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**ATWOOD’S THE HANDMAID’S TALE AND THE
TESTAMENTS AS TOTALITARIAN FEMINIST
DYSTOPIAS**

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APPROVAL PAGE



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that his master's thesis titled as "Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and The Testaments as Totalitarian Feminist Dystopias" has been written by myself in accordance with the academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that all materials benefited in this thesis consist of the mentioned resources in the reference list. I verify all these with my honor.

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ABSTRACT

Master's Thesis

Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and The Testaments as Totalitarian Feminist

Dystopias

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Historically, totalitarian regimes use the freedoms that democracy offers and exploit these civic rights to manipulate their citizens with an oppressive ideology. Totalitarian regimes are patriarchal in their essences, for among their targets to oppress women take the lead. After having “total control,” these patriarchally-based regimes expect to create an idealized version of women whose would only be responsible for domestic work. Literature often addresses issues pertaining to lives destroyed under such regimes. Some authors have raised their voices not only to give voice to individuals who were abused by the totalitarian domination of patriarchy but also to warn their readers about the possibility of a change towards totalitarianism because of the indifference of citizens. Likewise, in order to alert her readers Margaret Atwood created a dystopian state called Gilead which is ruled by a totalitarian authority. The order in Gilead regime is regulated by the Commanders and the Aunts, their female inferiors, who are in charge of keeping the order among women.

The authority limits freedoms in every facet of life, both public and private. The isolated and lonely individuals, or the mass, are forced to believe in the fiction formed in accordance with the totalitarian ideology: reality is distorted, murders are called sacrifices for the sake of one's country and a new “normal” is created in which individuals are so atomized that all sense of belonging is destroyed.

This dissertation aims at providing an insight into the analysis of women as the primary target of totalitarian domination while examining the formation of the Gilead government.

Keywords: Totalitarianism, Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale, The Testaments, Feminist Discourse, Dystopias.



ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Totaliteryan Feminist Distopyalar olarak Atwood'un *The Handmaid's Tale* ve
The Testaments

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Tarih boyunca, totaliter rejimler demokrasinin sunduğu özgürlükten faydalanıp, baskıcı ideolojileriyle halkı manipüle ederek bu hakkı sömürmüştür. Totaliter rejimler özünde ataerkildir, iki ideolojinin de bulunduğu nokta kadınları baskılamaktır. “Total” kontrolü ele geçiren bu ataerkil toplumlara dayalı rejimler, kadınları sömürerek sadece domestik alanla ilgilenmesi beklenen ideal kadın imajı yaratmıştır. Edebiyat, çoğu kez bu tür rejimler altında mahvolan hayatlara değinir. Diğer taraftan, yazarlar sadece totaliteryan yönetim tarafından ezilen halkı desteklemek için değil, aynı zamanda insanların pasif ve duyarsız kalabilmeleri durumunda gerçekleşebilecek olan muhtemel bir hükümet değişikliğine karşı uyarmak için de seslerini yükseltmişlerdir. Bu sebeple, Margaret Atwood, okuyucularını ikaz etme amacıyla, Gilead isminde totaliter bir hükümetin kontrolü altında yönetilen distopik bir dünya yaratmıştır. Gilead’de düzen Komutanlar ve Komutanların astı olan ve onların kurduğu sistemi gözetmekle yükümlü olan Teyzeler tarafından yürütülür.

Otorite, vatandaşları hayatın her alanında, hem kamusal alanda hem özel alanda kısıtlamaktadır. İzole edilmiş ve yalnızlaştırılmış bireyler, ya da yığınlar, totaliter ideoloji tarafından oluşturulan kurguya inanmaları için boyun eğdirilirler: gerçekler çarpıtılır, cinayetler bir insanın vatani uğruna yapmak zorunda olduğu fedakarlıklar olarak adlandırılır ve yeni “normalle”

birlikte atomize edilmiş bireylerin sosyal gruplara ait olma hissinin yıkıldığı bir hiyerarşik düzen yaratılır.

Bu tezin amacı totaliter kontrolün öncelikli hedefi olan kadınların hayatını incelerken, Gilead hükümetinin yapısına ışık tutmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Totalitaryanizm, Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale, The Testaments, Feminist Söylem, Distopyalar.



**ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* AND *THE TESTAMENTS* AS
TOTALITARIAN FEMINIST DYSTOPIAS**

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INTRODUCTION

Totalitarianism is a form of government that aims to have “total” control over every façade of life. A totalitarian regime is ruled by a leader or a group of authorities. Every totalitarian leader claims that in the past, citizens were living in a terrible condition, so they had to take measures. The leaders offer a so-called flawless community in which every citizen would revert to their natural roles. However, the worse has yet to come. After the seizure of power, the real face of the regime begins to show itself.

Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is one of the most prominent works that analyzes the motives behind and the structures of totalitarian regimes. Having been born into the cruel Nazi regime, Arendt reveals the ways that a totalitarian government works while looking into Nazi Germany and other totalitarian regimes. For Arendt, citizens living under totalitarianism are not citizens but masses. While atomizing the whole community, totalitarian authorities perceive individuals as only one group, a mass. Class consciousness is thus demolished as a result of the totalitarian strategy of isolation so that the masses can become unsupported in the system.

In totalitarian regimes, not only the masses, but even the leaders, in short, everybody suffers from the oppressive conditions in which they have to fully comply with the rules. Yet, among the most disadvantageous genders in such a regime are women. In today’s world, the culture of almost every country is patriarchal. Patriarchy exercises power over women and designate what they can do, when and how they can do it, such as how to dress, where to go, when to speak. The “permissions” as to how to behave are given to by patriarchal codes. This kind of order that regulates women in order to gain favor from men directly supports totalitarian regimes. A patriarchal regime and a totalitarian one are not so distinct from the other. Similarly, in totalitarian regimes, women are confined in the domestic sphere serving a male figure, whether he be a father, a husband or a son.

In the 20th century, we witnessed a mushrooming of totalitarian regimes all over the world. The World Wars played an important role in the rising of totalitarianism in Europe. Between the world wars some European countries not only

lost territories and human lives but also found themselves in deep economic crises. Totalitarian regimes take advantage of these economic crises when people start to lose their trust in democracy to solve problems. The stage is thus ripe for a totalitarian leader who will come to the stage as a savior as happened in Italy. In the early 20th century, the Italian government could not find solutions to the economic crisis that lingered after World War I. After the government's resignation, the king authorized Mussolini in 1922. One of the first changes he brought to Italian life was related to the role of women. He "believed that women should fulfill their role as wives and mothers because they were the ones who gave birth to children"; thus, the regime "wanted more births because that would allow it to have a larger number of soldiers for the Italian army and for the regime's dreams of expansion" (Monti, 2011: 36). In Mussolini's Italy, women's bodies were perceived as machines whose place is home and whose duty is to give birth to children for the continuation of this system.

Hitler's Germany shared the same view with Mussolini. Hitler won the elections and came to power because of the desperation shared by almost all German people due to the economic crisis. In the minds of his fanatic disciples, he was believed to be the Messiah sent by God to save the German race and to secure the purity of the Aryan race. Like Mussolini, the totalitarian fascist state was based on the reduction of the roles of women to what he considered "natural order" in which men were responsible for protecting his families while women had to stay home and to look after children. To please the husband and children becomes a nationalist idea for the whole Germany. Producing children for this state was extremely significant for Hitler. Therefore, he supported the traditional roles of gender. In Nazi Germany, women were trained at schools to be housewives. The three "K"s designated where women should and could be in this regime: Kinder (children), Küche (kitchen), and Kirche (church). These concepts accurately explain the place of women in this totalitarian regime.

What strikes historians and political thinkers most is that Hitler did not seize power by undemocratic means; on the contrary he was chosen by the citizens to rule the country. There are many reasons for this: by keeping women away from the market, Hitler promised that he would increase the employment rates of his male

citizens, which attracted the traditionalist people at that time. Also, he believed in the supremacy of Aryan German race. Consequently, he gained the support of the nationalists as well. Hitler announced the minority groups such as Jewish people and Romani as enemies that prevented Germany from moving forward. For Hitler, every inconvenience that prevented Germany from developing should have been destroyed. Thus, many minority members who were seen in this light were eliminated as a result of genocidal atrocities. However, as the majority of the country was German, the lives of such minorities remained insignificant for most Germans. Once German citizens turned into masses, they even supported these cruelties and atrocities under Hitler because, with constant state propaganda, the strong nationalist idea became the core of the culture.

While World War II mostly put an end to totalitarian regimes in Europe, towards the end of the 20th century, totalitarianism appeared in the Middle East under a different the guise of religious fundamentalism. As Islam dominates most of the Middle East, religion becomes a weapon for totalitarian leaders. They obtain the role of the savior of the state and claim that God has sent them. They announce it as their sacred mission to save the state from the Western ways of life by building a religious state. To obey the rules of the regime and, by extension the leader, is equal to obey God. They expect full obedience to the state and God as they are almost the same thing in the eyes of the Islamic totalitarian governments.

One of the totalitarian countries in the Middle East is Iran, which once was a modern country. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, also known as Shah, aimed at modernizing Iran. Thus, he exercised what came to be known as the White Revolution. With this revolution, he focused on reconstructing the country with many changes: women gained the right to vote, the quality of education is raised, the government bought agricultural lands from rich people and sold them to farmers at a reasonable price. However, there were some groups such as cult leaders and extremists whose self-interests were against such changes. Likewise, these great changes bothered the upper classes and religious leaders as they had the most disadvantageous place in this new regime. In order to prevent their resurgence, Shah often resorted to extreme measures as far as murders. The following economic crisis in Iran caused the citizens to lose their trust in the government and to turn their

support to religious fundamentalism. Once exiled from Iran by Shah, Ruhollah Khomeini took advantage of the crisis and appeared as a leader who would save the people from this predicament. After gaining the support of the citizens, Ruhollah Khomeini established a totalitarian state based on the Islam. First and foremost, he took away the rights of women claiming that modern women were Zionist and imperialist. Women had to wear *hijab* and to abide strictly by the religious laws. The state bases its ideas on Islam while shaping it according to its goals to create an oppressive Islamic nation.

Afghanistan, on the other hand, was not so different than Iran. Afghanistan, too, was a modern country ruled by democracy. After the Taliban seized the power, they followed a pure fundamentalist Islamic ideology as Iranian leaders did. Claiming to take the basis of their state from Islam, they created their own rules. Like all the other totalitarian regimes, the Taliban regime immediately removed women from social life as well. Women are prohibited from schools and workplaces; in fact, they are, not allowed to leave their homes alone unless accompanied by a male relative. If they do not follow the rules, they are killed often by being beaten publicly.

