’s preferences and wishes. Therefore, if a woman feels she lives in a happy and peaceful atmosphere as a

¹³⁵ “Pro-family,” *Merriem-Webster*, accessed May 21, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pro-family>.

¹³⁶ Eagle Forum, “Our Mission.”

¹³⁷ “Stop ERA – Again!” *Eagle Forum*, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://eagleforum.org/topics/era/stop-era-again.html>.

¹³⁸ Eagle Forum, “Stop-ERA – Again!”

¹³⁹ “Phyllis Schlafly Still Championing the Anti-Feminist Fight,” interview by Michel Martin, March 30, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=134981902>.

homemaker, no one can oppose or degrade her since she chooses not to work or raise her children. However, feminists prefer women to get educated and work for their own welfare. Moreover, marriages must be based on an ordinary partnership of both men and women, and it is indisputably wrong to demand either men or women to shoulder the responsibility on their own.

Nevertheless, Schlafly appears to aim to degrade the women who believe the power of feminist movements while ironically telling her purpose is to protect women, and in fact, she causes a discrimination among women as a woman herself. Indeed, Schlafly is so smart that she uses the power of politics for the benefit of the women like her and tries to prevent the women who look for equality and justice from getting the necessary guarantee as well as protection by the government. According to Douglas Martin, Schlafly is a polarizing woman in American society on whom she struggles to impose the conservative revival that has a stronger influence thanks to Ronald Reagan. Schlafly also makes some unfortunate statements including that sexual harassment at work is not a matter for a righteous woman and classes of sex education resemble sales parties at home causing abortions. She often deliberately provokes feminists with her sentences, “I want to thank my husband, Fred, for letting me come here” with the aim of irritating the supporters of the women’s movement.¹⁴⁰ Schlafly often debates Betty Friedan, who portrays Schlafly as “a traitor to her sex”; furthermore, Friedan threatens Schlafly to burn her at stake.¹⁴¹ In the following lines, Douglas Martin clarifies the ideas of the feminists and the opponents of Schlafly;

Feminists said it was her husband’s wealth — he was a lawyer from a rich Illinois family . . . some opponents called Mrs. Schlafly a hypocrite for pursuing so energetic a career while championing traditional female roles. She replied by calling her political career ‘a hobby’.¹⁴²

The preceding lines prove how Schlafly behaves hypocritically by defending the traditional roles of women as a mother and wife whereas she comes from a wealthy family, marries a rich lawyer as she wishes and has a perfect political career.

On the other hand, Schlafly is not the only person who is strongly against the ERA. Many claims frightened as well as discourage not only men but also women and unfortunately caused the ERA not to be ratified after 1982. In a newspaper article written by Barbara Rasmussen, Dr. Jonathan H. Pincus, who is the Professor of Neurology, states that the Equal Rights Amendment will cause unhappiness, rising

¹⁴⁰ Douglas Martin, “Phyllis Schlafly.”

¹⁴¹ CNBC, “Phyllis Schlafly.”

¹⁴² Douglas Martin, “Phyllis Schlafly.”

rates of desertion and divorce, social disruption, weakening family ties that also leads rising rates of suicide, perhaps sexual deviation and alcoholism.¹⁴³ If women take part in business life, it may naturally affect the birth rates, fertility, marriage or divorce because a conscious and economically independent woman does not consent to be oppressed by their husbands, and also she gives birth to babies not because she is obliged to but because she wishes. However, the anti-ERA supporters aim to persuade women that the ERA is unnecessary and the freedom makes women unhappy. In the following lines, Faludi clarifies how the anti-ERA supporters accuse women falsely to justify their efforts to prevent women's liberty and equality;

As a California sheriff explained to the press, 'women are enjoying a lot more freedom now, and as a result, they are committing more crimes. The U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography even proposed that women's professional advancement might be responsible for rising rape rates. With more women in college and at work now, the commission members reasoned in their report, women just have more opportunities to be raped.'¹⁴⁴

All these statements seem unfortunate because they ignore human nature. When a government gives its citizens freedom, it means they have the chance to choose to live as they wish. Undeniably, human nature regardless of the gender differences tends to make small or big mistakes even if the government tries to limit their freedom and autonomy. People are the creatures who not only have weaknesses and make mistakes but also learn from their mistakes. If someone thinks women deserve to be raped or exposed to violence just because they want to get education or work, or if someone says women commit more crimes just because they are liberated, then they have to limit the men's freedom as well. Naturally, there must be laws and rules for both men and women; however, ultra-limiting human's natural rights is not the solution. In fact, the families and the educators with the help of the government must be responsible for teaching everyone to choose to become a right person who believes the justice and equality of humanity.

Correspondingly, American government supports the idea that women are equal enough in the 1980s; nevertheless, the concept of equality ironically seems to depend on each person's point of view. Faludi questions such people's opinions of women's equality;

But what 'equality' are all these authorities talking about? If American women are so equal, why do they represent two-thirds of all poor adults? Why are nearly 75 percent of full-time

¹⁴³ Barbara Rasmussen, "Guidelines and ERA," *Playground Daily News*, April 11, 1974, 5A, <https://newspaperarchive.com/fort-walton-beach-playground-daily-news-apr-11-1974-p-5/>.

¹⁴⁴ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 4.

working women making less than \$20,000 a year, nearly double the male rate? Why are they still far more likely than men to live in poor housing and receive no health insurance?¹⁴⁵

The preceding lines highlight how women are oppressed in particular economically. Likewise, Susan Welch questions “how many women members seriously believe they have a chance to be party leaders in Congress? Our answer is ‘relatively few’. Of course, women, like men, are concerned with re-election, but few seem to have realistic hopes of higher office”.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, Faludi puts forward that most women are still in traditional women’s jobs such as secretaries and salesclerk, and they do not have even basic requirements to succeed equality at work. According to Faludi, America still does not have “family leave and child care programs”, and she questions why their freedom in reproduction is in greater danger today than earlier if women are considered as ‘free’.¹⁴⁷ Despite all these inequalities, it is incredible how the government and the anti-ERA supporters claim women are equal and free enough. They may think so because at the mentioned period, women appear equal, autonomous and liberated than the previous years. Nonetheless, even this amount of women’s freedom and autonomy seems to sufficient to make most men to be frightened for losing their power and superiority. According to Ferree and Hess, the anti-ERA supporters successfully increase women’s fears about losing their husbands’ protection and men’s fears about losing control over their daughters as well as wives.¹⁴⁸ All these unfortunate happenings and statements cause women who fight for their equality and freedom to fear that all these practices will set the clock back and to lose their rights and freedom.

Indisputably, feminism aims that each woman is aware of their unique value, strength and capabilities, and if they are given the opportunities, they can achieve much more than even they can imagine themselves. Admittedly, governments are responsible for protecting their citizens in every respect, and it is natural for political powers to limit their citizens’ freedom to some extent. However, if a government limit women’s liberation much more than men’s, it is hard to tell this government is the land of freedom in real terms. Moreover, the reason is most likely that they see women as the danger against men’s superiority or it seems more practical to use women as useful

¹⁴⁵ Faludi, *The Undeclared War Against American Women*, 5.

¹⁴⁶ Susan Welch, “Are Women More Liberal Than Men in the U.S. Congress?” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 1 (February 1985): 127.

¹⁴⁷ Welch, “Are Women More Liberal Than Men?” 5.

¹⁴⁸ Ferree and Hess, *The New Feminist Movement*, 140.

vehicles for carrying babies and serving for their husbands as it is in Gilead's totalitarianism. Atwood skilfully portrays a terrifying future not only for every woman but also for low-class men unless political powers take precaution for the existing situation in America of the 1980s governed with conservative dogmas. As the unique power, Gilead's government commands the fertile women to serve the Commanders as giving birth to their babies and infertile women to serve as the housekeepers or workers in the Colonies most of whom die in the harsh conditions.

Gilead's women except for the Aunts cannot speak, write, read or walk whenever they want, "for every rule there is always an exception . . . The Aunts are allowed to read and write" (148). Every move of the Gileadean women is under strict surveillance by the Eyes, which creates an extremely frightening atmosphere because they know their disobedience is surely punished by death. Therefore, Malak portrays *The Handmaid's Tale* as a dystopia dealing with power that does not tolerate any mistakes with its strict prohibitions and a controlled life based on censorship, fear conformity, terror and corruption that are all imposed by totalitarian regimes upon societies.¹⁴⁹ In an interview with Dodson, Atwood highlights how oppressors prevent women's education in order to keep them out of reading and learning ideas:

"It's slavery in general. Or, say, oppression in general. One of the things that oppressors like to deny, and usually do, to the people that they are oppressing is education . . . You don't want the people that you're oppressing to be able to read. It gives them ideas. And similarly with women; they get ideas if they read".¹⁵⁰

Atwood also gives credence to the power of reading literature and talking about literature since to her belief, literature that is connected to politics will save women from oppression.¹⁵¹ All the preceding lines prove how Gilead's totalitarianism oppress women by especially dispossessing their rights to get educated to control them in every sense.

¹⁴⁹ Malak, "Atwood in the Dystopian Tradition," 82.

¹⁵⁰ Dodson, "An Interview with Margaret Atwood," 101.

¹⁵¹ Dodson, 96.

2.2. Women in *The Handmaid's Tale*: A Political Torture

The Handmaid's Tale is a political torture for the Gileadean women by exposing them to intense education to indoctrinate their so-called divine service, erasing their memories, separating them from their families and spreading terror by slaughtering them as a punishment for not obeying their rules and prohibitions. Moreover, all these tortures purpose to turn these women into robots who unquestioningly do whatever the regime's demands. Like many women in Gilead, Offred mostly lives in her mind since they have to behave as if they are robots physically – no emotion, no opinion, no desire, no expectation, no resistance. Offred mostly dreams of her past days, which helps her to keep her hope alive. The fragmentations in her story may indicate that she is not entirely able to keep her memories alive or she feels under psychological pressure. She sometimes invents unreal stories that she desperately wishes to be true, which is one of the devastating effects of Gilead's political torture. Offred does not believe that the political system of Gilead targets to protect the citizens because their only aim is to capture the ordinary people and force them to survive in the prison of Gilead. Offred indeed believes that Gilead is a worse place than a prison since “there's no time here that can be done and finished with” (227). The preceding lines prove how women are sentenced to a life-long prison which will never end until they die.

On the other hand, the Eyes of Gilead are everywhere; thus, if someone tries to cross the borders formed by the Gileadean government, they have to suffer the fatal consequences. Therefore, the Gileadean citizens are pushed to forget their past and programmed to live according to Gilead' strict rules. Women in Gilead are exposed to such a political torture that killing themselves seems the best option unfortunately. The Handmaids are the most possible candidates to commit suicide; as a result, they are not allowed to lock the doors and keep sharp tools like knife, razor or even mirror as well as any objects like matches, ropes or drugs that would cause them to harm themselves or others because of “the incidents in bathrooms at first: there were cuttings, drownings” (74). Though Offred is opposed to these rules, she is not very brave to fight against because she is naturally afraid to die. Nonetheless, she wishes Moira, her best friend would blow herself bravely to kill at least fifty Commanders, “I'd like to tell a story about how Moira escaped . . . I'd like to say she blew up Jezebel's, with fifty Commanders inside it” (285). According to Offred, Moira not only gets rid of her

miserable life but also at least some of the political torturers who turn women's lives into a living hell by killing these Commanders.

The Handmaid's Tale begins with three epigraphs with the aim of preparing the readers for both political and religious satire. Two of these epigraphs are skilfully presented for political purposes. One of the quotes belongs to Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, "but as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal".¹⁵² Karen Stein portrays Swift as a "brilliant Irish political satirist and clergyman" and his aim in *A Modest Proposal* as to reveal the devastating results of the economic policy of Britain towards Ireland.¹⁵³ The title, *A Modest Proposal* is followed by *For Preventing The Children Of Poor People In Ireland From Being A Burden To Their Parents Or Country, And For Making Them Beneficial To The Public*. To find a solution to the problem of overpopulation and unemployment, Swift ironically proposes Irish people to use their babies as a means of feeding the society instead of forcing them to beg or murdering them through abortions.¹⁵⁴ He satirically states, "a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout".¹⁵⁵ Surely, Swift does not mean to portray cannibalism as the solution to save Ireland; on the contrary, he highlights the grim reality that Irish people are starving and having more children than they can feed because of the political strategies. According to Stein, Swift's *A Modest Proposal* indicates the devastating impacts of the colonial policy of England that reduces Ireland to famine and poverty.¹⁵⁶ The preceding lines prove how Ireland's people are negatively influenced by the British political approaches. The Irish's extreme poverty and famine most probably drive them into unthinkable crimes; therefore, Swift satirically presents eating babies as a solution to attract people's attention much better.

Correspondingly, the totalitarian regime in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* struggles to increase Gilead's population whereas Swift's *A Modest Proposal* aims to

¹⁵² Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2008), 12.

¹⁵³ Karen Stein, "Margaret Atwood's Modest Proposal: *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Canadian Literature*, no. 148 (1996): 62.

¹⁵⁴ Swift, *A Modest Proposal*, 6.

¹⁵⁵ Swift, 7.

¹⁵⁶ Stein, Margaret Atwood's Modest Proposal, 64.

decrease Ireland's population satirically. The government of Gilead seeks to solve the problem of the lack of population due to common infertility among both men and women, and they utilize the Handmaids as the tools of possessing more and more babies. If the Handmaids can give birth to healthy babies, they are sent to another Commanders' houses, even worse if they give birth to unhealthy babies or are proven to be infertile, they are sent to a more hellish place, the Colonies. Atwood's epigraphs aim to not only prepare the readers for political and religious satire but also emphasize the unfair treatment against women, particularly the Handmaids. According to Sheilagh A. Mogford, "Atwood's novel illustrates that men fear women gaining power; the structural organization of Gileadean society demonstrates that most of the changes are about controlling women".¹⁵⁷ Another quote presented as an epigraph and most possibly as Atwood's criticism against women's oppression, "in the desert there is no sign that says, Thou shalt not eat stones".¹⁵⁸ Though there may be different meanings, the possible deduction about this epigraph might be that the absence of a written rule does not mean one can treat a woman like a baby factory. In other words, no one can treat women as if they are useful tools for specific purposes as no one can eat stones even if they die of starving in a desert. Thus, there is no need for such a law or rule for something all the human beings must already know or do.

Accordingly, one of the Gileadean regime's ways to oppress women is to divide them into categories according to their missions; the Handmaids, Aunts, Commanders' Wives, Marthas, Econowives, Widows, the ones in Colonies and the ones in Jezebel's. Though each of them is a humiliating status, they do not have right to choose any of these categories with few exceptions. If they are fertile, they are decided to be Handmaids. If they resist or question their decisions, they are sent to the Colonies somewhere that is much more hellish than Gilead. According to Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and Koon Poh Chin, the Handmaid's bodies and sexuality are fundamentally used as the political instruments by the regime with the aim of having

¹⁵⁷ Sheilagh A. Mogford, "The Murder of the Goddess in Everywoman: Mary Daly's Sado-Ritual Syndrome and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 135.

¹⁵⁸ A Sufi proverb as an epigraph in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006)

control on reproduction.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, they are brainwashed that being a Handmaid is a privilege because everyone has to respect them owing to the nature of their service (29), and also the Aunts impose on the Handmaids, “yours is a position of honour” (20). Offred also emphasizes their importance, “I am too important, too scarce . . . I am a national resource” (77). Therefore, the Handmaids’ possible pregnancy creates great jealousy among other women because the government imposes upon everyone that healthy born babies are the savers of their future as a part of Commanders’ political strategies that resemble the ones in Nazism. According to Charu Gupta, desire for motherhood of every German woman was the basic issue in Nazism, and women were obsessively encouraged to get more children; on the other hand, husbands represent the world, domination, strength and the wives represent sexuality, subordination, weakness in the Nazi ideology.¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, Gupta puts forward that in the Nazi policy, women are rewarded by “various medals, tax concessions, and other privileges” on the condition that they promise not to work and increase their birth rate; furthermore, Nazi Germany not only forces women to give birth to children but also wishes to improve the race through ‘breeding camps’ in which “selected, unmarried ‘racially valuable’ Germans were sent for impregnating the women”.¹⁶¹ Likewise, the Gileadean government’s central issue is forcing women to give birth to more and more babies, and also the Gileadean regime portrays women as weak, passive or sexually useful tools whereas the regime pictures men as strong and powerful.

In the Gileadean regime, the Aunts are the only women who have the authority as responsible for training the fertile women to accommodate the regime’s views of life and become Handmaids in the Red Centre ruled by strict prohibitions. They are even taught gynecological education by the Aunts (134). In fact, the Red Centre is like a prison where the Handmaids are not allowed to talk, eat, sleep or go out unless the Aunts wish, and also they cannot read or write under no circumstances because the government fears the power of knowledge, and purposes to erase the women’s memory. In this way, the Gileadean regime can create a kind of robotic army that does not question the orders but behaves as the government demands. On the other hand, the

¹⁵⁹ Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and Koon Poh Chin, “Revisiting *The Handmaid’s Tale*: Reading the Novel through a Scientific Lens,” *International Journal of Education and Research*, vol. 1, no. 7 (July 2013): 6.

¹⁶⁰ Charu Gupta, “Politics of Gender: Women in Nazi Germany,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 26, no. 17 (April 27, 1991), WS40.

¹⁶¹ Gupta, “Women in Nazi Germany”, WS41.

Handmaids are most likely given pills or drugs to numb their brains and bodies though they already feel numb with fear, shock and terror (84). Even after they are sent to the Commanders' houses, they are still given drugs to prevent them from getting mad, "I feel drugged. I consider this: maybe they're drugging me. Maybe the life I think I'm living is a paranoid delusion" (125). The Aunts are like guardians, and they patrol day and nights. If they see a woman doing something illegal, they use their "electric cattle prods". Moreover, the Guards especially selected from the Angels protect the building with their guns. They are not allowed to enter the building or do not allow any Handmaids to exit without the Aunts' permission. Since Gilead is surrounded by the "chain-link fence" (10), the Handmaids are permitted to wander around the limited streets even if they could leave the Red Centre. The Angels also protect the city with the Guards and the Eyes arrest anyone who disobeys the strict rules of the Gileadean regime, which would quite likely cause them to be punished by death. There are strict border controls in many parts of Gilead, and this 24-hour surveillance is the clear indicator of a deep distrust among all the Gileadeans.

The luckiest women in Gilead appear the Commanders' Wives because they are not responsible for anything except for caring for her husband and the Handmaid of her house. As the members of the upper class, they enjoy their prosperity and never walk "on the sidewalks. Only in cars" (33). They could make friends and chat with the other Commanders' Wives though their relationship is fake and full of show-off. However, it is impossible for the Handmaids to make friendship, "it's hard to imagine now, having a friend" (35) because they are forbidden to talk or touch someone, which shows how Gileadean regime fears the women come together and become a powerful threat. For instance, when Offred and Moira first meet in the Red Centre, they cannot talk at once, "we looked only, small glances . . . Friendships were suspicious . . . we avoided each other" (84). As a result, the Handmaids desperately long for talking to or touching someone, "I hunger to touch something other than cloth or wood" (18). Indeed, they rarely have the chance even to whisper each other to communicate, which in fact makes the Commanders' Wives luckier than the Handmaids. Moreover, they have the right to possess the babies of the Handmaids. The government directly gives the healthy born babies of the Handmaids to the Wives. The governors are so merciless that they immediately send the Handmaids to the other Commanders' houses to give birth to their babies. The government does not want the Handmaids to establish an

emotional bond with their babies, which is the proof of the fact that the Gileadean regime struggles women to turn into robots without any feelings.

Ofwarren whose real name is Janine is the perfect example who suffers from being forced to leave her baby as soon as she gives birth. In Gilead, the red Birthmobiles are used to take the pregnant Handmaids to the hospitals to give birth. Healthy born babies are extremely rare that everyone expects Janine to give birth to an unhealthy baby, “what will Ofwarren give birth to? A baby, as we all hope? Or something else, an Unbaby, with a pinhead or a snout like a dog’s, or two bodies, or a hole in its heart or no arms, or webbed hands and feet?” Whatever is born cannot be taken and has give birth; therefore, the Gileadean government forbids the doctors to use the machines that give information about the health of the babies. However, they know the probability of getting healthy babies is low because “the air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules” (128). Nonetheless, the possibility of Janine’s giving birth to a healthy born baby makes everyone feel excited especially because they know the Commanders will be rewarded with promotion (133). At last, the Commander’s Wife sees Janine’s healthy baby girl as an attribute or something she wins. Janine is not allowed even to put her own daughter’s name, so the Commander’s Wife calls her name as ‘Angela’. The only thing Janine is permitted to do as the baby’s mother is “to nurse the baby, for a few months, they believe in mother’s milk”. Unfortunately, the only reason they want the baby’s mother is her milk, and as a mother, a Handmaid has no right on her own babies. After they have finished with the Handmaids, they transfer the Handmaids to another Commander’s house “to see if she can do it again, with someone else who needs a turn” (145). Meanwhile, they totally ignore what a mother feels and how she becomes miserable after she is forced to abandon her baby. At least, the Handmaid who bring a healthy child into the world is never called as an ‘Unwoman’ or sent to the Colonies as a reward which is indeed the lesser of two evils.

On the other hand, the Wives are incredibly jealous of the Handmaids, they do not allow the Handmaids even to use hand lotion since the Wives do not want the Handmaids “to look attractive. For them, things are bad enough as it is” (113). Serena Joy whose real name is Pam as the Wife of Commander Fred seems to symbolize the women like Phyllis Schlafly. Before the domination of the Gileadean regime, she sings and later makes speeches for “the sanctity of the home” and “how women should stay

home” though she does not do it herself and makes speeches instead (56). However, Serena Joy appears to be speechless as the other Gileadean women are. Moreover, the Wives are pictured by the Aunts as “defeated women. They have been unable” to give birth to babies (57). They are infertile, so they are required to live with a Handmaid. What’s worse, they have to witness, share and endure the physical as well as psychological torture in the monthly sexual intercourse between the Commander and the Handmaid. After one of the ceremonies, Offred questions, “which of us is it worse for, her or me?” (112). Therefore, the Wives feel such a great hostility that they wish to damage the Handmaids, or even worse kill them, which is strictly forbidden. To prove her fertility in a way, Serena deals with the flowers or knits “away at her endless Angel scarves . . . her form of procreation, it must be” (176-177). Furthermore, most of the Wives like Serena Joy see the Handmaids as ‘little whores’ and criticizes their uncleanness or lousy smell (132). Therefore, the Aunts warn the Handmaids to watch out the Wives and recommend them to try to feel empathy and sympathy with the Wives. As a woman, Offred feels both envy and guilt about Serena at the same time, “how could I be jealous of a woman so obviously dried-up and unhappy? . . . Nevertheless, I was jealous. But I also felt guilty about her. I felt I was an intruder, in a territory that ought to have been hers” (185). Then, after a while, she feels hostility against Serena Joy instead of feeling empathy or sympathy because she knows Serena dislikes her, and she would show her the door if she got half a chance since she is “a malicious and vengeful woman” (186). The preceding lines highlight how the Gileadean regime causes women to feel hostility as well as envy towards not only men but also the other women.

The less lucky ones are the Marthas, the Econowives and the Widows. The Marthas who are the cooks and cleaners of the Commanders’ houses do whatever the house members want without questioning. As the members of the Eyes, some Marthas are also responsible for observing the behaviours of the Handmaids and reporting their illegal behaviours to the government. Some Marthas see the Handmaids as “catching, like a disease or any form of bad luck” whereas some think “they’re doing it for us all” (16). The Econowives seem the combination of both the Marthas and the Wives, “the women of the poorer men . . . are not divided into functions. They have to do everything; if they can” (33). The Widows whose numbers are decreasing always wear black. However, the unluckiest ones are seemingly the ones in the Colonies and the

Jezebel's because they are the slaves of Gilead and responsible for doing the government's dirty works. At a time when Offred listens to the door of the kitchen, she hears the Marthas talking about being a Handmaid. Rita says, "go to the Colonies . . . They have the choice" instead of being a Handmaid. Cora says in response, "with the Unwomen, and starve to death and Lord knows what all?" (16). Life is so harsh in the Colonies that the Gileadean citizens prefer dying rather than being sent to the Colonies. When Moira tells Offred that she sees Offred's mother in a movie about the people in the Colonies shown by the Gileadean government, she feels really delighted because she supposes her mother dies, but Moira states, "you should wish it for her" (287). People who are expelled to the Colonies

spend their time cleaning up . . . Sometimes it's just bodies, after a battle . . . they're afraid of a plague or something . . . The other Colonies are worse, though, the toxic dumps and the radiation spills. They figure you've got three years maximum, at those, before your nose falls off and your skin pulls away like rubber gloves (283).

The Gileadean regime does not care people in the Colonies at all; moreover, it wants to get rid of these people. Most of the people in the Colonies are unfortunately infertile women, "it's about a quarter man in the Colonies" (284). They are seen as 'Unwoman' because these women are useless, and there is no need for their existence.

The Jezebel's is a club as the other option for 'Unwoman' instead of the Colonies. The Jezebel's is ironically less hellish place for women located on the ground floor of a hotel where women are rented to please men in every sense and mostly "an evening rental" (266). In the Jezebel's, there are a lot of men from different nations including Japanese or Arabs. Officially, such places like Jezebel's are strictly forbidden; however, according to the Commander, men's nature requires such places that present varieties to them. Moreover, he insults women by stating women wear a lot of different clothes "to trick the men into thinking" that they are a lot of different women. Ironically, Offred responds, "so now that we don't have different clothes . . . you merely have different women" (270). According to the Commander, the Jezebel's solves many problems because the Jezebel's stimulates trade, and they can meet many people in business who give much information that the regime needs to the women in the Jezebel's. Apparently, the Jezebel's is another perfect place to abuse women. They choose women especially from the ones who work in specific occupations such as a sociologist, a lawyer or an executive in their previous lives. Moreover, the Jezebel's has a strict rule: "gain ten pounds and they put you in Solitary" (271), which means it

is forbidden to gain weight in the Jezebel's. Each woman taken by a man is given a tag, and they have to show their tags even in the toilets where they are allowed to be just for fifteen minutes under the Aunts' watch. Even worse, the regime sterilizes not only the people in the Colonies but also the ones in the Jezebel's with the aim of preventing unwanted births, "discards, all of us. They're sterile . . . When they're unsure, they do a little operation on you, so there won't be any mistakes" (284). The preceding lines prove how the regime totally eliminates every possibility that seems as a threat to their system.

Correspondingly, the Gileadean regime purposes to destroy the individuality and autonomy of its citizens regardless of their gender. For instance, while the Angels and the Commanders are permitted to marry, the Guardians are forbidden to even look at the women, let alone touch or kiss the women. A Guardian has to get the status as an Angel; in other words, they must gain the political power even to marry a woman or to get a Handmaid. There are rules for even the Commanders; they cannot talk to or touch the Handmaids except for the times of the Ceremonies, "he isn't supposed to be here . . . He is violating the custom" (60). However, women are undeniably the most oppressed and repressed ones in the Gileadean government that just sees the women as useful bodies or boats that must carry cargos. It is a great luxury for the women to possess something and to say 'it is mine' for especially the Handmaids, "my room . . . There has to be some space . . . that I claim mine" (61). Offred also points out, "the bath is a requirement, but it is also a luxury. Merely to lift off the heavy white wings and the veil, merely to feel my hair again, with my hands, is a luxury" (74). The room she sleeps and even her own body do not belong to her, which also proves a woman does not have any properties or status as an individual.