Witnessing the dramatic shift in the 20th century towards totalitarianism, especially its most frightening form based on religious fundamentalism, Margaret Atwood, the Canadian author, takes up the issue of women under totalitarian regimes in her fictional dystopian state called Gilead. Gilead that has been pictured in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* is ruled by a group of totalitarian leaders. Especially women are vulnerable to the oppressive exercises of this regime as they are reduced to and defined by their reproductive capacities. Atwood demonstrates through Gilead the abuse of motherhood as a sacred existence. Thus, women of childbearing age in *Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* are redefined as “sacred vessels” or “ambulatory chalices” (Atwood, 2017: 146). The sole *raison d'être* of the fertile women, now called the Handmaids, is to give birth. Other women who cannot procreate or do not fit into the domestic female category that Gilead put are useless to the state. They are called “Unwomen.” In this male-dominated totalitarian regime, women are discriminated, thus labeled according to their ability to procreate. Thus, a positive attribution like fertility turns into a weapon in the hands of totalitarian order.

The most visible victims of Arendt's totalitarian system in Gilead are obviously women; therefore, this study will focus on the how totalitarianism works with increased power over women, the most disadvantageous genders under the rules of totalitarianism.

Margaret Atwood did not create this totalitarian state out of nothing. About the creation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, she asserts that:

Like many books, *The Handmaid's Tale* began with the question, What if? I guess I was tired of having people say, 'It can't happen here.' They were right only if you accepted their definition of 'it.' 'It' could mean Russian-style communism or Germany under Hitler, but what if we were looking at the wrong 'it'; what if while we were busily staring down the wolf at the door, another one was creeping over the back fence? Once any democracy starts curtailing freedom in the name of freedom, it may land us in trouble. What if you wanted to take over the US today? What flag could you wave successfully? *The Handmaid's Tale* is one answer to these 'What ifs?' And it goes on from there. (M. Atwood, personal communication, 1 September 2020)

While we already are living in patriarchal societies, why is the possibility of finding ourselves being a part of a totalitarian regime sound so distant? Atwood wants her readers think about those "what ifs" instead of taking what is given to us for granted. The story that Atwood tells is not improbable. One cannot simply ignore the fact that the core of totalitarianism and patriarchy are remarkably similar. Both try to imprison women either by subjugating them to anthropocentric beauty standards or by confining them to domestic life only. What these two regimes have in common is that they reflect a male-dominated and hierarchical view of the world in which everything else is subjected to a certain form of manhood.

The first chapter of this thesis explains what totalitarianism is. The history of totalitarianism is examined with its first origins. As a political idea, Plato is the first person who describes a system similar to totalitarian regimes. Centuries later, Machiavelli also shares his ideas on how a perfect community should be. Thus, his social organization is close to totalitarianism. After such earlier examples, Hannah Arendt and her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with her views on totalitarian states are introduced.

In the second chapter, my focus will be on Margaret Atwood and her creation of the fictional totalitarian state Gilead. Gilead is a dystopian state where the narrator remembers her past in a comparatively free country with nostalgia and where all her

spontaneous human existence is repressed. “Centrally concerned with the clash between individual desire and societal demand, dystopian fiction often focuses on sexuality and relations between the genders as elements of this conflict” (Booker, 1994: 337). Therefore, in both of these books, totalitarian regimes and patriarchy appear as two closely knitted forms of power, a point that dystopian feminist fiction lays bare and emphasizes. The main characteristics of feminist dystopian fiction to which *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments* belong, include the issues of the reduction of the female body and the imprisonment of women in the domestic circle. Similarly, in these books, Atwood creates this dystopian place called Gilead where every woman is defined by the capacities of her body and confined in the domestic sphere. Any deviation from or failure to perform the given duty is severely punished. For every individual living in Gilead, the only thing matters is the survival and success of Gilead.

While the previous chapter provides a perspective towards Gilead from women who occupy the lowest or comparatively lower places, the last chapter of this thesis will deal with the analysis of Gilead authority and its representatives. The figures of authority such as Commanders and older women called Aunts whose job is to keep women under control and as they both collaborate and compete among themselves in order to exert their will into the workings of the state. The Commanders are at the zenith of the hierarchy in Gilead while Aunts are hierarchically inferior to them. The Aunts are responsible for regulating social order and controlling and disciplining women, younger women, especially the Handmaids, whose sole duty is to procreate with Commanders. Together, these two figures of authority try to have total control over the masses.

The most effective forms of this control are achieved through religion and propaganda. Therefore, a new kind of religion taking its basics from Christianity is served as the only salvation for the past while propaganda has been used to normalize and “soften” and justify the current cruel conditions of totalitarianism.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the narrator is a Handmaid, Offred. Readers are provided only one point of view that is the Handmaid’s. On the other hand, in *The Testaments*, Atwood introduces three narrators: Aunt Lydia, and two young women, Agnes from Gilead, and Daisy from Canada. Aunt Lydia exists in both books; in *The*

Handmaid's Tale, she is depicted as a cold-blooded character while in the sequel to the book, she finds a voice to talk about the real reasons behind her actions. Therefore, the sequel unearths some of the hidden stories in the former as well as showing the aftermath of Offred's story. "The interplay between the three women's stories also allows us to compare how individuals make decisions about what constitutes ethical behaviour in a totalitarian regime" (Watkins, 2019). Although Aunt Lydia is perceived as a brutal woman, with her narration, she asserts that she had to act as if she was one of them to bring an end to the totalitarian state.

The last chapter thus discusses the workings of totalitarianism and the transition process from a democratic country to a totalitarian state. This change appears slowly without terrifying the citizens, yet at the end of this slow process, they are bereft of any human rights. In an interview with Hope Reese, Atwood asserts that: "The point at which you know you're under totalitarianism is when a peaceful protest crowd is fired upon. You're getting close to it when that happens just a little. But when you have a full-out shutdown, then there aren't any more protests because people know what will happen" (M. Atwood, personal communication, 26 April 2017). Even small signs might be significant messengers of a totalitarianism looming just around the corner, but once one realizes fully that it is there, all freedoms are taken away. Like any other totalitarian regime, Gilead, too, aims at reaching its aims in a very slow pace: femicides, leaving women unemployed, giving speeches on media about women as domestic creatures and so on. Understanding the transition process that happened in the US is significant to unearth the seeds of totalitarianism in every democratic system.

Thus, this thesis aims to show that the biggest victims of totalitarian regimes are women. I will interrogate how women are treated under the totalitarian structure of Gilead under the light of Arendt's book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS TOTALITARIANISM

1.1. TOTALITARIANISM: A HISTORY

Since humans are social beings, they have needed to regulate their social behavior often with the control of an authority. Sometimes, this authority, as in pre-modern societies, is self-appointed, based on bodily strength and prowess, but, as it is mostly the case in modern societies, the authority is appointed by social contract through a process of elections. Once he is chosen, he has the power to rule and to make decisions for the whole country on behalf of the inhabitants, considering their needs and to provide them support as a figure of resource that fulfills their necessities. Normally a leader elected by the people is not the sole authority; he shares his power with other centers such as judiciary, legislative branches. Therefore, his power is subjected to layers of checks and balances.

This system described above seems to be just, fair, and pleasant. However, a political leader, by violating laws and people's freedom, can decide whatever he believes to be right without the consideration of other people's opinions. In other words, a leader becomes a tyrant or dictator. In such a case, the rights of the citizens can be suspended, and their acts can be incessantly controlled in case of resistance against the government. The citizens are expected to obey the rules that are put by the authority only. This kind of structure refers to the totalitarian system. Totalitarianism is a "form of government that theoretically permits *no individual freedom* and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of individual life to the authority of the state" (*Britannica*; emphasis added). After a totalitarian ruler holds the power, the human rights are violated, and freedoms are lost by since the government—that is the dictator—has endless control over every facet of life.

Totalitarianism is always confused with "authoritarianism," because they are both oppressive systems that manipulate people by ignoring the constitution and laws and shaping citizen's view of how life ought to be. They both require full submission to the authority and disregard individual freedoms. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference: Authoritarian regimes do not get involved in the private life;

all their focus is on public life. In totalitarian regimes, on the other hand, everybody is under constant surveillance both in the private and public realms. Therefore, authoritarianism is accepted as the less strict version of totalitarianism. While in totalitarianism, institutions are rigorously controlled and regulated, authoritarian control mechanism does not cover the institutions such as the family and religion, related to the private realm. Also, authoritarian regimes do not have a precise ideology to follow or to be followed. However, the totalitarian movement's main attribution is ideology, which is run and checked by the government itself.

Totalitarian regimes aim at bringing into existence societies that their leaders deem perfect. In this process of constituting a “flawless” community, they set up strict rules demanding that everybody must obey. Every totalitarian leader comes up with the claim that the country had become a total disaster because of previous leaders or systems, and he has had to take it upon himself to put an end to these wrongs on behalf of the people. The past is made into a scapegoat, and the only thing left for the totalitarian leaders to do is to have “total” control of every field of life. They make it appealing to the people in a way of offering a grandiose future that gives them hope while picturing a utopian place. Totalitarian leaders “did not make a utopia a starting point, but rather treated a ‘New Society’ as a final goal” (Kamenetsky, 1964: 115-116). As totalitarian leaders depend on a bleak past for their rise, the only thing they can offer to citizens is a bright future that waits for them at the end of the harsh days before the seizure of totalitarianism.

To gain the citizens' trust, a charismatic figure is required to control and manipulate the state. This figure is generally pictured as a man who has supreme powers, almost like a god figure, and introduces himself with the qualities of a hero sanctioned by God to save his people from helplessness, desperation, and immoral ways. It is also interesting to note that totalitarian regimes appear when countries' economies collapse, and people suffer from death and starvation due to the wars. At this point of weakness, the only solution seems to be a figure who promises a bright future so that every little problem will be fixed, and lives will get better.

After taking control of the state, political parties who are opposed to the totalitarian regime are closed. Now, there is only one political party that serves for the benefit of the leadership. This party promotes the ideology of the leader by

supporting every move that the authority takes. After turning itself to the only option, the government uses secret police that check and control the people. The other controlling mechanisms in a totalitarian regime are applied through schools, media, and religion. Freedom is not even a matter of discussion in a surrounding like this. Under totalitarianism, next to all forms of freedom, people also lose their freedom of will, the most important part of our lives as moral beings. Since totalitarianism “is the antithesis of ideals of spiritual and mental freedom; it is utterly destructive of the supernatural and absolute bases of our traditional morality; it is, forsooth, a revolt against the continuity of historic civilization” (Hayes, 1938: 23). Freedom that has been taken away is not only the physical freedom of movement or speech, meaning that the government tells you what to do or what role you should play in society but also spiritual and mental freedom, namely the freedom of thought and belief. The authority has control over the thoughts of people. The citizens' thought and ideas are managed and manipulated through the control mechanisms of the state.