The Handmaids are not allowed even to use their original names because their personality or individuality do not matter but their so called holy purpose matters for the government. According to the regime, if one Offred dies, another Offred comes. The Commander tells Atwood's narrator, Offred, that the previous Offred has hanged herself; therefore, Offred thinks, "if your dog dies, get another" (215). However, surprisingly, the Commander wants her life to be bearable for Offred since he feels guilty of the death of the previous Offred, which is an infrequent situation. In one of the Salvagings, in which the guilty ones are punished by death by mostly being hung on the Wall, a Guardian announced as a rapist is given to the Handmaids to be torn

into pieces, and Ofglen attacks him fatally, which shocks and angers Offred who portrays this event as barbarism. However, Ofglen clarifies he is not a rapist but a political, and she has a good reason for killing the man, “put him out of his misery” (315). After that day, Offred learns from the new Ofglen that the former Ofglen hangs herself, and Offred thinks, “she is, the new one, and Ofglen, wherever she is, is no longer Ofglen. I never did know her real name. That is how you can get lost, in a sea of names” (318). The preceding lines prove how the regime completely ignore women’s personality, individuality or existence as a human being.

On the other hand, Gilead has strict censorship in addition to the border controls; as a result, there is no way for women to receive any information, and also the Gileadean citizens appear to be isolated from the outside world. Offred is “ravenous for news, any news” even if this news is false (28). However, unfortunately, no newspaper, no book or no TV programme except for the ones that serve the Gilead’s purposes is allowed. For example, the Handmaids are forced to watch ‘Unwoman documentaries’ including the pornographic images full of scenes especially containing physical violence to evoke “the old days of no safety”. In one of the documentaries, they mainly show a sign that writes,

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE. EVERY BABY A WANTED BABY. RECAPTURE OUR BODIES. DO YOU BELIEVE A WOMAN’S PLACE IS ON THE KITCHEN TABLE?
Under the last sign there’s a line drawing of a woman’s body, lying on a table, blood dripping out of it (137).

According to Laflen, the fascism of Gileadean regime is effective especially in “editing and crafting visual scenes to manipulate people and offering only a surface view of reality”.¹⁶² Even the songs are chosen carefully, and the regime does not permit the songs that include “words like *free*” because such songs are thought to be too dangerous (65). The Gileadean regime struggles to eliminate the risk of losing all the control by not letting its citizens getting the power of knowledge. Therefore, they just know what the state lets them know, which is also a sign of the existence of both totalitarian and fascist regimes in which the state completely controls people’s lives and no one cannot oppose the political system. Moreover, in the border controls, the Guardians are so watchful that they do not hesitate to shoot someone if they are suspicious because fear is everywhere. Offred exemplifies the shooting of a woman who is a Martha shot just because they think she is looking for a bomb or she is “a man

¹⁶² Laflen, “Fascist Style of Gilead,” 87.

in disguise” (29). Furthermore, universities are closed, and the Red Centre is the only institution to educate women. Indoctrination sessions in the Red Centre appear to succeed, “already we were losing the taste for freedom; already we were finding these walls secure” (153), and the Gileadean women see the traditions and habits belonging to their former lives unconsciously “lavish, decadent almost; immoral, like the orgies of barbarian regimes” (130). The preceding lines prove how these women are perfectly brainwashed that they believe whole-heartedly they must obey the strict rules of Gileadean government without questioning. Hence they forget their past and become the slaves of Gilead’s totalitarianism in the strictest sense of the word.

Accordingly, one of the fundamental political strategies is to dominate every woman easily for the sake of so-called Gilead’s future. The regime believes that it will become more comfortable for the women of the future because to their belief, these women will be willing to welcome their duties since “they will have no memories, of any other way . . . Because they won’t want things they can’t have” (134). However, Offred struggles to resist this torture by trying to keep memory and knowledge alive. At first, the only thing she could do is to dream and tell stories of her past in her mind but could not get any new information since all the books including the Bible and magazines or newspapers are destroyed or locked and are not permitted anyone to read them. When Offred is requested to the Commander’s room, she sees the room is “filled with books . . . no locks, no boxes . . . It’s an oasis of the forbidden” (157). However, she feels “something has changed”, and she could “ask for something. Possibly not much; but something” (165). Therefore, she believes the Commander could allow her to read some of the books, and she wishes him to give her much more information about the present situation of Gilead though she cannot dare to ask anything early on in their secret meetings. The Commander is patient and tolerant towards Offred and even says, “we can always look it up in the dictionary, he said. He said *we*” (179). At one night, the Commander gives her a magazine for women as a present which must have been destroyed by now; therefore, she compares her look to the magazine an extinct animal, and says regretfully that she sees such magazines “as trivial and absurd” once (179). However, now she realizes their importance and portrays them as “promise . . . an endless series of possibilities . . . rejuvenation, pain overcome and transcended, endless love . . . immortality” (180). As time passes, Offred wants to know more and more “whatever there is to know” (215) by realizing the power of knowledge and the

pleasure it gives although it may be fatal for both of them, which proves Offred is a brave, smart and ambitious woman.

Offred is aware of the fact that it is illegal and forbidden for her to be in the Commander's room except for the Ceremonies just with the Commander's Wife, Serena Joy. According to Offred, they are "for breeding purposes" but not "concubines, geisha girls, courtesans". In contrast, the regime has done anything probable to remove the Handmaids from this category because breeding is believed to be the Handmaids' duty and responsibility for their own country. Therefore, neither the Commander nor the Handmaids are allowed to show any sign of pleasure at the moment of the Ceremonies. Offred also points out, "we are two-legged wombs . . . sacred vessels" (156). However, Offred feels happier than she was before, and she sees her visits to the Commander's room as "something to fill the time". In fact, Offred does not love the Commander; nevertheless, "he occupies space, he is more than a shadow . . . To him I'm no longer merely a usable body. To him I'm not just a boat with no cargo . . . To him I am not merely empty" (188). The Commander is also hungry for touching someone and does not want to take part in the Ceremony as a duty without touching Offred and feeling anything; therefore, for a moment, he wishes her to kiss him (155) which also proves his weakness as a human being. He demands to make both Offred and himself feel happy like normal people even if it is for a while and too risky. She also thinks, "he is positively daddyish. He likes to think I am being entertained" (210). Moreover, the Commander gives Offred an indecent dress that must have been destroyed up to now to take her out at night. The Commander arranges everything including her pass and clothing to hide her face at the checkpoints. He takes her to a secret club called Jezebel's in a hotel where women are abused for different purposes such as to have good business relationships or sexual intercourse. Though especially upper class men seem so cruel and indifferent towards women in Gilead, Offred senses none of the hostility in Commander Fred, who also takes too many fatal risks to feed Offred's hunger for knowledge and feel his humanity.

Since the Handmaids are not permitted to write, read or speak freely in Gilead, Offred grabs each chance to communicate somebody even if it may cause her own death. In the following lines, Hilde Staels talks on the limitations of women's communication;

Whereas Offred remembers the 1980s as the time when one could freely communicate and 'squander' words, Gilead excludes all exchange of personal speech. In a society where social

interaction is excessively mechanized and people are reduced to passive recipients of the law.¹⁶³

Therefore, Offred utters her words by choosing meticulously whenever she has the chance to communicate with somebody because Offred knows very well she may not have the same opportunity again. On the other hand, the one she communicates may be an Eye, which causes her to fear to be captured and killed. She even longs for gossiping or talking about trivial things (17). For instance, every night Offred goes in the Commander's study room, they play Scrabble which is normally a simple word game people play to entertain themselves. Nevertheless, keeping any ways of information is forbidden even if it is a word game since it is also a way of interaction which is rare. Each word in the game is indeed valuable because they remind Offred of her past, in other words her normal life; therefore, Scrabble indeed makes Offred feel herself valuable, and she portrays this word game as something forbidden, indecent dangerous, different, desirable and "something he can't do with his Wife" (159). Whenever she wins the game, she thinks "this is freedom . . . What a luxury" (160). The preceding lines highlight how the Gileadean regime deprives the Gileadean women of even the most straightforward information owing to their fears to lose their authority and control over women.

Thanks to the strategy that limits women's fundamental rights and freedoms, the government itself holds the whole economic power as well as educational, social, religious and political skill. There is no real money in Gilead, and even before Gilead's period, the government begins to seize the control of money by holding everyone's all money in the Compubank. In the following lines, it can be seen how women are economically oppressed:

You can't work here anymore, it's the law . . . They're outside, he said, in my office. If you don't go now they'll come in themselves . . . there were two men standing there, in uniforms, with machine guns . . . What was it about this that made us feel we deserved it? . . . Women can't hold property anymore, she said. It's a new law . . . Luke can use your Compuaccount for you. They'll transfer your number to him, or that's what they say. Husband or male next of kin . . . Ours is not to reason why, said Moira. They had to do it that way, the Compuaccounts and the jobs both at once. Can you picture the airports, otherwise? They don't want us going anywhere . . . I feel as if somebody cut off my feet . . . It's only a job, he said, trying to soothe me. I guess you get all my money, I said. And I'm not even dead (202-206).

In the preceding lines, Gileadean women are forced to leave their jobs and properties. The reason why the government consisting of men holds all the money in

¹⁶³ Hilde Staels, "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Resistance through Narrating," *English Studies*, vol. 76, no. 5 (1995): 458.

the Compubank and forces women to quit their jobs, in other words holds all the economic power, is the fact that they do not want the women to go anywhere (205). Likewise, the Handmaids use pictures of the vegetables or fruits on the shopping list instead of money while shopping in Gilead's time. Nevertheless, it does not prevent people from using illegal ways like the black market (22). Apparently, holding all the money does not prevent people from opposing the Gileadean government's power and control; on the contrary, totalitarian regimes like Gilead most possibly provoke the societies into more immoral behaviours or committing more crimes by causing storms of protest.

Although Gilead's political power seems almost impossible to be damaged owing to the military precautions, the organizations like Mayday or Underground Femaleroad still struggle to save the oppressed ones secretly. In an interview by Dodson, Atwood points out she does not want to be in Offred's shoes since Offred does not live her own choices. Furthermore, Atwood talks about Gilead's totalitarianism as well as the underground,

People who live in free societies often find it difficult to understand, choices are extremely limited. There are some. That is, she knows people who belong to an underground: there is an underground. It's very dangerous to belong to it . . . young people sometimes don't get; they say, 'Oh, why don't they all just go join the underground?' . . . In real life the good guys often don't win.¹⁶⁴

Dodson questions whether "a prisoner like Offred could be saved by" or not, and Atwood responds that she is not allowed to escape from the Gileadean dictatorship, but she may be saved from the undercover and illegal Underground Railroad.¹⁶⁵ However, there are some women like Moira who tries to escape from this dictatorship. One day, Moira succeeds to deceive Aunt Elizabeth and put on her clothes while escaping by picturing her as "a cunning and dangerous woman" (151). What Moira has done is a miraculous and impossible action for the Handmaids; she is brave enough to show the power of the woman. All the other Handmaids including Offred think Moira has the power now whereas they find this escape frightening. Offred compares Moira to "an elevator with open sides" and she makes them dizzy. The Handmaids are perfectly taught to believe 'walls are safer than being free'. However, after Moira's escape, they think, "in the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more

¹⁶⁴ Dodson, "An Interview with Margaret Atwood," 100.

¹⁶⁵ Dodson, 101.

absurd. Their power had a flaw to it” (153), which proves the fact that the Gileadean women wait for a light that will show them the way to get rid of all these sufferings.

Resistance against the political power of Gilead may seem a war doomed to be lost. In every action of Gileadean government, the grim message that concerns the women much more is clearly conveyed to each citizen, ‘everything is under our control; therefore, there is no point in resisting’. Nevertheless, even by telling her story at a time when both oral and written language is controlled and restricted, Offred resists the power of Gileadean regime and fights for her power, individuality and autonomy. She enjoys “the power . . . passive but there” (31). Even though she has to be passive in her actions, Offred is incredibly active in her tale with the use of ‘I’, “I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose . . . What I must present is a made thing, not something born” (79). Offred also emphasizes the power of possessing something and tries to resist her life without any belongings, “I would like to steal something from this room . . . some small thing . . . It would make me feel that I have power” (94), which highlights how Offred longs for power of possessing something and resist her oppression in a way.

To conclude, Atwood portrays a future that sees the story of Offred’s harsh life as a perfect academic study in the last part called ‘Historical Notes’. In a symposium on Gileadean studies, the first thing they talk about the fun activities including nature walk, singing songs and fishing expedition. The map of the world is redrawn, and it seems everything is back to normal. Professor James Darcy Pieixoto discusses “Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*” (336), which indeed indicates they question and try to prove the reality of the story that is recorded by Offred on “approximately thirty tape cassettes” scientifically. On the other hand, some historians mock Offred’s story in a way by calling “the Underground Femaleroad” as “the Underground Frailroad” (337). Even Professor Pieixoto himself makes fun of Offred through her education, “she appears to have been an educated woman, insofar as a graduate of any North American college of the time may be said to have been educated . . . But the woods . . . were full of these” (342). Whereas Atwood emphasizes the importance of the struggle to look for the historical evidence without prejudice, she wishes to be satirical by portraying the future in which she exemplifies a group of academicians who focus on the academic studies and ignore the women’s real sufferings;

We must be cautious about passing moral judgment upon the Gileadeans . . . Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure, demographic and otherwise, and was subject to factors from which we ourselves are happily more free. Our job is not to censure but to understand (339).

Despite all the efforts to understand the historical facts of Gilead, the academicians actually focus on understanding the logic of the Gileadean regime but not the sufferings of Offred or the women of Gilead. On the other hand, Professor Pieixoto mentions “top-secret Sons of Jacob Think Tanks” where the Gilead’s social structure and philosophy are shaped by the Commanders including Fred. Though the formal records belonging to the meetings of the Sons of Jacob are destroyed, the historians learn some information using the diary kept by Wilfred Limpkin. (343). Thanks to Limpkin’s diary, it is understood that two probable candidates whose names are “Frederick R. Waterford and B. Frederick Judd”. To Limpkin, Waterford designs women’s costumes and suggests that the Handmaids should wear red, which he appears to borrow from “the uniforms of German prisoners of war in Canadian ‘POW’ camps of the Second World War era”. On the other hand, Judd appears to “more concerned with tactics” (344). Judd suggests using a ‘CIA’ handbook, and also he prepares a hit list. Moreover, Judd is suspected of being responsible for “the President’s Day Massacre”. According to Judd, their serious mistake is “teaching them to read” (345). It can be clearly deduced that the organization called ‘the Sons of Jacob’ is founded to eliminate and prevent all kinds of rebellions against their own regime in which they target to found a robotic army including men and mostly women. Seemingly, Offred’s story perfectly exemplifies how totalitarian regimes destroy women’s individuality, freedom or equality. Thanks to *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Atwood purposes to warn the women of the next generations for the possible devastating consequences of improper political practices. Furthermore, she skilfully strengthens her warnings about the possible devastating future of women by picturing the women’s sufferings not only in the past but also in the present and the future.