As in every formation of the state, rebels in a totalitarian regime are a threat to those who have power. The totalitarian leader prevents all occurrences of rebellion and makes an example of who are against the ideology in order for others to take a lesson from their example and avoid following a similar path. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault calls this “the rule of lateral effects.” He indicates that “The penalty must have its most intense effects on those who have not committed the crime” (Foucault, 1991: 95). A totalitarian leader does not abstain from using violence in order to evoke the feeling of terror in the eyes of the others. All threats against the regime are thus wiped out so that the targeted perfect society can be achieved.

The first glimpse of totalitarianism can be detected in the work of Plato, *The Republic*. He is thought of as the first person to come up with the idea of totalitarianism because of his anti-democratic ideas.

I suppose that when a democratic city, once it's thirsted for freedom, gets bad winebearers as its leaders and gets more drunk than it should on this unmixed draught, then, unless the rulers are very gentle and provide a great deal of freedom, it punishes them, charging them with being polluted and oligarchs. (Plato, 1991: 241)

Plato, here, criticizes democratic regimes for having “too much freedom.” Democracy, with its freedoms for every citizen opens the way for some to abuse

these freedoms and grab power and announce himself as the only authority. Anyone who has unlimited power to rule the state can turn into a tyrant that neglects the citizens by thinking only of their interests. Plato claims that it is democracy that provides the power to the unqualified to be a ruler. Therefore, the system should make sure that only the most qualified people should opt for becoming leaders and administrators. He carries his discussion further arguing that children should be separated from their parents at a young age without knowing who their biological parents are and should be raised under the control of the guards who will give education about how to be a great ruler; in that way, citizens would have the best ruler. In his prescription as to how a perfect society should be formed, Plato disregards the rights of the people who live in a society.

Years later, in the 16th century, the Italian diplomat and philosopher, Niccolò Machiavelli, contributes to the totalitarian thought. In his book, *The Prince*, he declares that a ruler is able to use the state as a tool for having the greatest benefit. Questioning “Is it better to be loved than feared, or to be feared than loved?” he comes to the conclusion that “Since it is difficult to reconcile these two, it is much safer to be feared than loved” (Machiavelli, 2008: 271). It can be inferred that a leader should rule the citizens by creating an oppressive persona to be feared. Such a leader is the very essence of totalitarianism.

If one wants to look back at the origin of totalitarianism as it has been practiced in our modern world, it can be noticed that this kind of political occurrence showed itself as a result of the repressive governments that rose in the 20th century. During the World Wars, people faced with the compassionless face of the world in death, starvation, and illness. The economy of the countries in the entire world collapsed and everybody was looking for help to save them from the atrocious realities of the world.

In Italy, it was Benito Mussolini that promised such help. He led a political movement called “fascism,” according to which one’s nation is superior to any other one and a strong central government is needed to manage the state. He deliberately both gave the Black Soldiers (cruel soldiers dressed in black) unrestrained power and stopped their atrocities, which helped turn him into a hero in people's eyes. After

having the control to rule Italy, he took citizens' lives under control and supervised the Church through state laws in ways that served his interests.

Mussolini's admirer, Adolf Hitler, is another totalitarian leader who ruled Germany. After the Great Depression, the country was in terror as the German parliament, the Reichstag, was burned down and people were scared, and at this time of horror, Hitler played the role of savior and was elected prime minister with the support of most of the German people. Soon after he came to power, he shut down the political parties and accused the Jews and communists of Germany's defeat in World War I and attacked them believing that pure German race is superior to other races. His oppressive acts were aimed not just at the people who did not share the same race but also at women. He advocated that a Nazi woman should stay at home and look after the children and her husband. It was expected for her to bear as many children as she could for the future of Germany and dedicate all her life to her marriage and family while men were responsible for holding an important place in political life. Thus, Hitler's fascism ruled by an oppressive regime regulated private life, especially the female body as a reproductive and domestic machine.

Hitler and Mussolini's contemporary Josef Stalin, the Russian totalitarian leader, moved the farmers to the cities and did not supply them any livelihood, which caused the deaths of millions of people. He had secret police to check up on people so that any minor rebellion could be prevented. Stalin thought that with force and terror, everything could be done just like any totalitarian rulers.

As history is witness, a totalitarian leader, after taking the control to rule the state, violates the laws and the constitution and forms a new kind of government that fully serves his leadership. The past is made a scapegoat by defaming the previous regime's services of the country. A phoenix-like country is expected to be borne out of the ashes of the past because the mission of this heroic leader is no less than divinely and patriotically ordained, he can use violence and force, if necessary, in order to obviate the rioters or a threatening group of people. Though it is claimed by the leaders that everything they have done is for the state's good, the thirst for unlimited power or with no control or inspection leads them to take their steps not according to the country's sake but for their own benefit.

1.2. HANNAH ARENDT AND TOTALITARIANISM

“Totalitarianism strives not toward despotic rule over men, but toward a system in which men are superfluous. Total power can be achieved and safeguarded only in a world of conditioned reflexes, of marionettes without the slightest trace of spontaneity.”

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Hannah Arendt, a German-Jewish thinker, was one of the prominent writers of political philosophy in the twentieth century. As she faced the cruel reality of Nazism, she mostly focused on the issue of repressive governments. What she experienced led her to see the scene of political life in a different way than others. After immigrating to the United States, she published a book titled, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—originally accepted as *The Burden of Our Times*, which was a ground-breaking work that changed people's perspective and helped to figure out what a totalitarian regime is. She particularly put political issues such as violence, otherness, and loneliness at the center of her work. She was a revolutionary writer in the sense that although it was feared to discuss the issue of the evil of totalitarianism at that time, she drew attention to the reasons that constitute a totalitarian government by analyzing the very core of the process of the formation of the state.

According to her, there are three reasons that political evil has ascended: anti-Semitism, imperialism, and totalitarianism, which are also the titles of the essays in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that will be the main guide in this study. At the “Totalitarianism” chapter, she clarifies the tendencies that caused such a regime. One of them is democracy. She addresses two aspects of democracy: first, rather than being the rule of majority, democracy is a regime with a minority of people actively joining and controlling politics and a great number of people not taking part in government; second, in democracies, the masses could be easily sculpted by the ideology of the state. Therefore, democracy, according to Arendt, does not guarantee an atmosphere for the individual to develop free heterodox thinking and acting. Arendt claims that these two aspects of democracy are what caused totalitarianism to be successful. Thus, totalitarianism makes its way to the throne by using “democratic freedoms in order to abolish them” (Arendt, 1979: 312). In other words, totalitarianism gains power through democratic means, using the freedom bestowed

by democracy itself. It would be wrong to say, however, that Arendt blames democracy for providing a great extent of freedom to anyone; rather, she demonstrates that totalitarianism benefits from the right of having freedom based on the democratic laws of the constitution.

According to Arendt, the biggest “achievement” of totalitarianism is transforming citizens into masses. Peter Baehr explains what the masses are for Arendt: “They constitute the detritus of all social strata which have lost their former social identity and emotional bearings as a result of abrupt political, geopolitical and economic dislocation” (Baehr, 2007: 12). In postwar conditions, the masses were having a crisis over the great changes in their lives because of the terrifying consequences of the war throughout the world. They had no hopes for the future; therefore, they lived without heeding what tomorrow might bring. Here, then the masses as well as economic deterioration can be a product of totalitarianism.

Though the masses may be criticized for being unresponsive to everything, Arendt makes it clear that the masses that remain indifferent to the social and political environment is not an adequate motive that gave rise to totalitarianism.

Indifference to public affairs, neutrality on political issues, are in themselves not enough cause for the rise of totalitarian movements. The competitive and an acquisitive society of the bourgeoisie had produced apathy and even hostility toward public life not only, and not even primarily, in the social strata which were exploited and excluded from active participation in the rule of the country, but first of all in its own class. The long period of false modesty, when the bourgeoisie was content with being the dominating class in society without aspiring to political rule, which it gladly left to the aristocracy, was followed by the imperialist era, during which the bourgeoisie grew increasingly hostile to existing national institutions and began to claim and to organize itself for the exercise of political power. (Arendt, 1979: 313)

Then, as Arendt indicates, it is the imperialist era, when bourgeoisie spread and established its power over social and political institutions and became the politically dominating class, not the indifference of the masses that resulted in the postwar condition, especially in Europe. With the rise of the imperialist era, the ambitious and rapacious bourgeoisie seizes the power of utmost control while the other social segments were denied voice on political issues.

The masses gain the right of being a part of the community by birth. What designates a person's place in society, however, depended on the social status, the environment that one was born into or, as Arendt indicates, extreme luck that

changes it. As mentioned above, the masses with no contribution to the political decisions of the country, feel disconnected also from their values and traditions. It is one of the most noteworthy aspects of totalitarian movements to melt down the differences among social classes. When individuals are trapped within the boundaries defined by others, their choices, their sense of belonging that make individual identities possible also disappear. Finally, the class system falls.

The breakdown of the class system is one of the main causes of the emergence of totalitarianism. As Arendt puts it, most of the people are not able to join in labor and turn into a part of the “superfluous” mass. This superfluous mass is a conception that every totalitarian regime wants to achieve. By transforming people into a redundant group, totalitarianism aims to exclude the rights of citizenship so that it can apply its power easily. This leads individuals to become members of classless masses. Arendt explains that this occurrence also affects the political order; “The breakdown of the class system meant automatically the breakdown of the party system, chiefly because these parties, being the interest parties, could no longer represent class interests” (Arendt, 1979: 314). Since every political party is representative of class interests, with the disintegration of the class system, having a suitable voice to represent them becomes impossible.

Besides, Arendt reveals that the mass that is created by the hands of the totalitarian regime is atomized. In the process of time, the mass develops into a society in which there are only isolated individuals. They are people who do not belong anywhere and have no interest in the world because of the bleak experiences like war, poverty, and economic crisis. Such atomization radically changes the psychology of the masses in such a way that, according to Arendt, only self-centered bitterness and selflessness remain. The self-centered bitterness imbues individuals with agony because of the isolation that was built by the system. Selflessness, on the other hand, signifies that the individuals do not matter whatsoever; they are nothing but tools for the ideology.