3. CHAPTER THREE: INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON WOMEN IN ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

3.1. The Religious Right and Gilead's Theocracy

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* presents not only a totalitarian social system wholly controlled by the political leaders but also a theocratic social system controlled by the religious leaders of Gilead. Accordingly, Atwood masterfully reveals how women are oppressed in the name of religion in Gilead referring to the historical facts in America at the time when the novel is written as well as the Biblical precedents. Fundamentally, women's efforts to gain their natural rights including abortion are not favoured in America in the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of the 'Religious Right', also called as the 'Christian Right' or the 'New Right'. Marisa Chappell points out that in the 1970s, concerns about the changes in gender roles, sexual behaviour and family structure provoke the improvement of the Christian Right, which also encourages the voters to support the so-called issues including sex education, the abolition of the ERA and abortion as well as the prayers at the public schools.¹⁶⁶ Sheilagh A. Mogford also suggests that the Christian Right influences women in especially abortion implying women do not have control over their body, "women cannot be trusted to make decisions about their bodies or . . . their lives".¹⁶⁷ To Mogford, another influence of the Christian Right on women is on the family values forcing women to get some traditional roles like being a mother as well as a wife and providing men to be the head of the family. In the following lines, Mogford also compares the humiliating position of women in Gilead referring to the Christian Right:

The men of Gilead who take power after the coup create a society that not only clearly defines women's roles, but does so according to women's abilities to reproduce. It's as if Atwood envisioned a society where the 'family values' presented by the Christian Right of the 1990s are taken to their ultimate conclusion.¹⁶⁸

Correspondingly, abortion is an act punishable by death in Gilead both religiously and politically, and the Gileadean regime abuses the Handmaids for the purpose of solving the problem of infertility and getting more and more babies.

¹⁶⁶ Marisa Chappell, "Reagan's 'Gender Gap' Strategy and the Limitations of Free-Market Feminism," *The Journal of Policy History*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2012): 116.

¹⁶⁷ Mogford, "The Murder of the Goddess in Everywoman," 134.

¹⁶⁸ Mogford, 135.

The Religious Right undeniably plays a significant role in the oppression of women particularly thanks to the use of both printed and visual media effectively. C. Danielle Vinson points out that the leaders as well as the supporters of the Religious Right use television and radio starting fundamentally with the written media including newsletters and magazines to propagate their ideologies.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, the televangelists including Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell play vital roles in the development of the Religious Right by trying to convince people to become Christian and demand money in the name of religion by regularly appearing on television. According to Beauchamp, Pat Robertson aims to use religion for their political purposes with his campaigns in the 1980s; therefore, he helps the Religious Right to establish “a permanent caucus in the Republican Party”.¹⁷⁰ Maralee Schwartz and Kenneth J. Cooper also highlight how Pat Robertson characterizes feminism as an anti-family and a socialist political movement that stimulates “women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians” in one of his letters in order to raise money for the purpose of defeating the ERA.¹⁷¹ The preceding lines prove how some people portray feminists as the killers of the family structures, politics or economics and even their babies. On the contrary, the feminists fundamentally aim to gain their natural rights as well as their equality and freedom in addition to raising awareness about women’s value.

Unfortunately, Pat Robertson is not the only person who works for the Religious Right and fights against the ERA and especially abortion. Jerry Falwell as an American religious leader as well as the founder of Moral Majority, which shares common purposes with the Religious Right, also regularly appears on radio programs and television, and he is “a leading representative of the New Christian Right” by the 1980s.¹⁷² Moreover, Jerry Falwell attacks not only the Equal Rights Amendment but also women movement by portraying them as anti-America, anti-God and anti-family

¹⁶⁹ C. Danielle Vinson, “Religion and Politics and the Media,” *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, ed. Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 463.

¹⁷⁰ Beauchamp, *The Politics of the Handmaid’s Tale*, 15.

¹⁷¹ Maralee Schwartz and Kenneth J. Cooper, “Equal Rights Initiative in Iowa Attacked,” *The Washington Post*, August 23, 1992, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/08/23/equal-rights-initiative-in-iowa-attacked/f3e553a1-b768-449f-8d65-d096f9e318ee/?utm_term=.38a5eee44c90.

¹⁷² Blaine T. Browne and Robert C. Cottrell, *Modern American Lives: Individuals and Issues in American History Since 1945* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 287.

with “full of women who live in disobedience to God’s laws”.¹⁷³ Undeniably, the Equal Rights Amendment’s major aim is to protect every woman’s rights by means of law. Nevertheless, the ERA is defeated by especially the religious conservatives in addition to the organizations such as Eagle Forum as well as Stop ERA and Concerned Women for America, which is founded with its members composing of evangelical Protestants who are eager to maintain traditional gender roles of women as a wife and mother in 1970s.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately, all these ideologies about the role of women related to the Religious Right cause women to return to “their positions as second-class citizens”.¹⁷⁵ The preceding lines clarify how such people severely damage women’s movement, in other words women’s fight against the oppression, suppression or repression of men and for being an independent and autonomous individual in every field of life.

On the other hand, the Religious Right seems to be mostly used for political purposes, mainly to become more effective in elections. Alex Thomson defines the Christian Right as “a collective term for conservative political activists” who put their faith in “traditional religious values” to be connected to their political wishes in America.¹⁷⁶ William Martin quotes Ronald Reagan’s praising the Bible and religious leaders to get their political support, “all the complex questions facing us at home and abroad have their answer in that single book . . . a turning point in America”.¹⁷⁷ However, the intensive involvement of religious leaders in the political powers also cause religious as well as political extremists to appear; furthermore, many Americans are alarmed with the fact that the Religious Right really influences the politics with its extremist religious activists.¹⁷⁸ Clyde Wilcox also points out the fact that the Religious Right may seize control and power over American politics stands as a fearful possibility, “perhaps someday ruling by force as the Nazis did in Germany”.¹⁷⁹ Correspondingly, Atwood portrays a regime that is controlled by religious dogmas that

¹⁷³ Browne and Cottrell, *Modern American Lives*, 285.

¹⁷⁴ Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 317.

¹⁷⁵ Erin P. Knapp, “Appropriating History in Margaret Atwood’s Novels,” 12.

¹⁷⁶ Alex Thomson, “The Christian Right,” *A Glossary of US Politics and Government* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 30.

¹⁷⁷ William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 217-18.

¹⁷⁸ Clyde Wilcox quoted in Hodson, “American Trends and American Fears,” 34.

¹⁷⁹ Wilcox quoted in Hodson, “American Trends and American Fears,” 36.

force women to obey its strict rules without questioning. In the following lines, a Commander tries to justify why they set harsh regulations and prohibitions:

Don't you remember the singles' bars, the indignity of high school blind dates? The meat market . . . Remember the ads in the Personal columns, *Bright attractive woman, thirty-five*. This way they all get a man, nobody's left out. And then if they did marry, they could be left with a kid, two kids, the husband might just get fed up and take off, disappear, they'd have to go on welfare. Or else he'd stay around and beat them up. Or if they had a job, the children in daycare or left with some brutal ignorant woman . . . Money was the only measure of worth, for everyone, they got no respect as mothers . . . This way they're protected, they can fulfil their biological destinies in peace. With full support and encouragement (249-250).

The preceding lines prove how the governors of Gilead share the common statements that aim to justify why they do not like women to become the part of the outside world with the people such as Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Phyllis Schlafly by picturing working women as careless towards their husbands or children or single women as immoral. There may be many women and men who are reckless or immoral since human nature tends to make mistakes. However, it does not mean that women do not deserve to get educated or work.

Furthermore, the Gileadean regime claims to protect women from the sins or the evils; on the contrary, they push the women into the ocean of crimes themselves and abuse women for their political purposes by forcing them to be silent, deaf or blind. Moreover, such religious ideologies as it is in the Religious Right, which considerably interferes political affairs, unfortunately damage the secularism. According to secularism, every human being is equal before the law, and no political and religious connection, gives disadvantages or advantages. Moreover, everyone regardless of their religious faith has the same obligations and rights.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, the damage to the separation of religious and political affairs causes religious extremists to appear and also great chaos among the believers and non-believers. Consequently, this religious chaos influence not only women but also men in a negative way. Undeniably, there have been numerous wars and murders in the name of religion; as a result, nations have suffered a lot in the places like Gilead where religion is exercised in power struggles and personal interests. Therefore, the secularism is crucial in reaching the level of contemporary civilization. The following lines prove the negative consequences of the absence of secularism caused by the extremist supporters of the Religious Right who spread severe intolerance and fears of violence:

¹⁸⁰ "What is Secularism?" *National Secular Society*, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.secularism.org.uk/what-is-secularism.html>.

News accounts have often related incidents of bombings at women's health clinics which perform abortion . . . the violence of extremists and the lack of tolerance combine with the use of militaristic language by many evangelicals to further intensify the fears of those opposed to the religious right.¹⁸¹

The preceding lines highlight how being an extremist in an ideology is really harmful to both themselves and the others. Undeniably, tolerance and respect are the key terms in sharing different beliefs and striking a balance between these disagreements.

However, the Religious Right unfortunately succeeds to spread fear among women thanks to the televangelists and the politicians as well as the organizations like Promise Keepers founded by Bill McCartney. He claims that their organization impacts and transforms "the lives of over 7 million men" by introducing men to their Saviour, Jesus Christ and challenging them "to be men of the Word, godly husbands and fathers, live a life of purity".¹⁸² Like the Religious Right and Moral Majority supporters, this organization also struggles to harm women's movement. Tim Footman quotes one of Falwell's statements about PK as an opposing force against feminist movement, "it appears that America's anti-Biblical feminist movement is at last dying, thank God, and is possibly being replaced by a Christ-centred men's movement which may become the foundation for a desperately needed national spiritual awakening".¹⁸³ To reach their targets, PK goes too far and bomb abortion clinics as Gileadean regime bombs abortion clinics and murder the women and doctors that cause abortion. Patricia Ireland as the President of NOW reports that women activists work for the purpose of unmasking "the religious political extremists who are organizing the rank and file Promise Keepers", which they know from their first-hand experience fire bombs clinics.¹⁸⁴ Seemingly, women organizations are perfectly aware of the political and religious extremists' severe attacks, and they fearlessly stand up to this oppression and violence.

The intensive interference of the religion with the politics causes women to lose their natural rights such as working, getting education as well as their economic, political, social or religious liberties much easier. Due to their men-centred ideology, the supporters of the Religious Right or PK fundamentally wish to destroy women's

¹⁸¹ Hodson, "American Trends and American Fears," 37.

¹⁸² "About Promise Keepers," *Promise Keepers Official Website*, accessed June 8, 2017, <https://promisekeepers.org/about/about-promise-keepers>.

¹⁸³ Tim Footman, "Jerry Falwell," *The Guardian*, May 16, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/may/16/farewellfalwell>.

¹⁸⁴ Patricia Ireland, "Promise Keepers and Women's Rights Press Conference," August 25, 1997, video, 00:20:38-00:20:56, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?90001-1/promise-keepers-womens-rights>.

economic freedom since they are eager to regain their power as the breadwinner. Ireland highlights how women's economic liberty is sacrificed by stating that women lose their properties, investments or savings accounts, and they can get them back if their husbands give them written permission.¹⁸⁵ Likewise, the Gileadean regime's one of the first ways of oppressing women is to prevent them to get their own properties and cause them to live in their husbands' pocket. In Gilead, it is impossible for a Handmaid to work freely, "it's strange, now, to think about having a job. Job . . . It's a job for a man". Then, Offred compares her situation with the life of 'Job' by referring to "The Book of Job" (198). In the Bible, the prophet Job is portrayed as a wealthy man "blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil".¹⁸⁶ The Lord says to Satan that the prophet Job fears God and keeps away from evils as an upright and blameless man.¹⁸⁷ However, Satan claims Job is a righteous man because he has everything, a good family, healthy as well as wealth. Therefore, Satan asks for permission from God to test Job. He loses all the members of his family, all his possessions in addition to his health. However, Job does not give up praying to God, "he fell to the ground and worshipped. He said, 'naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God".¹⁸⁸ Correspondingly, all the women including Offred lose all their properties as well as their own families. Offred is most likely to think that they are tested like the prophet Job and they must endure and fight against their pains.

Women's economic freedom is not the only thing the Gileadean government destroys but also they demolish their freedom in every area as the Religious Right and Promise Keepers supporters wish to do. Ireland points out that PK aims "to trash women's rights" whereas "women's right's movement celebrates choices" and PK no longer wants women's freedom to choose how they live.¹⁸⁹ The major messages of PK are "political personhood for women would destroy the family or at least men's role of control" and women's equality is portrayed as "the source of society's ills".¹⁹⁰ Ireland also clarifies how PK and their sponsor, Jerry Falwell attack the feminists, gays,

¹⁸⁵ Ireland, "Promise Keepers and Women's Rights," 00:16:52-00:17:02.

¹⁸⁶ Job 1:1, *Job's Character and Wealth*, accessed July 14, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/nasb/job/1.htm>.

¹⁸⁷ Job 1:8.

¹⁸⁸ Job 1:20-22, *Satan Allowed to Test Job*, accessed July 14, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/nasb/job/1.htm>.

¹⁸⁹ Ireland, 00:18:28-00:18:50.

¹⁹⁰ Ireland, 00:01:45-00:02:06.

lesbians and believers in secularism as well as reproductive freedom by portraying them as infidels and sinners.¹⁹¹ All these messages also reflect the religious ideologies of the Gileadean government that keeps all the women out of the political as well as social life and sentence the women who are seen as sinful and an infidel to death.

The feminists are against Promise Keepers not only owing to their acceptance of only male membership but also their efforts to take control of women and force them to take the backseat in the name of taking responsibility. Ireland argues their messages encourage men “to dominate women . . . to go back to take their roles back as heads and masters of the family” by repeatedly calling “on the wives to submit to their husbands” in the name of religion because they sincerely believe God gives husbands right to control their wives in every area of their lives.¹⁹² Seemingly, PK uses the verses from the Bible to justify themselves, “wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church”.¹⁹³ However, most men appear to ignore the following verses, “husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church . . . husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. Indeed, no one ever hated his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it”.¹⁹⁴ Equally, the Gileadean regime and its representatives choose the specific verses from the Bible or totally change them to manipulate the Gileadean women:

For lunch it was the Beatitudes. Blessed be this, blessed be that. They played it from a tape, so not even an Aunt would be guilty of the sin of reading. The voice was a man’s. *Blessed be the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed be the meek. Blessed are the silent.* I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out, too, but there was no way of checking (105).

Seemingly, the regime wishes the Handmaids to become the silent sex slaves of the Commanders by means of these verses. Different from the message of the preceding lines, Jesus Christ indeed aims to give all the human beings regardless of gender differences good advice to deserve the heaven in the part of the Beatitudes, “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God . . . Rejoice and celebrate, because great is your reward in heaven”.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the

¹⁹¹ Ireland, 00:05:40-00:05:54.

¹⁹² Ireland, 00:05:55-00:06:32.

¹⁹³ Ephesians 5:22-23, *Wives and Husbands*, accessed June 10, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/bsb/ephesians/5.htm>.

¹⁹⁴ Ephesians, 25-29.

¹⁹⁵ Matthew 5:6,8-9,12, *The Beatitudes*, accessed July 24, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/bsb/matthew/5.htm>.

regime perfectly knows how to manipulate women as their slaves who serve the government in all terms by abusing religion.

On the other hand, the Gileadean regime uses religion to justify polygamy as the way of getting more and more babies, which is “practiced both in early Old Testament times and in the former state of Utah in the nineteenth century” (342). According to Professor Pieixoto, the government legitimises and enforces the use of the ‘surrogate mothers’, which is considered to possess Biblical precedents whereas they outlaw the ‘artificial insemination’ and the ‘fertility clinics’, which are claimed to be irreligious. Professor Pieixoto also points out that the regime creates a pool of women by declaring all nonmarital liaisons as well as second marriages adulterous and placing the female partners under arrest by claiming they are morally unfit. Furthermore, the regime confiscates the children of such women and give the childless couples from the upper status to adopt. Therefore, thanks to its political and religious power, the Gileadean government enables men in the higher status to be able to choose the women who prove their reproductive suitability by bringing healthy children into the world before (341). The preceding lines highlight how the Gileadean regime abuses religion to justify their cruel practices towards the women from lower status on the purpose of making them get birth to more and more babies for the people from upper status.

Accordingly, the Commanders as the religious and political leaders of Gilead often abuse the Biblical precedents to manipulate all the Gileadean women. Furthermore, the Commanders call themselves as the ‘Sons of Jacob’, which also signifies the impossibility of the separation of the politics and religion. In this theocratic system, the Commanders establish a religious centre called the ‘Rachel and Leah’s centre’, which is the best place to indoctrinate the Handmaids. They are perfectly brainwashed to do everything for the sake of God and to save Gilead’s future by constantly reminding Gilead’s future is in their hands (57). Likewise, the following lines which are often repeated in the Ceremonies reveal how the Gileadean regime struggles to prove that the Handmaids’ duty is divine and for God’s sake.

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' (105).¹⁹⁶

Not only Jacob but also Rachel and Leah possess the Biblical references. Rachel and Leah are sisters who are both the wives of Jacob. They compete against each other to have more babies. Since Leah has more babies whereas Rachel has no baby, Rachel envies her sister and gives Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah as the wife to give birth to babies.¹⁹⁷ Through this verses, the regime brainwashes the Handmaids into believing that giving birth to the Commanders' babies as their essential and divine goal for Gilead's future.

Correspondingly, Atwood's fictional Gilead has a Biblical reference. Sharon Rose Wilson clarifies the Biblical precedent of Gilead as, "named for a region in ancient Palestine, Gilead is the place where Jacob and Laban 'make a deal' about Laban's daughters" who are Rachel and Leah.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, Gilead is believed to possess 'balm' that heals the people and ends their sufferings, "go up to Gilead and obtain balm".¹⁹⁹ However, Atwood portrays a vision of Gilead, in other words America where people suffer from unthinkable pains let alone find the balm. Staels portrays the biblical land providing healing balm as "a waste land, a desolate area, whose inhabitants are spiritually and emotionally deadened"²⁰⁰ by referring the verse, "is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?".²⁰¹ Likewise, Atwood satirizes the hymn, "There is a Balm in Gilead" by replacing it, "There is a Bomb in Gilead" (248) because Gilead gives women nothing other than infinite pains and sufferings.

In Gilead, not every woman is sentenced to endless pains. If a woman is appointed as an Aunt by the government, she gets some privileges like reading or writing; however, they must also apply all the rules determined by the regime. The Aunts are responsible for teaching the religious ideologies of the Bible to the Handmaids in the Rachel and Leah centre. Furthermore, the Handmaids are not permitted to read even the Bible because the regime demands to hold the power of all

¹⁹⁶ Genesis 30:1-3, *Dan and Naphtali*, accessed May 10, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/genesis/30-1.htm>.

¹⁹⁷ Genesis 30:4.

¹⁹⁸ Sharon Rose Wilson, *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics* (The USA: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 285.

¹⁹⁹ Jeremiah 46:11, *Jeremiah Weeps For His People*, accessed June 4, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/jeremiah/46-11.htm>.

²⁰⁰ Staels, "Resistance through Narrating," 458.

²⁰¹ Jeremiah 8:22, *The Judgment on Egypt*, accessed June 4, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/jeremiah/8-22.htm>.

the knowledge including religious knowledge, which is one of the best ways to control every Gileadean citizen. In the following lines, Offred reveals how they are kept out of reaching the religious knowledge themselves:

He inserts the key, opens the box, lifts out the Bible, an ordinary copy, with a black cover and gold-edges pages. The Bible is kept locked up, the way people once kept tea locked up, so the servants wouldn't steal it. It is an incendiary device: who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it? We can be read to from it, by him, but we cannot read (103).

The governors perfectly know the undeniable fact that if the women in Gilead know how to read and if they read particularly the Bible, they realize how Gileadean regime chooses the specific parts of the Bible hypocritically, and also the governors cannot manipulate the Gileadean women so easily. Admittedly, forbidding to reach information causes the women of Gilead to be so hungry for knowledge; therefore, even reading a word in a cushion makes them feel excited. Offred says that she can spend a long time on the word 'FAITH' because this word is one of the rare things the regime gives her to read (68). The system is aware of the indisputable fact that keeping women illiterate and uneducated results in their complete faith in the regime.

On the other hand, the Commanders as the so-called protectors of their religion do not let other religious groups play active roles in Gilead including 'Quakers', most of whom are arrested by the regime (98) in order to eliminate all the risks of losing their citizens' faith. Quakers, whose formal name is "the Religious Society of Friends" with their approximately 210.000 members in the world, belong to "a group with Christian roots that began in England in the 1650s" There are about 210,000 Quakers across the world".²⁰² Seemingly, Quakers support the ideas of the feminist movement since they believe "there is something of God in everybody" and all the human beings are unique as well as equally valuable by also opposing everything that may threaten or harm them.²⁰³ BBC also clarifies that Quakers regard abortion "as a matter of individual conscience", and BBC provides the views of Quakers gender issues, "Quakers do not accept value judgements based on race or gender . . . Quakers welcome diversity . . . Quakers have always treated men and women as equals, and were pioneers in the movement for female equality".²⁰⁴ All the preceding lines clarify why Atwood refers to the Quakers. Seemingly, it is because they are alienated by the Gileadean regime as the supporters of the equality of genders. Correspondingly,

²⁰² "Quakers," *BBC Official Website*, updated July 3, 2009,

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/quakers_1.shtml.

²⁰³ "Quakers," *BBC*.

²⁰⁴ "Quakers," *BBC*.

Atwood highlights how the members of the Quakers risk their lives to save Moira, who is a lesbian; however, they can save neither Moira's life nor their own lives. Moira ends up in the Jezebel's, and the members of the Quakers end up in the Colonies or most possibly on the Wall.

Incredibly, the Gileadean regime imagines there will be a better society when they utterly destroy women's freedom and control women as well as their supporters in the name of religion. On the contrary, the history proves that the solution is not to sentence women to life-long imprisonment but is to educate not only women but also men to make right choices starting from the family. It is an undeniable fact that the stringent rules and prohibitions do not always prevent all the people from involving illegal and immoral activities but may cause people to engage them secretly as Atwood skilfully portrays in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The Gileadean people are forced to behave as if they are true believers and moral but indeed many of them behave hypocritically. The best example for their immoral behaviours is the fact that the Handmaids are compelled to have a sexual intercourse not only with the Commanders by means of the permission of the regime but also with the doctors or any men secretly to give birth. In one of Offred's monthly controls that aim to find out whether they are 'worthy vessels' or not, the doctor makes an indecent proposal:

Nothing wrong with you . . . I could help you. I've helped others . . . The door's locked. No one will come in. They'll never know it isn't his . . . Lots of women do it . . . You want a baby, don't you? . . . You're soft . . . It's time. Today or tomorrow would do it, why waste it? It'd only take a minute, honey (71-72).

The preceding lines prove how the regime causes its citizens to be immoral and hypocritical. Like many doctors in Gilead, the doctor of Offred says illegal and dangerous sentences like claiming the Commanders to be sterile. However, according to the law, no one can dare to call a man as sterile but merely women are called as barren or fruitful. Offred is not willing to accept the proposal because she knows the grim fact that "the penalty is death. But they have to catch you in the act, with two witnesses" (72). Nevertheless, Offred behaves as if she may accept his proposal later because she is afraid of the possibility that the doctor causes her to be sent to the Colonies or he may report her for infertility or cancer by faking the tests (72-73). When the doctor says next month, she feels frightened though she knows she hasn't crossed any boundaries, given any trust, taken any risks, but the choice terrifies her, "a way out, a salvation" (73). On the other hand, it is believed that having sexual

intercourse with anyone other than the Commanders is a sinful action that may cause the Handmaids to pay the price, “she had an eighth-month miscarriage . . . She thinks it’s her fault . . . She used a doctor . . . it wasn’t her Commander’s at all” (245). The preceding lines highlight that the Handmaids are believed to be sinful when they have sexual intercourse with a man secretly; however, they are hypocritically brainwashed to do the rightest thing religiously when they give birth to a Commander’s baby.

Correspondingly, despite being the Commander’s wife, Serena Joy makes another indecent proposal that requires Offred to have sexual intercourse to give birth by implying the Commander is sterile, “maybe he can’t”. Offred questions whether she means God or the Commander by stating that “if it’s God, she should say *won’t*. Either way it’s heresy” since only women are defective and damaged. Under any circumstances, Offred is obliged to have a baby; therefore, Serena says, “maybe you should try it another way” (233), which she implies ‘another man’, Nick who is the chauffeur of Commander Fred. Nick, who lives over the garage of the Commander’s house, has low status and no right to marry a woman (25-26). Though Offred says it is against the law, Serena justifies her proposal, “I know you can’t officially. But it’s done. Women do it frequently. All the time” (234). Moreover, Serena proposes Offred to show her daughter’s picture just for a minute to persuade her, which is a merciless behaviour that forces Offred to accept the proposal, “maybe I could get something for you . . . A picture she says . . . Of her . . . Your little girl” (235). The preceding lines prove the immorality, hypocrisy and cruelty of the regime as well as its supporters who themselves offer indecent proposals by threatening these unfortunate women with their beloved ones.

On the other hand, beginning from the time when Offred comes the Commander Fred’s house, Nick tries to get close to Offred, which is too risky and forbidden. Offred remembers the Aunt Lydia’s statements about the weakness of men, “some of them will try . . . All flesh is weak . . . They can’t help it . . . God made them that way but He did not make you that way . . . It’s up to you to set the boundaries. Later you will be thanked” (55). The preceding lines prove how the Handmaids are forced to shoulder all the responsibility of being sinful by justifying God made the men that way. In other words, if Offred is caught with any men, she is the guiltiest one religiously. However, Offred takes all risks to be sent to the Colonies and even worse to be hanged on the Wall by meeting both Nick and the Commander secretly, which is

also illegal because both the Handmaids and the Commanders are permitted to meet in the Ceremonies. Before Serena's proposal, Nick both gets close to her himself and helps the Commander to meet Offred in his study room secretly and illegally, which is also a sign of immorality and hypocrisy. Without knowing Offred meets the Commander, Serena arranges Nick and Offred's secret and illegal meeting (294). Furthermore, Nick humiliates Offred when she comes to his room, "let's be practical . . . I don't have much time . . . I get paid" (296), which causes Offred to burst into tears. However, Offred continues to visit Nick in his room without Serena's knowledge after that night since she feels she does something for entirely herself. Moreover, she feels thankful to Nick because he lets her in every time though he does not have to (302). The preceding lines highlight how women are pushed to commit illegal activities secretly since all their rights and freedoms are completely repressed or destroyed by the regime in the name of religion and politics.

In conclusion, it is essential to highlight the grim fact that the Gileadean women are oppressed and suppressed socially, economically, physically or psychologically in the name of the religion. On the other, Offred can be said to be luckier since she does not lose at least her hopes and dreams. Unfortunately, most of the women in Gilead are not permitted even to dream or hope because the future is drawn to be dark if they do not submit not only their bodies but also their souls to the purposes of the regime. However, their feet and hands are shown as less significant parts of their bodies because they are not required to give birth, "remember . . . For our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential" (108). With the aim of forcing them to serve the regime's purposes and prevent social disruption, the regime uses some torturing methods including the Testifying, the Ceremonies, the Salvagings, the Particution and the Prayvaganza all of which will be examined in the following part. Indisputably, the religion has never been the fundamental aim but merely a tool for political purposes, 'having more and more babies' for the Gileadean government.