Another distinguishing mark of totalitarian movements is that they expect unconditional loyalty from everyone. This great extent of loyalty is only attainable when individuals feel entirely isolated from the outer world. Arendt adds that “Total loyalty is possible when fidelity is emptied of all concrete content, from which

changes of mind might naturally arise” (Arendt, 1979: 324). It is suggested that total obedience to the totalitarian leader is required by the state, and it is done so by changing people's perspectives to the world giving people no other connection with the rest of the world.

As the masses depend on the totalitarian leader, the leader also relies upon the will of the masses. Hence, without the existence of the leader, there will be no representative of the nation who defends them against the inner and the outer threats while, without the support of the individuals, it will not be possible for the leader to hold onto his position of authority. In Arendt's words, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between the mass and the totalitarian leader, “Without the masses, the leader is nonentity” (Arendt, 1979: 325).

She also remarks not only the elite but also the mob, “the underworld of the bourgeois class” (Arendt, 1979: 337) that comes from a criminal underworld plays a significant role for the furtherance of the totalitarian ideology. In this newly formed totalitarianism, they gain the ability to be the new “bourgeoisie” feeling superior to everyone else. Although it is considered that the control over the masses is totalitarianism's only aim, the elite and the mob also fall under the totalitarian power. Especially, the mob connects the mass and the government just like a bridge. They become instrumental especially when and where other tools of propaganda do not suffice, and direct resort to violence is necessitated. For Arendt, the mass is “won by propaganda” (Arendt, 1979: 341). The propaganda is often associated with the so-called terror and violence that reign in “the nontotalitarian world.” In addition, totalitarianism does not abstain from using violence to those who do not conform to the policy of the government.

Perhaps, the most important tool of totalitarian regimes is propaganda. The propaganda presents a fictional world, offering an escape from reality. The masses, preoccupied with the desire to avoid the real world, take the offer without questioning. This rejection of reality is, in fact, an outcome of the feeling of loneliness and statelessness. The propaganda to which the masses were exposed destroys common sense that could potentially mobilize people in case of a collective act. Instead, the mass accepts being a part of this fictional world because this escape allows them to have self-respect and a sense of recognition by the state.

Arendt questions what would happen if this fictitious world that was created by the authority collapsed. She asserts that every kind of propaganda is doomed to be demolished by its own nature. Once the “fictitious world which shelters them is destroyed,” Arendt affirms, “the masses revert to their old status of isolated individuals who either happily accept a new function in a changed world or sink back into their old desperate superfluity” (Arendt, 1979: 363). Even the fanatics of the regime, when the old fiction disappears, stay fanatics if a new fiction replaces it. The masses are in a constant struggle for belonging somewhere, and now, they search for new possibilities that another newly established fiction suggests. They become a part of the future which grants a different prospect of life.

The masses observe only one totalitarian leader as he is the only one who is on the stage. It is always propagated that one supreme ruler is responsible for controlling the country as a singular power. However, it is not the case; a shapeless structure of power is in charge of the regulation. For Arendt, there is a type of government that is visible, ostensible, and a hidden one which plays its role behind the curtains. The co-existence of these different sorts of power, rather than one true leader, is what, in fact, dominates the citizens. Any ambiguity about who the real leader is, however, perplexes the supremacy of the leader in the eyes of the community. It should be also noted that the laws of the totalitarian movement claim that the will of the leader is the absolute law of the region. Nevertheless, the existence of the singular power in the totalitarian regime is out of the question.

The last part of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* covers the topic of ideology. As it is mentioned before, every totalitarian government needs an ideology to manipulate the masses. Ideologies bring some (pseudo-) scientific and philosophical thinking together and act as if they are a part of scientific philosophy. Arendt argues that ideologies do not deal with “being” but with “becoming” because they aim to create a change in the future of the country. Besides, she insists that all ideological thinking has three characteristics. First, all the ideologies are linked directly to history. It is required for the ideologies to show and include the process of total explanation on “all historical happenings, the total explanation of the past, the total knowledge of the present, and the reliable prediction of the future” (Arendt, 1979: 470). Second, ideological thinking is free from learning from experiences. It refuses

to take lessons from life experiences and helps to form a different reality connected to the fiction that the totalitarian movement creates. To construct a world of fiction, the experiences are ignored. Third, for all ideologies, there is an all-explanatory point of origin:

Ideological thinking orders facts into an absolutely logical procedure which starts from an axiomatically accepted premise, deducing everything else from it; that is, it proceeds with a consistency that exists nowhere in the realm of reality. Once it has established its premise, its point of departure, experiences no longer interfere with ideological thinking, nor can it be taught by reality. (Arendt, 1979: 471)

However, Arendt claims that such logical consistency is not possible since ideology is not created at a certain point of time and has no strict starting point. If the ideology is expected to change reality, the preliminary thing to do is to be able to figure out what reality is.

Arendt returns to her ideas on loneliness created by the regime again, but this time, she draws a line between isolation and loneliness. Isolation occurs when the ability that people who once used to act together in social sphere is taken away from them and their freedom to join the political sphere is destroyed. The common world that was shared by every individual is demolished and this makes the world insufferable. Arendt points out that:

This can happen in a world whose chief values are dictated by labor, that is where all human activities have been transformed into laboring. Under such conditions, only the sheer effort of labor which is the effort to keep alive is left and the relationship with the world as a human artifice is broken. Isolated man who lost his place in the political realm of action is deserted by the world of things as well, if he is no longer recognized as *homo faber* but treated as an *animal laborans* whose necessary "metabolism with nature" is of concern to no one. Isolation then becomes loneliness. (Arendt, 1979: 475)

After all various activities are turned into one activity, which is laboring, the relationship between humans and the world is destroyed. In addition to being isolated from political action, if people also lose their relation to things and are considered as *animal laborans*, they reach the level Arendt calls loneliness. Thus, the feeling of devastation due to loneliness can be observed in the societies in which the only value is laboring.

Arendt says that while isolation is related to the human beings in the political realm, loneliness concerns all fields of human life. A totalitarian leader aims to achieve both among the masses he rules. First, the feeling of isolation from the

political realm is created—by which citizens become parts of masses—so that the natural outcome, which is loneliness, will follow. A leader would not exist without destroying connections of the people in both the public and private realms of life. Totalitarian domination plans to capitalize on loneliness to make individuals feel desperate so that they can find meaning only in identifying themselves with the leader. Arendt, therefore, defines loneliness as the essence of the totalitarian government. Loneliness, arising out of the same round as terror, is firmly related to “uprootedness” and “superfluousness.” She argues that these two are the results of the industrial revolution, the rise of imperialism and the discrepancy between the political and social life which are the “curse[s] of the modern masses” (Arendt, 1979: 475).

As a witness to the cruelties of the Nazi regime, Hannah Arendt was interested in the issues that are brought by totalitarian governments. The bleak experiences of her time led her to think about oppressive rulers and their government. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is one of the celebrated works in terms of its revolutionary ideas about the totalitarian regimes and is an important guide to comprehend the role of the governments. In this book, Arendt questions the very reason for the occurrence of this system. She analyzes the roles of the masses, the mob and the elites in the totalitarian society revealing what each of them means in the eyes of the government. Arendt also presents many features of totalitarian movements and proves that totalitarian regimes focus on the loneliness, uprootedness, and isolation of masses as a result of being removed away not only from the political realm but from also the world of things. Similarly, these points can be observed in many dystopian works as dystopian worlds are ruled with a totalitarian regime. The elements of totalitarian governments, which Arendt pointed out, can be detected in Margaret Atwood's novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. In the light of her writings about such regimes, Margaret Atwood's presentation of a totalitarian regime will be analyzed in the next chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

MARGARET ATWOOD AND HER CREATION OF A TOTALITARIAN FEMINIST DYSTOPIA

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer who received the attention of millions with her groundbreaking novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* that was published in 1985. After 35 years, in 2019, she published *The Testaments*, the sequel to *The Handmaid*. Both books are feminist dystopias that take place in totalitarian regimes, which have caught the imaginations of readers with their presentation of a bleak new world which is *not* impossible for one to imagine oneself in. In both books Atwood describes the Gilead regime, established in the breakdown of the United States, as a dystopian totalitarian system of government, whose ideology is based especially on controlling women and reproduction. Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* touch on topics such as what it means to be living under a totalitarian regime, the restrictions, and prohibitions that women have to endure and how people are dehumanized through the practices of government. To comprehend the ideas that these books deliver, first of all, feminism and dystopias should be analyzed in detail.

2.1. FEMINISM

Feminism is a movement that appeared to defend the rights of women in every sphere of life. Its main attempt is to end sexist oppression. Although Feminism is thought to benefit women only, it intends to provide women with political and social rights without privileging women over men. Feminism concentrates on the experiences of all women, claiming that women have been victimized through ages. As Bell Hooks declares in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, patriarchy is an ideology which makes women believe they are worthless: “Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men” (Hooks, 1984: 43). The only way to feel valued as a woman is achieved only with attaching oneself to a man. Therefore, women’s value depends on the man or men she is attached to, and she is always better married than single and unattached. Since the private sphere is ruled by the husband, every

moment of a married woman's life and every inch of her body is under her husband's control. Women are not allowed to have their own lives and are expected to take care of the domestic work only. From patriarchal point of view, being married for a woman is a precious identity. However, it is not a quest for individual freedom.

The disregarding of women in the social sphere gave birth to the feminist movements. The First Wave feminism appeared between the nineteenth century and the early twentieth centuries. It promoted the property rights for women and the suffrage of women started to be discussed. Political activism increased especially after the world wars. The right to vote and to attend to the political field of life were demanded which was remarkably important. Even though for the first time, women broke the silence and raised their voices to take part in politics, this wave included white women of middle-class only. The struggles of white women were announced with protests while women in minority groups were left out. This is one of the main reasons of why feminism failed to gain more women supporters as it was considered a white bourgeois women's organization.

Women who belonged to minority groups and who were under oppression refused to be included in such a movement that was operated by the bourgeois. Some women did not want to take part in it because of the political connotation feminism once had, which was generally associated with radicalism while some of them correlated feminism with lesbianism and avoided it because of socially ingrained homophobia. Feminists are exposed to many misunderstandings in society. Hooks asserts in *Feminism is for Everybody* that:

Conservative mass media constantly represented feminist women as man-haters. And when there was an anti-male faction or sentiment in the movement, they highlighted it as a way of discrediting feminism. Embedded in the portrayal of feminists as man-hating was the assumption that all feminists were lesbians. Appealing to the homophobia, mass media intensified anti-feminist sentiment among men. Before contemporary feminist movement was less than 10 years old, feminist thinkers began to talk about the way in which patriarchy was harmful to men. Without changing our fierce critique of male domination feminist politics expanded to include the recognition that patriarchy stripped men of certain rights, imposing on them a sexist masculine ideology (Hooks, 2000: 67-68).