3.2. Women in *The Handmaid's Tale*: A Religious Torture

The Gileadean regime undeniably abuses the Gileadean society, mostly women in the name of religion especially with the aim of gaining political control on its citizens as many regimes have been utilizing religion for their political purposes throughout the history. Lois W. Banner points out that so-called religious humanitarians abuse societies' pure religious faith not only "to gain power over society for their own conservative" due to their desire for "social control, not social improvement" but also to preserve their own decreasing status and regaining their earlier position as the churchmen who influence, indeed dominate, American society's opinions morally.²⁰⁵ Accordingly, with the aim of providing a social control, the Gileadean regime does not hesitate to create great chaos by using religious justifications in society in the preparation of founding the Gileadean government:

There were bonfires in Times Square, crowds chanting around them, women throwing their arms up thankfully into the air when they felt the cameras on them . . . tossing things onto the flames . . . bikini underpants, see-through brassieres with pink satin hearts sewn on to cover the nipples (262).

Moreover, the crowds force the importers and the manufacturers as well as the salesmen of such indecent clothes to kneel down and repent in public with their paper hats on which SHAME is written in red.

The Gileadean government uses lots of cruel methods believed to have Biblical precedents to manipulate women. Some of these methods are so merciless that the Gileadean women are tortured not only politically or socially but also physically, psychologically or economically in the name of religion:

To the woman He said,
'I will greatly multiply
Your pain in childbirth,
In pain you will bring forth children;
Yet your desire will be for your husband,
And he will rule over you' (131).²⁰⁶

The preceding lines signify how the regime uses Biblical precedents for their own sake and prefers to inflict pain on women. The Gileadean regime is so pitiless that they deliberately cause severe pain to the women in the name of religion though they have the possibilities to relieve their pain because they believe "a little pain cleans out the mind" (222). They do not let male doctors give birth since they see it shameful

²⁰⁵ Lois W. Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of Interpretation," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 60, no. 1 (June 1973): 23.

²⁰⁶ Genesis 3:16, *The Fall of Man*, accessed 10 May 2017, <http://biblehub.com/nasb/genesis/3.htm>.

although male doctors are permitted to examine females in the monthly periods before the ceremonies, which indeed indicates their dilemmas and hypocrisies. Moreover, they portray the old ways as terrifying and cruel through the movies on the purpose of proving the new ways are much better, “some man with a searchlight looking up between her legs . . . a trayful of bright sterilized knives . . . Once they drugged women, induced labour, cut them open, sewed them up”. However, their new ways ironically seem to be much more merciless, “no anaesthetics, even” (131). The regime does not allow the doctors to check the babies whether they are healthy or not despite the possibility of killing both the baby and the mother as well as to use anaesthetics for relieving the women’s pains at the moment of giving birth.

One of the most effective and torturing methods found by the Commanders that call themselves as ‘Sons of Jacob Think Tankers’ is to establish ‘Rachel and Leah’ Centre and ‘Aunt’ system. In the Historical Notes part, Professor James Darcy Pieixoto emphasizes that the Gileadean regime offers some freedoms and benefits for a few privileged people in exchange for those they remove on the purpose of instituting “an effective totalitarian system” (345). According to Pieixoto, Limpkin’s diary proves that B. Frederick Judd founds the ‘Aunt’ system and the following lines clarify the advantages of the ‘Aunt’ system:

The best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves . . . in the case of Gilead, there were many 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 (346).

The Aunts also prefer this status because they do not want to be sent to the Colonies where the infertile, old or useless ones are assigned to do the dirtiest works of Gilead. The Aunts’ essential duty is to provide intensive – mostly religious – education for the Handmaids in the Red Centre. Owing to their intensive religious education, even their daily use of language includes praying about reproduction, “‘blessed be the fruit,’ she says to me, the accepted greeting among us. ‘May the Lord open,’ I answer, the accepted response” (27). Moreover, they use the traditional expression “Under His Eye” (55) as the farewell to remind themselves that they are under 24-hour surveillance by referring to God and also most possibly the Eyes as the cruel police force of Gileadean government. By this way, the women are disconnected with the outside world and perfectly brainwashed that the Gileadean government is their best option to live peacefully.

The Aunts frequently speak ill of the women of the past ironically for their good with a pious voice, “they made mistakes . . . We don’t intend to repeat them . . . A thing is valued . . . only if it is rare and hard to get. We want you to be valued” (130). They often claim that the old indecent way of life is wrong, and freedom leads people to degenerate into immorality. The Aunts harshly criticize the women who demonstrate their bare legs, shoulders or backs in public especially to get a sunburn by oiling themselves in the past. They portray this way of life as too filthy, distasteful or horrible since to their belief, women could possess a successful life when they “avoided things, excluded things” (66). Furthermore, with the aim of being more believable, the Aunts force the Handmaids to watch the pornographic movies that belong to the old days. The Aunts call these movies as Unwoman documentary and name Unwoman as Godless. Aunt Lydia blames especially the women of the past for “scorning God’s gifts” and causing today’s problems, “women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees” (129). The preceding lines prove how the women of Gilead are announced to be scapegoats for all Gilead’s problems.

On the other hand, the Aunts do not want the Handmaids to have their properties especially in the name of religion as usual with their justifications. They claim that women “get too attached to this material world” and they do not remember the spiritual values if they possess many things (76). Their real purpose is the fact that the Gileadean women are not attached to the outside world with the aiming of controlling them much easier. The Aunts indoctrinate the Handmaids to dedicate their lives to the Gileadean regime. Janine perfectly exemplifies to be “a true believer” because she is “like a puppy” who is often kicked by plenty of people on the purpose of getting an official approval or praise for just a moment (148). Likewise, Offred gets accustomed to not possessing anything but being possessed by the regime as if she is a thing since she is forced to learn how to survive without many things. All their properties are “looted, dumped out, carried away, confiscated” (76). The preceding line clarifies how the regime destroys the women’s individuality, freedom or independence day by day and eventually indoctrinates into believing that they unquestioningly belong to the regime body and soul.

Accordingly, the Aunts as the representatives of the so-called Republic of Gilead do not hesitate to express somebody else’s sayings as if they are from the Bible in order to manipulate the women easier, which also indicates how they corrupt as well

as abuse the religion for their own sake. They usually highlight their slogan to justify merely the Commanders whose wives cannot give birth to a baby are permitted to get a Handmaid, “from each . . . according to her ability; to each according to his needs” as though it is from the Bible (134). However, this saying’s original version is “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” from Karl Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.²⁰⁷ Karl Marx, who is against capitalism as the believer of public ownership, aims to say that each produces according to their abilities, but each benefits from this production according to their needs regardless of their skills, which causes people to more enjoyably and productively since they work voluntarily according to their strengths.²⁰⁸ It is an undeniable fact that Gileadean regime uses this saying to emphasize all the Handmaids produce babies according to their abilities, but all the Commanders benefit from this production according to their needs.

Another cruel method to torture the Handmaids in particular emotionally and psychologically is ‘Testifying’ in which the Handmaids are forced to confess the mistakes they made in the past. In a Testifying session, Janine tells how she is raped by a gang at fourteen and has an abortion. According to Offred, Janine tells the same story often, and she appears to be proud of her story which may not be true. Seemingly, it is much safer to make up a story at Testifying rather than saying nothing. After Janine confesses her mistakes which do not belong to her because she is indeed a victim in her story, everyone begins to insult Janine:

But whose fault was it? Aunt Helena says, holding up one plump finger. Her fault, her fault, her fault, we chant in unison. Who led them on? Aunt Helena beams, pleased with us. She did. She did. She did. Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen? Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson (86).

The Handmaids in the Red Centre are brainwashed to be responsible for all their bad experience in their lives because the Aunts aim to make them believe that God wants to punish the women to teach them lessons. Even the other Handmaids are forced to be so merciless that Janine bursts into tears in one of the Testifyings. Aunt Helena makes her kneel in front of everyone and everyone despises her by calling her as a crybaby. In the end, Janine believes herself that it is her fault though it is not, “I led them on. I deserved the pain” (86). The preceding lines prove how the followers of the regime are

²⁰⁷ Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Electric Book Company, 2000), 20, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/karabuk/detail.action?docID=3008482>.

²⁰⁸ Vladimir, I. Lenin, “State and Revolution,” *The Political Theory Reader*, ed. Paul Schumaker (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 57.

so successful in brainwashing the Handmaids that these women mercilessly humiliate each other and unquestioningly accept any pain the regime inflicts on them.

Correspondingly, the Ceremony is a justified rape system as a religious as well as political torture in Gilead not only to control the Handmaids' bodies but also to witness the controlling influence of woman's body on everyone in a way:

They too have been summoned by the bell, they resent it, they have other things to do . . . But 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 . . . It's my fault, this waste of her time. Not mine, but my body's, if there is a difference (95).

On the days of the Ceremonies, the whole household including the Marthas, the drivers, the Wives, the Commanders in addition to the Handmaids come together to listen to the verses from the Bible and watch the movies that brainwash the household to accept the provided conditions by the regime. In the evenings of the Ceremonies, the Handmaids are permitted to watch the news that is most possibly fake but better than no story because it gives them hope to learn any information. This news and clips are successfully modified and manipulated that they act as if everything is fine. According to Offred, the regime only shows them "victories, never defeats" because no one wants to see bad news. She is aware of the fact that the speaker is likely to be an actor who is like an ideal grandfather. He promises "everything will be all right soon . . . There will be peace . . . You must go to sleep, like good children" (97). Offred is aware of the fact that the man tells them what they miss believing very convincingly. Though she struggles against him, she feels hypnotized. She wishes his sayings were true. All the preceding lines prove how the regime uses written and visual media that merely tells what the government wishes to manipulate women.

The Ceremony is torture not only for the Handmaids but also for the Wives, "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" (106). As a preparation of the Ceremony, the Commander demands everyone to pray silently for blessings and success in their all ventures. The Commander also reads a sentence from the Bible to indicate how significant and valuable that Serena lets Offred be together with the Commander, "and Leah said, 'God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband'"(106).²⁰⁹ At this religious ritual moment, Offred does not know how to pray but she perfectly knows the religion is not their ultimate divine goal but a vehicle to

²⁰⁹ Genesis 30:18, *The Sons of Jacob*, accessed July 24, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/nasb/genesis/30.htm>.

justify the regime's political purposes. She prays as "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*" (107) which means "Don't let the bastards grind you down" (214). At the moment of the Ceremony, both Serena's and Offred's pain is indescribable because Serena is obliged to witness the process whereas Offred experiences herself:

My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product. If any. The rings of her left hand cut into my fingers. It may or may not be revenge (109).

Offred does not see the act of the Ceremony as neither making love nor rape. She confesses that she prefers such a life in a way because there is not "a lot of choice but . . . and this is what" she chooses (110). On the other hand, she is contented that "kissing is forbidden between us. This makes it bearable". Furthermore, at the time of the Ceremony, the Commander wears his uniform to highlight he is "doing his duty . . . This is serious business" (111). All the preceding lines prove how the Gileadean regime sees this sexual torture towards not only the Handmaids but also the Wives just as a political necessity though the regime tries to show all these tortures possess so-called holy purposes such as to save the Gilead's and so their daughters' future.

Likewise, Offred remembers "Queen Victoria's advice to her daughter: *Close your eyes and think of England*" at the moment of the Ceremony (110). Jessica Autumn Brown and Myra Marx Ferree compare Queen Victoria's advice with pronatalism defined "as a political, ideological, or religious project to encourage childbearing by some or all members of a civil, ethnic, or national group".²¹⁰ Brown and Ferree point out this advice is used as a metaphor for the "women of the Victorian era to endure sex for the sake of the national good"²¹¹. Accordingly, it is also used as today's old joke illustrating the primary role of the women's reproduction in Britain because of the falling of births at an alarming rate. It is clearly seen that Atwood not only warns against the possible consequences of today's world but also reflects how the past's wrong perspectives toward women are forced to reappear by some of today's politicians as it is the Gileadean regime. Kathryn Hughes portrays these wrong perspectives toward women's role in the 19th century in her article and put forward that women as sisters, daughters and wives are sentenced to home to commit domestic duties; furthermore, they do not get the same chances and privileges as men in

²¹⁰ Jessica Autumn Brown and Myra Marx Ferree, "Close Your Eyes and Think of England: Protanatalism in the British Media," *Gender and Society*, vol. 19, no. 1 (February 2005), 8.

²¹¹ Brown and Ferree, "Protanatalism in the British Media," 6.

education, but they are educated for their traditional gender roles as the ‘Angel in the House’.²¹² The preceding lines highlight how the women are sentenced to home pretending as if they are angels as homemakers in the 19th century. Equally, the Commanders in Atwood’s novel pretend as if the Handmaids are angels as the sex slaves of the Commanders.

Another most effective way that the Gileadean regime utilizes to terrorize its women is the use of the Wall where the guilty ones according to the regime’s so-called religious and political strict rules are hanged and demonstrated for days on purpose. Though it is strictly forbidden for women to look men in the eye or vice versa, it is ironical that the regime demands each woman to look at the bodies of the hanged people on the Wall with the aim of preventing them from doing unwanted actions. When the Handmaids go out, their daily routine is firstly to visit the church, then look at the graves and lastly at the Wall. The hanged people are marked according to religious group they belong to or the crime they commit:

Only two hanging on it today: one Catholic, not a priest though, placarded with an upside-down cross, and some other sect I don’t recognize. The body is marked only with a J, in red. It doesn’t mean Jewish, those would be yellow stars . . . So the J isn’t for Jew. What could it be? Jehovah’s Witness? Jesuit? Whatever it meant, he’s just as dead (228-229).

In addition to the ones who commit religious crimes, there are doctors or scientists who are hanged on the Wall. The doctors who are believed to murder babies by the regime have a placard that shows “a drawing of a human fetus” around his neck (43). In addition to the doctors and scientists, many people are hanged since they commit the crime of ‘Gender Treachery’ (53). Furthermore, the government expects their people to feel hatred and scorn when they see these bodies. On the contrary, Offred feels relief partly as Luke or her daughter are not among these hanged people and blankness that she must not feel” (43). On the other hand, the Gileadean regime hangs the rebels’ bodies on the Wall to show everyone the grim fact that if they are against the regime, this is the end they will have. The Wall makes women act as true believers since they are perfectly suppressed by fear, “Ofglen’s head is bowed, as if she’s praying . . . I think of her as a woman for whom every act is done for show, is acting rather than a real act” (41) The preceding lines prove how women are forced to act as true believers though they are not.

²¹² Kathryn Hughes, “Gender Roles in the 19th Century,” *British Library*, published May 15, 2014, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>.

Correspondingly, the regime calls the public execution on the Wall as ‘Men’s Salvaging’ if the men are hanged and ‘Women’s Salvaging’ if the women are hanged, “Salvagings are always segregated . . . They tell you only the day before. It’s not enough time, to get used to it” (307). In the Historical Notes part, Professor Pieixoto clarifies that Frederick R. Waterford adapts the Salvaging to Gilead from “the Philippines to become a general term for the elimination of one’s political enemies” (344). According to Offred, the Women’s Salvagings is rare compared to the Men’s Salvagings, which means the regime is successful in terrorizing women (308). The Salvagings are held at a place where women “walk freely when it was university”, but now they aren’t permitted to enter the buildings that “belong to the Eyes” (191). The preceding lines highlight how the buildings that are used as giving education to everyone regardless of their gender are now used as the torture centres for the ones who do not obey the regime’s strict rules.

The Aunts manages the Women’s Salvagings, and the women who will be hanged are placed on the scene before they open the gates to the audiences. Offred compares them to “graduating students who are about to be given prizes”; moreover, these women are likely to be “given injections or pills, so they won’t make a fuss” (308-309). The Aunt Lydia tries to justify the murders of the women, “duty is a hard taskmaster, or may I say on this occasion taskmistress, and it is in the name of duty that we are here today” (310). The regime does not explain or televise the crimes of the women or men hanged in the Salvagings in detail for the purpose of preventing the others from committing similar crimes. Since the regime does not explain what the women’s crimes are anymore, the Handmaids try to guess the possibilities in the following lines:

Unchastity, or an attempt on the life of her Commander? Or the Commander’s Wife, more likely . . . As for the Wife, there’s mostly just one thing they get salvaged for. They can do almost anything to us, but they aren’t allowed to kill us, not legally . . . It could be adultery, of course . . . Or attempted escape (311).

However, the Wives are allowed to hit the Handmaids, “there’s Scriptural precedent. But not with any implement. Only with their hands” (24). No matter what their crimes are, no one can dare to question whether they are innocent or not; moreover, the Handmaids share the murder of the regime by being forced to help the hanging of the women, “I’ve leaned forward to touch the rope in front of me, in time with the others, both hands on it . . . then placed my hand on my heart to show my unity with the

Salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the death of this woman” (311). Offred cannot see these women bodies as the representative of something bad; in contrast, she compares the hanged bodies to the birds or angels, “with their wings clipped, like flightless birds, wrecked angels” (312). It is much more merciless that the regime forces the Handmaids to aid and abet the crime of murdering another woman whose mere fault is not to obey the regime’s so-called divine rules.

Another way of public execution is the ‘Participation’, which is most possibly the combination of the words ‘participation’ and ‘execution’. In this type of execution, the regime submits a man to the hands of the Handmaids to punish the man to death. The Handmaids start to tear the man to pieces when the whistle is blown by the Aunt and the Participation ends when the whistle is blown again. Professor Pieixoto explains in the Historical Notes part that Frederick R. Waterford also adapts the Participation to Gilead as he does the Salvaging, but B. Frederick Judd improves the Participation system. Waterford lifts “from an exercise program popular sometime in the last third of the century; the collective rape ceremony, however, was suggested by an English village custom of the seventeenth century” (344). The regime finds a ‘scapegoat’ and submits him to the women of Gilead just for giving chance them to get rid of their anger by tearing a man to pieces, “scapegoats have been notoriously useful throughout history, and it must have been most gratifying for these Handmaids, so rigidly controlled at other times, to be able to tear a man apart with their bare hands every once in a while” (345). All the preceding lines prove how women are prevented from creating chaos by controlling their anger thanks to the Participation.

Accordingly, one of the Participations is clarified in detail and the following lines highlight how women are forced to murder a man though he is not guilty:

As if he’s a half-dead rat dragging itself across a kitchen floor . . . I try to look inside him, inside the trashed face, see what he must really look like. I think he’s about thirty . . . I know that whatever he’s done I can’t touch him. He says something . . . He says, ‘I didn’t’ (314).

The Aunt Lydia furiously blames him for being a Guardian who rapes and impregnates a woman whose baby dies (313-314). The Handmaids are perfectly provoked and also so hungry for any type of freedom that each Handmaid feels incredibly excited about their limitless freedom to attack the man:

We are permitted anything and this is freedom, in my body also, I’m reeling, red spreads everywhere . . . She pushes him down, sideways, then kicks his head viciously, one, two, three times, sharp painful jabs with the foot, well aimed . . . I can no longer see, he’s obscured by arms, fists, feet . . . He has become an *it* (315).

Offred pictures what she witnesses in the Particution as monstrous, and unfortunately some of the women turn into a true monster like Janine, who has “a smear of blood across her cheek, and more of it on the white of her headdress” and holds the man’s hair in her hands. (316). Although Offred cannot accept the situation in her mind, she is unable to protest against anything because she is aware of the grim reality that they are sentenced to death if they do not obey the political and religious rules of the regime. On the other hand, the Aunt Lydia aims to justify the man’s death penalty in the Particution through the Bible, “the penalty for rape, as you know, is death. Deuteronomy 22:23-29 (314). According to these verses of the Bible, “if a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die”.²¹³ However, there are also other conditions to execute men or women of adultery, “if a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death”.²¹⁴ It is undeniable that killing a woman is incredibly cruel; however, forcing a woman to get married a man who rapes her is as merciless as killing her. According to the verses in the Bible, “if a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay her father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives”.²¹⁵ The preceding lines prove that some verses in the Bible are available for being abused by men since they seem to suggest women to force to get married or be killed without questioning whether these women are guilty or not as the Gileadean regime abuses these verses in their cruel practices.

Whereas the Gileadean regime claims to create a moral system, its representatives mostly abuse their limitless power, and the most tortured ones are undeniably women. For instance, the Aunt Lydia is claimed to abuse Janine sexually, “how much you want to bet she’s got Janine down on her knees? What you think they get up to in that office of hers?” (252). Furthermore, in spite of all the Gileadean’s regime’s moralistic and religious language, the men of Gilead are so hypocritical that they establish a secret club called Jezebel’s where women of Gilead are sexually abused and tortured to build bridges with the men of different nations. The online

²¹³ Deuteronomy 22:22, *Marriage Violations*, accessed 28 June 2017, <http://biblehub.com/niv/deuteronomy/22.htm>.

²¹⁴ Deuteronomy, 22:23-24.

²¹⁵ Deuteronomy, 22:28-29.

dictionary of Meriam-Webster defines the word 'Jezebel' as "an impudent, shameless, or morally unrestrained woman".²¹⁶ Indeed, Atwood refers to the Bible by the name of Jezebel who is a notorious woman character told in Kings I and Kings II as the Phoenician princess and then wife of King Ahab in the northern of Israel. According to Janet Howe Gaines, Jezebel is mostly pictured as a sinful, evil or infidel, "every biblical word condemns her"²¹⁷ as well as "a murderer, prostitute and enemy of God"²¹⁸ because she worships the Phoenician deities and especially Baal as the pagan god of fertility and murder the prophets of Yahweh, in other words God of the Israelites as the unique deity.

On the other hand, Jezebel's story told in the Old Testament is full of cruelty, sex, murder as well as intrigue, and Jezebel utilizes her political power to spread the Baal religion which was thought as "the worst sin against God, akin to today's Christians' embracing Satan" by the Jews with its ritual sex, temple prostitutes and many gods.²¹⁹ Correspondingly, Jezebel is not willing to "accept Ahab's God, Yahweh. Rather, she leads Ahab to tolerate Baal".²²⁰ However, Jezebel goes too far in her actions instead of respecting their people's religious beliefs, "Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord".²²¹ As a consequence, the Lord punishes the kingdom of Ahab with the drought as well as famine because of Jezebel's infidelity and murder of the Lord's prophets, "the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, 'go, show yourself to Ahab and I will send rain on the face of the earth' . . . Now the famine was severe in Samaria".²²² Likewise, the Aunts in Gilead figure the women in the Jezebel's are "all damned anyway, they've given up on us, so it doesn't matter what sort of vice we get up to" (285). All the preceding lines clarify why the Gileadean regime portrays the women in the Jezebel's as sinful, immoral or infidel like Jezebel mentioned in the Bible.

²¹⁶ "Jezebel," *Merriam-Webster*, accessed 18 June 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Jezebel>.

²¹⁷ Janet Howe Gaines, "How Bad Jezebel Was?" *ProQuest Central*, vol. 16, no. 5 (October 2000): 23.

²¹⁸ Gaines, "How Bad Jezebel Was?" 13.

²¹⁹ Michael Satchell, "Jezebel Was a Killer and Prostitute, but She had Her Good Side: The reigning icon of womanly evil," *U.S. News*, January 25, 2008, <https://www.usnews.com/news/religion/articles/2008/01/25/jezebel-was-a-killer-and-prostitute-but-she-had-her-good-side>.

²²⁰ Gaines, "How Bad Jezebel Was?" 13.

²²¹ 1 Kings 18:13, *Obadiah Meets Elijah*, accessed June 19, 2017, http://biblehub.com/nasb/1_kings/18.htm.

²²² 1 Kings, 18:1-2.

Naturally, all these political and religious tortures drive the women mad and cause them even to commit suicide though the regime tries hard to prevent all these suicides. Janine is one of the Handmaids that go mad by remembering her past as a waitress, “my name’s Janine. I’m your wait-person for this morning. Can I get you some coffee to begin with?” (246). Her friends and particularly Moira struggle to jolt Janine out of her madness by slapping her. The Handmaids are all aware of the fact that they are sent to the Colonies or even murdered cruelly if they are believed to be useless:

They won’t send you to the Infirmary, so don’t even think about it . . . They won’t mess around with trying to cure you. They won’t even bother to ship you to the Colonies. You go too far away and they just take you up to the Chemistry Lab and shoot you. Then they burn you up with the garbage, like an Unwoman (247).

The preceding lines highlight how the women are immediately got rid of when they are thought to be useless since merely the women who give birth to healthy babies are valuable for the regime. Accordingly, they are brainwashed to be valueless and something to be filled to be valuable; therefore, they pray for emptiness to become “worthy to be filled: with grace, with love, with self-denial, semen and babies” (222). Similarly, the women are so brainwashed through the religious torture that even their bodies seem shameful or abject to themselves, and they also feel ashamed of those times when they wear bathing suits on the beaches (74-75). All the preceding lines prove how the Gileadean women are exposed to such a great religious and political torture that they feel hatred towards even their bodies that control their own lives.

Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* not only tells the story of oppressed women but also mentions the racist tortures towards people who belong to the different religions. Offred shares a memory from her childhood and remembers a woman who is the mistress of a supervisor of the camps in which they capture the Jews and then kill them. Offred’s mother tells Offred all the details though she is a just child:

In ovens . . . but there weren’t any pictures of the ovens, so I got some confused notion that these deaths had taken place in kitchens. There is something especially terrifying to a child in that idea. Ovens mean cooking, and cooking comes before eating. I thought these people had been eaten (167).

Offred also clarifies how the mistress of the brutal man surprisingly defends him at the interviews, “he was not a monster . . . People say he was a monster, but he was not one. What could she have been thinking about? . . . She was thinking about how not to think”. Indisputably, no matter what nation they belong to, many women go through the similar pain and suffering. Especially the times of the war are the times when

women are the most oppressed, suppressed and repressed. They are forced to live with such cruel men and forget to think straight; moreover, most of them choose to believe such men are their best chances to be able to survive by inventing humanity even in such merciless people. Despite all their efforts to survive, many women cannot succeed to fight against their sufferings and commit suicide (168). The preceding lines prove how many women's real feelings are ignored by many people no matter which religion or race these women belong to.

On the other hand, most places are designed to give hope to its citizens and also to gain their faith in Gilead. Even in the cushions, it is written 'HOPE', 'CHARITY' or 'FAITH', and even in some of the gravestones, it is written 'In Hope', which may indicate even death gives them much more hope than life. Offred questions, "In Hope. Why did they put that above a dead person? Was it the corpse hoping, or those still alive?" (122). Indeed, there is no real hope, faith or love in Gilead, "faith is only a word, embroidered" (328). The regime believes it is not worth falling in love, "arranged marriages have always worked out just as well, if not better . . . *Love* is not the point . . . All we've done is return things to Nature's norm" (250). They behave as if they believe "God is love" (256); however, the regime's real target is not undeniably related to God's love. Nonetheless, the women of Gilead try hard to find happiness and hope in the smallest things despite all their sufferings by attaching themselves anything familiar like an egg, "in reduced circumstances the desire to live attaches itself to strange objects" (127). Moreover, Offred compares a simple egg to God, "I think that this is what God must look like: an egg. The life of the moon may not be on the surface, but inside. The egg is glowing now, as if it had an energy of its own. To look at the egg gives me intense pleasure . . . The minimalist life. Pleasure is an egg" (126). Indeed, it may be thought that Offred looks for God in a way by comparing a thing that makes her pleased and hopeful to God. Perhaps, she wishes God to save Offred from her sufferings. However, when she says "the sun goes and the egg fades", she may begin to lose her hopes and beliefs (126). On the other hand, Offred struggles not to lose her hope and belief to God despite her harsh life conditions as it is highlighted in the following lines:

My God. Who Art in the Kingdom of Heaven, which is within . . . help me to get through it, please . . . I have enough daily bread, so I won't waste time on that. It isn't the main problem . . . Don't worry about forgiving me right now. There are more important things . . . keep the others safe, if they are safe. Don't let them suffer too much. If they have to die, let it be fast.