Mass media was an important tool to create such an impact on people about feminism. Depicted as "men-haters" by media, all feminists were conceived as lesbians with the undertone of homophobia. It is noteworthy that the hatred of the

male-dominated society not only announced feminists as the enemies and threats to the societal order, but they also fit men in boundaries of their own. Mass media, here, is responsible for forming an idea not only concerning women, but also concerning men, forcing both to obey the rules of patriarchy, as well as, feeding the growing hatred against the feminist movement by turning women into foes.

Like the First Wave, The Second Wave feminism started as a white bourgeois women's movement. It occurred during the 1960s and 1980s. It is during this phase that the issues pertaining to the private realm began to be seen as relevant to women's oppression. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is often cited as the first influential book that marked its start. It showed that the lives of middle-class white women were far from perfect as they were condemned to a total silence. She pointed out that women watch men behind the bars of their cage called home while men achieve victory in their workplaces. Friedan analyzed the different roles and experiences of the male and female and the meaning of the private and public spheres for women. She sternly criticized that women are expected to find happiness only by means of their husbands and children, and this was what caused loss of identity for women. This is not only a private issue that concerns the family but also a broader one which enlarges and becomes a part of something bigger that is related with the politics and the societal order on which the patriarchy forces its tools. Taking their cue from this here, cultural feminists' focal point is on the discrimination between the sexes in the private realm and family. One of the most outstanding slogans of feminism came out in this era which is "personal is political." The phrase became popular when Carol Hanisch published the essay called "Personal is Political." With the motto of "personal is political," the division between the public sphere of the state and the private sphere of home was introduced. Feminists argued that this division gave birth to the separation of women from the public sphere which excludes women from politics. While men are considered as citizens of the state, women are forced to exist only in private area as housewives and mothers. During the second wave, it was announced that the issues in the private realm are political. The motto of the wave takes its origin from the problems of the women who are suppressed at home. Feminists thought that private and bodily issues such as childbearing, giving birth, abortion, and childcare should be considered political

because all of them are the factors of the alienation and oppression of the women in the society. Socialist feminists, who contribute the idea that class and liberation of women are deeply connected, are also parts of this movement.

Third Wave feminism, on the other hand, is a reaction against the second wave as it excluded women of color in the West and all the women who live outside Western nations. Brence states that “This wave breaks the boundaries of the definitions coined by the second wave, re-examining the concepts of femininity, gender and sexuality as well as questioning whether the second wave paradigms are universally good for all females” (Brence, 2019). Third Wave feminists do not analyze the issue of woman from a universal point of view as the second wave feminists do. They claim that the experiences of upper middle-class white women are exceedingly emphasized by the second wave feminists. Yet, the Third Wave feminists recognize the experiences of all women as intersectional. Snyder states that:

Third-Wave feminists rightly reject the universalist claim that all women share a set of common experiences, but they do not discard the concept of experience altogether. Women still look to personal experiences to provide knowledge about how the world operates and to trouble dominant narratives about how things should be. (Snyder, 2008: 184)

Class, race, ethnicity, and nationality are important factors when feminism is discussed since not all experiences of women can be compared to each other, for Third Wave feminists. Personal experiences matter in the way of perceiving the world and figuring out how dominant narratives work.

The topic was not subjected to an in-depth discussion in the above-mentioned waves in the feminist movement was the case of women under totalitarianism. However, totalitarian regimes are by no means things of the past; there are such women who still have to fight for their rights and freedoms under such regimes. Whether it is a democratic country or a totalitarian one, both these regimes, being patriarchally coded in human history and experience so far, degrade women while depriving them of their basic human rights, albeit to differing degrees. In *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, this issue is in question: Offred, who is placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, Daisy, who is “found” and cherished by Gilead, and Aunt Lydia, who is at the top of the system are given voices while their different

types of struggles are displayed through their speeches. In the books, it is demonstrated that when women with diverse statuses unite, the devaluation of women by patriarchy can come to an end someday.

2.2. FEMINISM AND DYSTOPIA

With the rise of the feminist movements, feminism has shown itself in literature with also the dystopian genre. To fully comprehend the mechanism of dystopia, it is significant to know what utopia is. The word utopia comes from the Greek word “eutopia” which means good place. Utopias present perfect places where people live in harmony and peace. Utopias take place in a distant place and/or future. Peace, happiness, and equal opportunity are concepts that belong to the utopian societies. The main message of utopian writing is that there is an alternative way of living a life and the destiny of living a good life is in the hands of citizens whether such life becomes real by voting for an honest and trustworthy leader and being a responsible citizen to one's country. Therefore, it offers a positive outlook for what may happen in the future.

Dystopias are the exact opposites of utopias. They depict a place where everything is terrifying and abominable. The events may take place in a post-apocalyptic environment when the world as we know it has come to an end and life is threatened by hostile forces both from nature and humans. Sometimes dystopias are of political nature. The governmental system in such dystopias is almost always strict and oppressive. The citizens do not have any human rights; therefore, they are under constant surveillance of the government. People have no choice but to obey the rules. Otherwise, they would face with the death penalty. These dystopian places are run by propaganda that is presented to the citizens in their daily lives.

Further, feminist dystopias compound the dynamics of feminism and dystopia and create a vision of future that feminists dread, one that is ruled by the most oppressive and excessive patriarchal norms whose practices are brutal. Feminist dystopias are often inspired by totalitarian regimes since such regimes cause additional sufferings for women. Totalitarian feminist dystopias call attention to the oppression of women under male domination. In feminist dystopias which are set in

a totalitarian state, silencing the voices is the primary tool of the state in order to keep people from communicating the injustices so that every individual is left isolated and helpless. Totalitarianism is then found in almost every social arrangement where individuals cannot freely voice the circumstances that bind them. Margaret Atwood talks about the totalitarian regime's dynamics in "An End to Audience."

In any totalitarian takeover, whether from the left or the right, writers, singers, and journalists are the first to be suppressed. After that come the union leaders and the lawyers and judges. The aim of all such suppression is to silence the voice, abolish the word, so that the only voices and words left are those of the ones in power. Elsewhere, the word itself is thought to have power; that's why so much trouble is taken to silence it. (Atwood, 1980: 427)

Words are powerful, so they are thought to be threats against any totalitarian social order. Silence of the people with differing opinions is necessary to keep the government alive. Therefore, in order to silence the voices, suppressing people is a must. The process of oppression takes its starting point from suppressing journalists whose work is to provide information and to shape the future of the country. This is the essence of totalitarianism displayed with dystopian fictions. In her books *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, Atwood presents a dystopian world called Gilead where people are ruled with theocracy that limits especially the actions of women. Atwood's emphasis on women qualifies both books as feminist dystopias.

In feminist dystopias, the narrators are almost always women. While in *The Handmaid's Tale* it is Offred who tells her story of her transformation of being a Handmaid and providing flashbacks to her old life, in *The Testaments*, there are three narrators, Agnes, Aunt Lydia and Daisy. The use of female voices offers the audiences to have a better outlook to the issues of women. As the narrators in both books provide their feelings about the totalitarian regime, the narrative as a whole gives an insight into what it feels like to live as a woman under a totalitarian government. They depict the bleak environment where people who are against the ideology of the government are murdered, and women are classified according to their roles and functions in society. As in every dystopic world, in Gilead, there is a cold, strange and unknown atmosphere that breeds an uncomfortable feeling within the readers' mind.

The lack of sisterhood is highly emphasized throughout feminist dystopias. Some women are also blamed for the current system of oppressive patriarchal order. For instance, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Serena Joy, who is a Wife—the highest role a woman can occupy in the domestic sphere—in Gilead, had given speeches before the fundamentalist regime took over. The speeches advocated that women had no active part to play for the sake of society outside the domestic sphere. Offred marks the irony in Serena's position as a woman who had been extremely active in the public domain, but who later received what she preached: "Her speeches were about the sanctity of home, how women should stay at home. Serena Joy didn't do this herself, she made speeches instead, but she presented this failure of hers as a sacrifice she was making for the good of all" (Atwood, 2017: 55). Although Serena herself did not apply the idea she was supporting in her life, she gave this message on TV feeding the ideology of the government, yet to come. Nevertheless, like every woman in Gilead, Serena Joy was also silenced: "She doesn't make speeches any more. She has become speechless" (Atwood, 2017: 56); because her words are taken seriously now, she has lost her voice. Serena, herself a woman, should have been one of the first supporters of women's right and freedom as someone who had voice on air. However, her words led all women including her to be miserable. As such, Atwood sheds light on how the way to Gilead has been gradually paved by everyone except a few of US feminists who tried in vain to warn people.

Atwood demonstrates that the system in Gilead functions by destroying the ties of sisterhood further so much so that every woman not only lives in isolation but also feels lonely and helpless as part of a mass. After the totalitarian government was formed, it may seem to the readers that there are women in Gilead who find their only worth in contributing to the male ideology by showing no support to one another. Whatever suffering or wrong women may face, they find no support from their sisters at large; instead, their victimhood is blamed on them alone. Janine, for instance, was gang-raped at the age of fourteen and had an abortion. In a ceremony where a fake sense of unity is attempted among the Handmaids, Aunt Helena asks whose fault this is, and the women answer, "her fault" and "she did," and God did this "to teach her a lesson" (Atwood, 2017: 82).

Nevertheless, the case of the Handmaids is somewhat different from Serena Joy's. Even if these women blame Janine for getting raped, they should not be blamed for voluntary lack of sisterhood. Since totalitarian regimes crash resistance to authority and the feeling of unity in community, they employ varying methods of brainwashing, resulting in normalizing the cases where it is only right to accuse Janine of getting raped. Those who will not be part of this chorus, like Moira, Offred's closest friend from her past, are already eliminated or marginalized. Lack of sisterhood, in this case, is a result of the oppressive exercises of the government of Gilead, such as brainwashing the masses by using the ideological tools such as propaganda.