You might even provide a Heaven for them. We need You for that. Hell we can make for ourselves (223).

In spite of her sufferings, Offred mostly prays for her beloved ones. On the other hand, she feels so lonely and desperate while talking to God, “I feel as if I’m talking to a wall. I wish You’d answer. I feel so alone. All alone by the telephone. Except I can’t use the telephone . . . How can I keep on living?” (224). All the preceding lines indicate Offred’s real feelings which reflect her wishes to believe God will save them whole-heartedly, but the regime’s cruel tortures and hypocritical behaviours cause her hopes and beliefs to diminish.

Correspondingly, one of the ways to show how obedient and pious hypocritically is to use ‘Soul Scrolls’ which is a store established everywhere in Gilead. These stores sell prayers to upper-class people; therefore, it is thought that these stores make much profit. Especially the Wives order these prayers because “ordering prayers from Soul Scrolls is supposed to be a sign of piety and faithfulness to the regime” and also “it helps their husbands’ careers”. In order to buy prayers from the Soul Scrolls, the rich citizens of Gilead pick one of the prayers including ‘sin, birth, death, wealth, health’ and order them by Compuphone. Their prayers are printed out by the machines called as ‘Holy Rollers’; therefore, nobody reads or hears the prayers, “there are no people inside the building: the machines run by themselves. You can’t hear the voices from outside; only a murmur” (192). The intended audience is not undeniably God. In fact, buying prayers is enough to persuade the government they are quite faithful; however, no one can question the system. When Ofglen asks Offred whether God listens to these machines, Offred gets shocked and frightened because such a question is treason or heresy for the Gileadean regime (193). Nevertheless, Offred’s answer becomes ‘no’ courageously though she supposes “it’s faith, of a kind” (193). The preceding lines highlight the fact that the women of Gilead do not find the religious methods as the signifier of the faith believable, but they are forced to behave as if they believe the regime’s ways and practices whole-heartedly.

Especially for the Handmaids, ‘Prayvaganza’ is another hypocritical way to show how faithful they are, “we’re off to the Prayvaganza, to demonstrate how obedient and pious we are” (242). In the Women’s Prayvaganzas, mostly wedding ceremonies of the Angels are held by the government, and in the Men’s Prayvaganzas, they celebrate mostly military victories. In one of the Women’s Prayvaganzas, Offred realizes a slogan on which “GOD IS A NATIONAL RESOURCE” (243). This slogan

indicates how religion is used as a tool to hold the political power. Likewise, the Gileadean regime believes that God is on their side and the government has the authority not only on the politics but also on the religion. The Commanders in their uniforms manage the Prayvaganzas, and a Commander portrays one of the Women's Prayvaganzas as the day of thanksgiving and praise. According to Offred, he makes a long speech "about victory and sacrifice. Then there's a long prayer, about unworthy vessels" (248). In the following lines, this Commander perfectly reflects how the regime sees women and suggests a way of salvation for them:

Let the woman learn in silence with *all* subjection . . . But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety (251).

Likewise, he clarifies how the Gileadean regime uses perfect religious, economic or social methods to turn women into slaves who serve for their political purposes, "these girls haven't been allowed to be alone with a man for years" (249). Their families with the government arrange their marriages and decide whom they get married. The regime wants the next generation of women not to remember anything including playing baseball, riding bicycles or reading books, and to be silent totally:

Even though some of them are no more than fourteen — *Start them soon* is the policy, *there's not a moment to be lost* — still they'll remember. And the ones after them will, for three or four or five years; but after that they won't. They'll always have been in white, in groups of girls; they'll always have been silent (249).

The preceding lines highlight their so-called perfect plan to turn women into robots for Gilead's future. To the regime, the Angels' Wives' unique and divine mission must be to give birth to babies; or else, their husbands get a Handmaid to fulfil the duty. However, the Handmaids aren't anticipated to love the Angels or the Commanders but to do their duty "in silence. When in doubt, when flat on your back, you can look at the ceiling" (252). All the preceding lines prove how the regime is self-seeking and indifferent to the Gileadean women, in other words they do not give any importance or value to the women's feelings or thoughts.

On the other hand, the regime promises a so-called excellent future for both the women of Gilead and their daughters, "the women will live in harmony together, all in one family; you will be like daughters to them . . . There can be bonds of real affection . . . Your daughters will have greater freedom" (187). However, Offred is aware of the fact that there will not be a perfect future for women, but they will forget the past and

get used to their provided conditions. Especially the Handmaids of Gilead will always be seen as the mistresses of the Commanders, “I’m his mistress. Men at the top have always had mistresses . . . The mistress used to be kept in a minor house or apartment of her own, and now they’ve amalgamated things . . . I am the outside woman. It’s my job to provide what is otherwise lacking” (187). Offred often feels so hopeless in a regime enslaving women for their fertility that she thinks death may be the best choice for most of the women of Gilead like her to get rid of their endless sufferings, “death is a beautiful woman, with wings” (191). All the preceding lines highlight how the women of Gilead feels under such a pressure that even death becomes an escape or a salvation for these women from their life-long imprisonment.

To sum up, it can be deduced that Offred is mostly a hopeful and robust woman who fights against all her sufferings at least in her mind though she often seems to lose her beliefs and hopes. Especially at the end of her story, she wishes to kill herself as well as the others when she feels the fear of being murdered by the others (327-328). Moreover, her fear and despair make her pray wholeheartedly, “dear God . . . I will do anything you like . . . I’ll obliterate myself . . . I’ll empty myself, truly, become a chalice. I’ll give up Nick, I’ll forget about the others, I’ll stop complaining. I’ll accept my lot. I’ll sacrifice. I’ll repent. I’ll abdicate. I’ll renounce” (322). She is so terrified that everything she is taught in the Red Centre and everything she resists come flooding in because she does not wish “to be a doll hung up on the Wall” or “to be a wingless angel”. On the contrary, she wishes “to keep on living, in any form” by resigning her “body freely, to the uses of others” (322). All these preceding lines prove how she is terrified of being murdered and how fear as well as despair turn a woman into a real slave. However, her hopes and dreams survive thanks to Nick, who helps her escape from the Commander’s house, “it’s all right. It’s Mayday. Go with them . . . He calls me by my real name” (330). The preceding lines highlight the fact that there is always hope for everyone as long as they go on breathing.

The end of the story and Offred’s fate is ambiguous as questioned by Professor Pieixoto in the Historical Notes part whether the narrator reaches “the outside world safely and build a new life for herself” or she is discovered “in her attic hiding place, arrested, sent to the Colonies or to Jezebel’s, or even executed” (349). Furthermore, Atwood refers one of the famous mythological characters, Eurydice to emphasize the history is full of ambiguity. According to Professor Pieixoto, Eurydice can be called

“from the world of the dead”, but no one can force her to answer. To be able to grasp why Atwood uses this reference, it is significant to examine the story of Eurydice and her beloved husband Orpheus’s life. Eurydice and Orpheus love one another very much, and also they suffer from losing each other forever very early. Orpheus is a great musician and when Eurydice dies, Orpheus gets incredibly upset that he follows her “down into hades (=the place under the ground where the spirits of dead people live)”, and they let Eurydice leave on the condition that Orpheus does not look back at her. However, he cannot resist looking at her, and so she has to return to Hades.²²³ By keeping Eurydice’s story in his mind, the Professor Pieixoto portrays the past as “a great darkness, and filled with echoes. Voices may reach us from it; but what they say to us is imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come” (350). Though it is impossible to know all the details of Offred’s life, it is crystal clear that she has to experience an unbearable life due to both the religious and political dogmas of the Gileadean regime. On the other hand, Margaret Atwood’s almost all the references made in her *The Handmaid’s Tale* undeniably target to attract her readers’s attention to the sufferings of the women in a world where there is no freedom, justice or equality for women, and she seemingly succeeds her target as the undeniably strong supporter of the women’s movement.

²²³ “Orpheus and Eurydice,” *Longman*, accessed July 21, 2017, <http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/orpheus-and-eurydice>.

CONCLUSION

I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilized. I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then at least more active, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia . . . I wish it were about love, or about sudden realizations important to one's life, or even about sunsets, birds, rainstorms, or snow (301).

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is not about love, hope or faith as many people expect from a novel to feel happier in an imaginative world but it reflects women's real sufferings of the existing world. It is a fact that today's many women reap the benefits of the fight their ancestors had for justice, freedom and equality. However, Atwood wishes each woman to remember that a considerable amount of women still suffers unthinkable tortures and may be obliged to suffer much more in the future. In today's world, many women are still humiliated, beaten, exposed to sexual harassment or rape and even murdered by their husbands or even their fathers to prove their limitless power. Correspondingly, the politics encourage such men in a way by not imposing the most onerous penalties, and such men insist on behaving as if women are inferior and deserve much less than men in all fields of life. Therefore, today's women must not give up fighting against the unfair treatments of men by writing or speaking about their natural rights more and more as Atwood struggles to do in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Moreover, Atwood skilfully echoes the voice of all disadvantaged and oppressed women regardless of their ethnic group, sexual preference, class or race since she believes that it is cruel to tell someone deserves to be a slave just because of his/ her race or ethnic group as to tell a woman deserves to be inferior just because of her gender difference.

Accordingly, the Gileadean government exemplifies the best possible political strategies that turn women into slaves who are abused sexually, economically or physically. The regime mostly uses the power of fear by showing that not obeying the Gileadean strict rules brings them an immediate death by being hanged on the Wall. Moreover, thanks to their intensive religious education, the regime succeeds in brainwashing most women to believe Gilead is not a prison, but it is a kind of privilege to be there. The regime often reminds them that they protect the women of Gilead from all sorts of evils and even their memories, and such way of life is better for women under the circumstances. However, as Atwood expresses, "better never means better for everyone . . . It always means worse, for some" (241). Furthermore, the women of Gilead are exposed to such harsh conditions in the name of politics and religion that

their only chance to feel hopeful “reconstruction: the way love feels is always only approximate . . . I would like to be shameless. I would like to be ignorant. Then I would not know how ignorant I was” (297). Offred often feels that they would die from the lack of love “there’s nobody here I can love, all the people I could love are dead or elsewhere. Who knows where they are or what their names are now? They might as well be nowhere, as I am for them. I too am a missing person” (119). The preceding lines prove how the Gileadean women feel as if they are dead because they do not possess a family or a name, and they are not different from any practical things in Gilead.

Offred’s sufferings are so unbearable that she wishes everything would be a nightmare or just a scary story, “I would like to believe this is a story I’m telling”. On the other hand, Atwood emphasizes the importance of storytelling, “those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance” (49). Just to help the women of next generations, Offred bravely tells her own story in a country where a woman has no right including reading, writing and speaking by risking her own life. There is a well-known saying, ‘the pen is mightier than the sword’, which emphasizes the significance of using the power of words. Offred knows this reality very well, “the pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains . . . Just holding it is envy. I envy the Commander his pen” (213). The Gileadean regime purposes to create a woman army who does not know anything except for the information the government lets them know. The government is aware of the fact that no one can feel the shortage of anything that is not known; therefore, they struggle to turn the women of Gilead into robots who do not have any memories of the times when they possess the opportunities to get an education or career. Gilead’s robotic army that has no emotions and no ability to complain or oppose anything perfectly fits their so-called holy purpose, ‘getting more and more babies’.

Apparently, it may be acceptable to say ‘the country is in a state of chaos and a group of people must take control over the country’. However, no one has the right to establish totalitarianism by claiming they would save the country or theocracy by claiming they are doing God’s will. Every person is unique and valuable, so they must be given all the opportunities to use their natural rights equally and fairly. All human beings must be free to choose how to think or behave and what or who to believe. They must be liberated to love or hate, “I believe in the resistance as I believe there

can be no light without shadow; or rather, no shadow unless there is also light” (122). Atwood possibly refers to the sermon named ‘No Light Without a Shadow’ in the Bible. In the sermon, it is said that everything exists with their opposites in nature, “if there is light there is also darkness; if there is height there is also depth; if there is joy there is also sorrow; if there is perfection there is also deformity . . . if there is reward there is also punishment; if there is heaven there is also hell”.²²⁴ It is clear that God presents all the human beings choices, and it is their responsibility to choose the light or the darkness, which indicates that no state has right to torture any of its citizens in the name of the religion. Moreover, states must not interfere the religious issues to be able to neutral in their services.

To conclude, millions of people struggle to survive in the oceans of their cultural, racial, religious or ethnic diversities. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Atwood focuses on the sufferings of the women as the victims of these diversities in addition to the patriarchy; on the other hand, she wishes to raise awareness about the oppression of not only women but also men by the totalitarian or theocratic regimes. Accordingly, Atwood highlights the fact that it is equally wrong for both women and men to treat each other as if they are slaves for the sake of power. They are indeed two integral pieces of a whole and also much more powerful together. The real power is achieved when all the human beings can realize forgiveness, tolerance and respect will only end their purposeless war, “forgiveness too is a power. To beg for it is a power, and to withhold or bestow it is a power, perhaps the greatest” (154). It is undeniable fact that real life is challenging as well as complicated, and every human being makes mistakes. Therefore, it is essential to forgive, tolerate and respect to lessen all kinds of discrimination between men and women. The more men and women try to understand each other; the better place the world will be. Everyone must start to change themselves. Especially women must teach their sons and daughters that women are as valuable as men in the societies. Moreover, it is essential for all the women to remind their indisputable importance by continuing their successes in all fields of life since women’s fight against rapes, sexual harassment, physical and psychological violence, alienation still goes on and will be most likely to go on in the future if the necessary precautions are not taken.

²²⁴ Isaiah 61:2, *No Light Without a Shadow*, accessed August 16, 2017, http://biblehub.com/sermons/pub/no_light_without_a_shadow.htm.

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