In this dystopic world, women are not only silenced but in fact dehumanized through the actions of the patriarchal order. Gilead is ruled by the Commanders who are males. In *The Testaments*, Commander Judd states that "Society is best served by separate spheres for men and women" and continues "We have seen the disastrous results of the attempt to melt those spheres" (Atwood, 2019: 174). The current ruling system does not approve of such equality and claims that the distinct spheres of men and women should be determined. In dystopic societies, the problem of inequality is stretched so far that at one end, women fall beyond the pale of humanity and human rights. Women in fact become auxiliaries in a world at the center of which the interests of a handful of males dominate with the concentric circles of other males of gradually lessening importance. In this scale, women are reduced to mere tools to reproduce. The dehumanization of the Handmaids can be observed especially in the practice of giving birth. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred had perceived her body as something that served her own ends, "an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of *my will*" (Atwood, 2017: 83; emphasis added). Later, her view changes as "Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, *congealed around a central object*, the shape of a pear... Every month there is a moon, gigantic, round, heavy, and an omen" (Atwood, 2017: 84; emphases added). As a Handmaid, Offred's physical being is transitioned from her own instrument of pleasure and transportation to a being that exists for something other than herself; she is simply a shell that wraps around an embryo. Women are thus objectified and are valued only by their capability to bear

children. They are treated as “seeds” and “trees” that bear their fruit for others (Atwood, 2017: 28), but never beings that have an intrinsic value to exist.

The change from the United States to the totalitarian Gilead, where women are silenced and dehumanized does not happen instantly. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred says that “Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it” implying that the alteration in the social order comes without making it too obvious and adds;

There were stories in the newspapers, of course, corpses in ditches or the woods, bludgeoned to death or mutilated, interfered with as they used to say, but they were about other women, and the man who did such things to other men. None of them were the men we knew. The newspaper stories were like dreams to us, bad dreams dreamt by others. How awful, we would say and they were, but they were awful without being believable. They were too melodramatic, they had a dimension that was not the dimension of our lives. (Atwood, 2017: 66)

Despite all the evidence people had refused to believe that something had been slowly changing because the readers of such news often perceive themselves as exempt from such violence and when it already reaches them, they are not readers but victims of a faraway story for yet other readers who think of themselves as exempt and protected. Aunt Lydia in *The Testaments* says: “You don't believe the sky is falling until a chunk of it falls on you” (Atwood, 2019: 66), and this summarizes the citizens' lack of sensitivity.

Psychological conflict is a natural outcome of the drastic change as they now live in an oppressive environment that requires full obedience. Offred has to tread on extremely thin ice when she begins to play board games with the Commander and starts a sexual affair with Nick. In both cases, Offred seems to be the most expendable character. She is normally not to be in the presence of the Commander without the Wife, but when he asks her to his room and offers her small presents and suggests playing games together, she can never be sure of his real intentions. She also takes the risk of being caught by Serena Joy, in which case her execution is inevitable. With Nick, the danger is even bigger. Although Serena Joy arranges their first meeting in order to help her get pregnant, Offred takes multiple risks: She can never be sure whether Serena is doing this to trap and get rid of her; also, she cannot

help wondering if Nick is a member of the secret police called “the Eyes.” Under such circumstances she learns to be wary of every possible sign that might endanger her as her whole life turns into a psychological game for survival.

For younger characters in *The Testaments*, born into Gilead, not survival per se but keeping one’s psychological well-being becomes a major problem. After learning that the Commander Kyle and Tabitha are not her real parents, Agnes starts to express her feelings:

I felt belief creeping up through my body like a paralysis. The story Tabitha used to tell, about rescuing me and running away from the evil witches—it was partly true. But it hadn't been Tabitha's hand I'd been holding, it had been the hand of my real mother—my real mother—my real mother, the slut. And it wasn't witches chasing us, it was men. (Atwood, 2019: 85)

Her world is shattered when Agnes learns that she was told a story that was not real, and her real mother is a Handmaid. She wants to blame Tabitha for making up a story and hiding a secret but at the same time, she exclaims that Tabitha “chose” her and “cherished her.” Experiencing a life-changing confusion, afterwards, in contrast to what Tabitha had said before, she sees herself as “Tabitha's project” (Atwood, 2019: 85). Her inner conflict grows and changes her perspective of herself. Agnes faces the same traumatic experience and learns that she is not the person she thinks. “There was another void opening in reality: Neil and Melanie were fading, changing shape. I realized I didn't know much about them really, about their past... Nobody ever asks their parents much about themselves, do they?” (Atwood, 2019: 131). The absence of intimate bond is one of the main characteristics of a dystopian society. Intimacy is not allowed; thus, it is destroyed as it can raise the sense of unity among people.

The last part of *The Handmaid's Tale*, “Historical Notes” is put to set the tone of a dystopian society. Ketterer analyzes this part in “Margaret Atwood's ‘The Handmaid's Tale’: A Contextual Dystopia” as such: “The immediate effect of the ‘Historical Notes’ is to appraise the reader of the ‘fact’ that he or she has all along been fictively situated in this post-Gilead future” (Ketterer, 1989: 212). In dystopias, readers are made deeply aware of the fact that nothing that happens in the book is a far possibility and every part of that horrific world can appear at any moment. Dystopias, in fact, tell us more about our present reality than a faraway future or past. They give us warnings that what we turn a blind eye today might be the beginning of

a huge dystopia tomorrow. They thus alert us to the realities that are rendered invisible and insignificant in our real present world. Dystopian writers hope that their words will be taken seriously as even the things that are seen unlikely can take place in any time.

Totalitarian feminist dystopias have a bleak atmosphere where people's public and private lives are kept under continuous scrutiny by an oppressive regime, rendering every individual isolated, lonely, exchangeable, and replaceable. This kind of dystopia offers a feminist vision of what would happen if the patriarchy had expanded its authority over women until no sphere of existence is left for them. Rather than showing a certain group of people responsible for oppression, like most feminist dystopias, Atwood's novels also show that without patriarchy as a system no oppression on women could be established. In the oppressive regime of dystopias, women are expected to conform to the expectation of the ideology whether it is done so by serving the country with their bodies by means of their reproductive capabilities or staying at home concerning themselves only with domestic work. The writers of this genre try to warn the readers to stay awake against the events to which they are somehow indifferent. Dystopias "allow readers to draw comparisons between their own lived experiences and the dystopic world, and to postulate about the conditions in the society in which they live that might lead to the future represented in the dystopian narrative" (Holladay and Classen, 2019: 5). No one can ever know what will happen tomorrow since sometimes change comes so slowly that it is not easy to observe. If a little change from above bothers people, they should raise their voices and show a reaction because bigger changes can take place in society only if there is silence in the face of small ones. Delivering this message, Margaret Atwood's novels *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* give the readers the perfect examples of totalitarian feminist dystopias with their critique of the ways of the totalitarian government towards women by depicting the bleak atmosphere of what it feels like to live under such oppressive system.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF THE TOTALITARIAN REGIME IN ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* AND *THE TESTAMENTS*

3.1. THE AUTHORITY IN GILEAD

The Gilead society is ruled by the laws of totalitarianism and like any other totalitarian society, Gilead also includes different social classes defined by the government. The men in Gilead are categorized according to their functions in the state, such as the secret police, the Eyes, the Angels, the Guards, and the Commanders. At the zenith of this hierarchy, the Commanders are at the top of the social strata, having the responsibility of controlling the country. The social hierarchy in Gilead distributes different roles to its women such as the Aunts who are older women who observe and train younger women. As authority figures, the role of the Aunts is to organize the social order among women while the Commanders are responsible for much larger mission that involves the general situation of the state.

The Commanders work as lawmakers, politicians, and army commanders. Because of their high position, they can have a Wife and a Handmaid who is supposed to give birth to a child—a child that the Wife is incapable of having—that will be part of the system as well. In *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, the roles of the Commanders and their functions in the totalitarian system can be observed through their actions, speeches and but especially their relationships with the Aunts.

The Commanders and the Aunts co-work in the process of establishing control in Gilead. While the Commanders deal with more serious issues like setting and establishing rules and regulating social order, the Aunts are responsible for regulating domestic activities. They are in charge of teaching the Handmaids what their responsibilities are and punishing the ones that revolt against the authority. The head of the Aunts is Aunt Lydia who is a well-respected Aunt among the Commanders. As Gilead is known for its oppressive exercises upon women, it is surprising that “a powerful woman,” who knows the way that the government works, exists within the boundaries of this totalitarian regime. In *The Testaments*, the

readers have a chance to hear the voice of Aunt Lydia as she is one of the narrators in the book. She expresses the reasons for her “political longevity”:

First, the regime needs me. I control the women's side of their enterprise with an iron fist in a leather glove in a woolen mitten, and I keep things orderly: like a harem eunuch, I am uniquely placed to do so. Second, I know too much about the leaders—too much dirt— and they are uncertain as to what I may have done with it in the way of documentation. If they string me up, will that dirt somehow be leak? They might well suspect I've taken backup precautions, and they would be right. Third, I am discreet. Each one of the top men has always felt that his secrets are safe with me; but—as I've made obliquely clear— only so long as I myself am safe. I have long been a believer in checks and balances. (Atwood, 2019: 62)

Because of the strict separation of men and women in social life, there has to be a connection to reach women, and the only way for this to happen is through the Aunts. As being the head of them, Lydia says that she regulates the lives of women and compares her “workplace” to a harem, depicting herself as a eunuch who keeps everything under control. Having been earlier a family court judge, she asserts that she knows much about how leaders work. As an experienced judge who worked in government offices in the past Aunt Lydia, she saw the dirty work of the leaders, and as she now stands as the head of the Aunts privy to some of the secret workings and some documents of the state, the leaders of Gilead fear that she might reveal how corrupted the government. The leaders, on the other hand, know that their secrets will be “safe” as long as Lydia is safe. She, then, says she believes in checks and balances or a version of them in Gilead. In totalitarian regimes, checks and balances as we know them in democratic societies cannot be applied because the system is based on the unquestionable authority of the leader(s). Therefore, in Gilead there is no governmental or non-governmental body to check and control the workings of the system on behalf of the citizens. Aunt Lydia, seemingly affirming to be a supporter of such a system, owes her survival to her knowledge of secret workings behind the scenes in which almost everyone at the top of the Gileadean authority engages. When the citizens have no rights and formal representation to check and balance the power of the state, they manage to take matters into their own hands and create their individual means of checks and balances.

The picture of Aunt Lydia in *The Testaments* provides insights into her personal struggle with Gilead. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, however, Aunt Lydia is

depicted as a strict teacher by Offred without providing any additional information about what condition she has been in. She is portrayed as a cruel character who gives lectures on how to be a Handmaid in Gilead. At the beginning of this newly formed regime, Aunt Lydia normalizes the current oppressive exercise of the government to keep the Handmaids calm. Offred states that: “Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary” (Atwood, 2017: 43). Aunt Lydia makes the Handmaids sure that long usage will make the new situation become natural and that their present resistance and negative point of view to this way of living will change after some time.

Aunt Lydia’s words and actions express how more easily totalitarian regimes keep resistance under control the longer they establish themselves. Totalitarian systems operate by normalization and internalization of the oppression by the oppressed. Arendt remarks in *Portable*: “What totalitarian ideologies therefore aim at is not the transformation of the outside world or the revolutionizing transmutation of the society, but the transformation of the human nature itself” (Arendt, 2000: 139). The transformation of human nature is provided with the normalization of the new lifestyle which occurs when oppressive regimes control the citizens by using hidden or open threats, terror and violence until they admit their new conditions as given. Otherwise, they would have to confront to death penalty. Terror is therefore the essence of totalitarian regimes. For instance, Aunt Lydia talks about the first days of Gilead and how she and other Aunt candidates were treated badly and forced to live under terrible unclean conditions: “They were reducing us to animals—to penned-up animals—to our animal nature. We were to consider ourselves subhuman” (Atwood, 2019: 143). The figures of authority deprived them of basic necessities such as cleaning and eating. Aunt Lydia adds, “You would be amazed how important such things become—basics that you’ve taken for granted, that you’ve barely thought about until they’re removed from you” (Atwood, 2019: 143). Not only has the authority deprived women of daily necessities of life, but also, they force women to attend the executions and teach them how things work in this new regime. The Gilead authority, once again, uses terror to get their way.

Arendt comments on terror in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as: “Terror as the execution of a law of movement whose ultimate goal is not the welfare of men or the interest of one man but the fabrication of mankind, eliminates individuals for the sake of the species, sacrifices the “parts” for the sake of the ‘whole’” (Arendt, 1979: 465). All totalitarian regimes aim at one common target, which is the elimination of these “parts.” For example, Moira, Offred’s friend, was a rebel figure. Offred compares her to “an elevator with open sides” as in this totalitarian state, she is what the authority calls “a loose woman” (Atwood, 2017: 143). Later, Offred and Moira come across in the Jezebel’s. Offred recognizes the great change of Moira as she is indifferent to what has been happening to her, Offred remarks her disappointment: “I don't want her to be like me. Give in, go along, save her skin. That is what it comes down to. I want gallantry from her, swashbuckling, heroism, single-handed combat. Something I lack” (Atwood, 2017: 260). As a rebel, Moira is also silenced. The readers cannot get a chance to what really happened or what will happen to her. Offred reveals “I don't know how she ended, or even if she did, because I never saw her again” (Atwood, 2017: 262). There are two choices for the rebels; either they have to obey to the role that were given to them or to face with death penalty. In both cases, the “others” are repressed or removed. With the removal of these parts which refuse to serve the leadership, one type of human being is aimed to achieve. To have one true community, in which no different thoughts are allowed, the “parts” or the “others” are killed for the sake of the so-called perfect future of state. Terror is the tool of the totalitarian leader to eliminate the unfitting parts. Gilead, similarly, is driven with this understanding of terror used as a tool for oppressing people. In order to raise terror, the Gileadean regime does not refrain from violence.

The use of violence can be observed through Offred’s the narration. As a woman that has agreed to become a part of the whole as a Handmaid, Offred is rather an observer of direct violence rather than its primary target; she is one of those intended to “learn” from the examples of others who were eliminated by the system. On their way home from All Flesh, Offred and Ofglen see the dead bodies hanging on the wall. She declares that:

Beside the main getaway there are six more bodies hanging, by their necks, their hands tied in front of them, their heads in white bags tipped sideways onto their shoulders. There must have been a Men's Salvaging early this morning. I didn't hear the bells. Perhaps I've become used to them. (Atwood, 2017: 41-42)

In Gilead, the state maintains its authority over the people like Offred indirectly with examples. Salvagings are among such indirect examples that teach what to avoid if one does not want to have the same fate. Men's/Women's Salvagings are the executions of the people who are opposed to the ideology of the government. Their dead bodies are exhibited to the masses to remind them that rebellion results in death. The bell is rung to announce to the people the death of the rioters so that everybody who hears this announcement can gather to the scene where the executed bodies of rioters are exhibited. Offred notices that now the sounds of bells have become so much part of her daily life that she does not even hear them. She begins to move in robotic regularity rather than with her initial terror. These and similar other changes in human habit and perception are carved by authority. The authorities' such tamperings with the human nature are observed in the growing indifference of the masses towards the routinized violent events of daily life. This change causes something much bigger: the transformation of all social life.

Such banalization of violence results in indifference. How it creates indifference is also important to comprehend the way that the totalitarian government works. Destroying human emotions gives rise to the impassivity in people. Common sense is lost at the hands of the totalitarian system as it means the ability to decide what is right or wrong. The supreme authority forces people to accept its rules by leaving them no choice but to obey without judging the morality of the conduct of the government. Arendt reveals that "[c]ommon sense trained in utilitarian thinking is helpless against this ideological supersense, since totalitarian regimes establish a functioning world of no-sense" (Arendt, 2000: 138). Sense as the prerogative of the regime alone becomes monopolized as supersense, the ideology, while ordinary people are deprived of their common sense. Common sense, which, defined by utilitarian thinking, is directed to maximize happiness and to minimize or remove sufferings, is opposed to the aims of totalitarianism as totalitarian regimes desire to create a "world of no-sense." Since emotions are part of human nature, totalitarian regimes put prohibitions and take strict measures to prevent its citizens from feeling something.

In Gilead, no human bonds are allowed to exist; this is most obvious especially among the Handmaids. It is the essential center of the Handmaid's duty to

give birth to children. Yet, even the most fundamental tie that binds mother and child becomes violated in their case because Handmaids are removed from the houses where their children will be raised soon as soon as the babies stop breastfeeding. As mothers who cannot bond with raise their children as their most fundamental right, the Handmaids live in a double bind: if they cannot give birth, they will be announced Unwomen and sent to the colonies of toxic waste, and if they give birth, they will suffer the loss of their babies.

When the children grow up, they also suffer from being raised without their real mothers. While babies they are taken away from their families without knowing who their real parents are. For instance, in *The Testaments*, Agnes is introduced as a girl who was born into the regime. Later in the novel, she learns that her parents are not her real mother and father and thinks about the possibility that their Handmaid at the time of her birth could be her real mother. Since the Handmaids' names are changed when they are transported to a new house and they get new names based on their new Commanders' names, Agnes has practically no trace of her birth mother. She asks about her to Zilla, the Martha, wondering if she is still alive since she knows that her mother rebelled against the rules and Zilla thinks this would not be the case since the authority would not hurt a woman whose body is reproductive and guesses Agnes's real mother's situation: "Oh, I'm sure they changed her mind... They're good at that. Hearts and minds—they change them" (Atwood, 2019: 90). It is emphasized once again that totalitarian regimes try to change human nature by using oppressive tools. The intimate feeling between a mother and a child is destroyed by their compulsory separation. After learning this truth, Agnes perceives the new Handmaid, Ofkyle, differently. As her real mother is probably a Handmaid, she now thinks about the possibility of this new Handmaid being her mother. Worried, Agnes remarks that:

Who was she really? And what if *she* was my missing mother? I knew this was make-believe, but I was so *lonely*; I liked to think of how things would be if it were true. We would fling ourselves into each other's arms, we would hug each other, we would be so happy to have found each other again... But then what? I had no version of what might happen after that, though I had a dim idea that it would be trouble. (Atwood, 2019: 92; emphasis added)

Even if she thinks that there is not a chance that Ofkyle is her mother, she prefers thinking as such and starts to imagine what they would do if that was the case. She

dreams of this impossible situation because she feels “lonely.” This statement itself proves that the totalitarian Gilead regime is successful. Totalitarianism turns people into an isolated atom in a mass which causes the loss of identity. “What makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one's own self” (Arendt, 1979: 477). Loneliness is not the same as isolation; unlike the lonely individual, “[t]he solitary man ... is alone and therefore ‘can be together with himself’ since men have the capacity of ‘talking with themselves.’ In solitude, in other words, I am ‘by myself,’ together with my self” (Arendt, 1979: 477). Denied a self to begin with, being with oneself is a total impossibility for the lonely individual.

Similarly, Gilead destroys everything that can remind people of their past life including their names. Reminiscent of the past, birth names are no longer allowed to be used, and a new name, affixed to a male's, is appointed to emphasize the status of being possessed by a male which uproots causes women from their earlier identities, relationships, and experiences. Thus, by the elimination of feelings of attachment among people through isolation, the aim of the totalitarian regime is achieved.

Gilead is depicted as a society that any kind of intimate relationship is forbidden. The relationships are altered, and romantic affairs are strictly prohibited. Wives and Commanders receive a Handmaid to their home so that they could have a child. All recreational sexual activity is frowned upon, for the only purpose of sex is taken to be reproduction. Therefore, the only acceptable and permissible sexual relationship between a Commander and a Handmaid is when they try for a baby in the presence of the Wife. Reduced to reproduction, sexual activity lacks any and all expressions of affection since there is no emotional bond between the partners. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred asserts that: “The sexual act, although he performed in a perfunctory way, must have been largely unconscious, for him, like scratching himself” (Atwood, 2017: 169). Sex has no meaning, thus mechanized and it is done only to produce babies, not for pleasure. Offred explains this lack of emotions as: “...nobody dies from lack of sex. It's lack of love we die from” (Atwood, 2017: 113). Even the Commander, at some point, tells Offred that he wants her to kiss him (Atwood, 2017: 149), and it reveals the need for affection on the part of the Commander as well.

Games and other activities that humans perform for pleasure and pure entertainment serve to establish ties between them. They function as social glue that holds a social unit together. In this dystopian world, ruled by a totalitarian government, activities for entertainment, that are left from the previous regime, are also forbidden. Despite this restriction, it is exposed that the Commander still has a board game called Scrabble. He offers Offred to play with him. Offred comments:

My presence here is illegal. It is forbidden for us to be alone with the Commanders. We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary; everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. There is supposed to be nothing, entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the flowering of secret lusts; no special favours are to be wheeled, by them or us, there are to be no footholds for love. We are two-legged wombs, that's all; sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices. (Atwood, 2017: 146)

In Gilead there should be absolutely nothing entertaining or pleasurable about the Handmaids; they are perceived as “two-legged wombs,” “sacred vessels” that are responsible only for bearing children, and “ambulatory chalices” who are sent from one home to another in order to bring a baby to families. As their mere purpose is to breed, they are not left alone with Commanders since a relationship based on some form of emotion or pleasure can bloom between them. When Commander Fred starts secret get-togethers with Offred for games, he is breaking the law that he was probably instrumental in enforcing, but this breaking of laws arises out of the human need for human company.

Anything that involves the slightest hint of human interaction is forbidden in the Handmaid's lives. Daily conversations between Handmaids are reduced to some stock phrases that reveal nothing about the state of the speaker. Likewise, the activity of reading and writing is prohibited, too. “Gilead simplifies and manipulates language, eliminates the written word where possible, generates its own forms of New-speak, debars women from writing” (Stilman and Johnson, 1994: 72-73). Gilead authorities are aware of the power of words, so the rulers take precautions by outlawing reading and writing since these activities can provide a possible means of communication in case of a rebellion to the authority. Yet, because the state needs to use some means of communication to employ in its own propaganda, the authorities in Gilead cannot totally leave other means of language.

Despite the prohibition against written language and the propagation of orality, in certain ways Gilead resorts to strategies which, in the broadest sense, are allied with literacy. The spectrum ranges from pictographs to graffiti, as well as the use of written signs as magical and religious instruments of power. The totalitarian Gilead bans the public use of written signs. Yet the regime cannot completely do without visual signs for the transfer of information to and among women. (Klarer, 1995: 136)

With the banning of written language, Gilead has chosen to use signs to specify the stores on the streets. These images can be regarded as a way of communication as well as a written language because both usages have a message to deliver to people. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred talks about a store:

The store [where clothes are ordered] has a huge wooden sign outside it, in the shape of a golden lily; Lilies of the Field, it's called. You can see the place, under the lily, where the lettering was painted out, when they decided that even the names of the shops were too much temptation for us. Now places are known by their signs alone. (Atwood, 2017: 34-35)

Because of its great potential to play with meaning, undermine authority and the varieties it offers in communicating meaning and messages, the particular verbal language, however, is never equaled by other symbolic ways of communication. Words are powerful because they can cause and “tempt” the people of Gilead to think and evaluate the actions happening in Gilead; therefore, reading and writing are prohibited by the authority. However, as it is a newly formed regime, there are people who can read and write in Gilead. One day, Offred finds some writing carved into the closet floor in her room: “*Nolite de bastardes carborundorum*,” which means “do not let the bastards bring you down.” She treats this writing as a religious message because it gives her strength, it ties her with the other person who wrote it and gives her continually interrupted uprooted life a sense of continuity. Even though she at first has no idea about its meaning, later, she expresses that: “Still, it was a message, and it was in writing, forbidden by that very fact, and it hadn't yet been discovered. Except by me, for whom it was intended. It was intended for whoever came next” (Atwood, 2017: 62). The writing she finds is written to carry a message or a voice. It is significant for her to find it even though Offred has initially no clue about the meaning because at that moment, she notices the writing, she becomes a reader of someone whom she does not know. To be able to read in such an oppressive environment that bans every action that requires reading and writing,

these words turn into something precious as they give the taste of freedom through the process of reading.

The fact that although Gilead is ruled with the principles of theocracy, even going to the graveyard is not very appropriate because the gravestones include writing. In *The Testaments*, Agnes asserts that there are the names of the dead on stones which can “lead to reading and then to depravity” (Atwood, 2019: 156).

Since reading leads to moral corruption, only the morally strong can learn it. Aunts are among the handful of women who can legally read and write because they are thought to be different than any other people, and this ability of the Aunts leads to the downfall of this totalitarian regime. The Aunts are responsible for carrying out the administrative duties which require reading and writing. The second generation of Aunts is provided by some of the daughters in the houses of Generals and Wives. Agnes, who chooses the path to be an Aunt, describes how a young girl receives a calling by a divine power:

Aunt Estée had said once that you needed to have a calling that told you God wanted you to help all women and not just a single family; but how did the Aunts get that calling? How had they received their strength? Did they have special brains, neither female nor male? Were they even women at all underneath their uniforms? Could they possibly be men in disguise? Even to suspect such a thing was unthinkable, but what a scandal if so! (Atwood, 2019: 156)

Although women in general are perceived as weak creatures whose morality cannot be upheld once exposed to reading or writing, Aunts are thought to be morally powerful due to the “calling” they get. Therefore, they can be trusted with the written word. This calling includes a divine invitation to take part in the work of the government and to help the other families rather than helping the husband and a small family. Men, on the other hand, are equipped not only with a “big” brain but also with stronger moral fiber that can resist the temptations hidden in reading and writing. Therefore, that there are some women with such abilities and authority is so surprising for Agnes that she thinks the possibility of the Aunts being men since among other capacities, Aunts can access many secrets through reading and writing. Aunts may seem an anomaly in a system where women are categorically denied knowledge, but because the content of their work deals with the female body and its workings, a site which no man in Gilead can enter, as a select group they serve a

liminal space between the secrets of patriarchy and of the female body. Agnes speculates that because of the power they hold, it would be so scandalous if they were men.

The teaching of reading and writing to the prospective Aunts are strictly planned so that the candidate will not be immediately exposed to dangerous context. When Agnes is accepted to be an Aunt, she starts to learn and practice reading with the “Dick and Jane” books written by Aunt Vidala. She quotes:

Just look at Tirzah! She sits there,
With her strands of vagrant hair;
See her down the sidewalk stride,
Head held high and full of pride.
See her catch the Guardian’s glance
Tempt him to sinful circumstance.
Never does she change her way,
Never does she kneel to pray!
Soon she into sin will fall,
And then be hanging on the Wall. (Atwood, 2019: 294)

Even though reading is allowed for the Aunts, initially the reading materials for the Aunts-to-be are limited to those written by the Aunts themselves. It is not at that point acceptable for Aunt candidates to read books that have been written in the outer world. Rather, while learning how to read, it would be good to teach lessons written under the control of the authority, about the punishment the girls would get if they were tempted by men. Depicting a girl named Tirzah, which means “my delight,” it is displayed what would happen to the Gilead women if they did not follow the path of the religion. Even under the name of teaching how to read and write, one can see the workings of the ideology of the totalitarian regime and its way to scare the individuals with the use of violence and terror.

While Agnes continues to practice writing, she is asked to write “And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is Charity,” “Love is as strong as Death” and “A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter” again and again. She, then, becomes curious about the context of these sentences and questions: “Was Charity really greater than Faith, and did I have either? Was Love as strong as Death? Whose was the voice that the bird was going to carry?” (Atwood, 2019: 298), and it is these questions that reveal why reading and writing are banned in the first place. The things she repeatedly writes

lead her to think whether these sayings are true. Agnes adds: “Being able to read and write did not provide the answers to all questions. It led to other questions, and then to others” (Atwood, 2019: 299). Reading is a process that requires thinking actively. The questions that she gets from reading such writings cause her to think further beyond the doctrines of the totalitarian government.

As suspected by the Gileadean authority, the activity of reading and writing turns into dangerous tools for the authority in the hands of Agnes and Aunt Lydia. When Agnes finds a file, from yet an unknown sender later to be revealed as Aunt Lydia, she gets a glimpse into the rottenness of the system:

Wives had schemed against other Wives; Marthas had eavesdropped and collected information, and then sold it; mysterious food poisonings had occurred, babies had changed hands from Wife to Wife on the basis of scandalous rumours that were, however, unfounded. Wives had been hanged for adulteries that had never occurred because a Commander wanted a different, younger Wife. Public trials—meant to purge traitors and purify the leadership—had turned on false confessions extracted by torture. (Atwood, 2019: 308)

This received folder reveals to Agnes the dirty things that have been done in Gilead for years. Agnes is portrayed as a girl who has always been confused by the way things work in Gilead: She had an emotional breakdown after learning her parents are not related to her, she refused to get married and claimed that she had a calling—which is a lie—to be an Aunt to save many families. With this file, Agnes’s questions are answered as her doubts are confirmed when she discovers the shocking deeds that have seeped into the whole of the system from the extreme top to the bottom. From the very beginning and throughout the story, she had always felt that something was wrong and now, she knows that “Beneath its outer show of virtue and purity, Gilead was rotting” (Atwood, 2019: 308). Agnes shares this new knowledge about what is happening behind the curtains with the readers by the help of writing. In other words, writing provides her with the tools of disseminating her knowledge to unseen and unknown people at different times and places.

As it was mentioned before, Gilead is ruled with the principles of theocracy. The Bible is used to further the ideology of patriarchy. Ruether points out patriarchal societies in which religious rules are applied. Biblical texts

uses the religious symbols to validate this society, to make it appear normative, to make God appear to be the creator and sanctioner of this society and adherence to it to human order and the divine order are seen as coherent and

unified. God as creator, lawgiver and redeemer spreads “his” sacred canopy over things as they are. The rulers in the present social hierarchy are God's agents in rule; those who are subject to them are admonished to obey. To disobey one's king, priest, father or husband is to disobey God. This is the religion of the sacred canopy which stabilizes and sanctifies the present patterns of society. (Ruether, 1982: 55-56)

This kind of religion-driven patriarch is not unfamiliar to the readers of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. Gilead is ruled exactly with these principles. The Bible is accepted as a guide to lead the way to create a so-called perfect society while the rulers' words are regarded as God's command. Religion is used not only to make everything work in the public sphere but to put things in order in the domestic sphere as well. For a woman, disobeying her husband is to disobey God; therefore, this kind of patriarchal order leaves women no choice but to adhere to the rules of the authority.

In Gilead, there are many religious symbols that facilitate the order of society. At the beginning of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood refers to one of the frequently quoted biblical passages in Gilead: It is from Genesis 30:1-3. The quotation includes Jacob and Rachel and how they accepted Bilhah as their Handmaid because they could not have any children. The story shows parallelism with the life in Gilead as Jacob symbolizes the Commander while Rachel is Serena Joy and Bilhah is Offred. Thus, Gilead society takes certain portions and practices of the Bible as the basis of their society.

In Gilead, the effects of religion can be observed even on the streets. Before banning the writings of the names on the stores, the shops were going by their names. The name of Milk and Honey, for instance, recalls the story in the Bible that gives reference to Israel as the land of milk and honey implying the abundance and fertility of the land. It is also ironic that this was chosen as the name of a convenience store while Gilead is in fact running out of sources. The other store that has a biblical reference is All Flesh which is originally used in the Bible as a warning from God who instructs Noah to take meat into his ark. The authorities in Gilead consider themselves as the new Noahs to save humanity from corruption and the ensuing wrath of God, a fact that the Handmaids should always keep in mind.

Greetings also have biblical connotations in Gilead. The daily greeting such as “hello” is replaced with “Blessed be the fruit,” meaning God may bless the womb

and make it capable of bearing children. Fruit is used to symbolize the bounty of one's body in terms of reproduction. The fact that the wish in this sentence has been turned into a daily life practice of welcoming people emphasizes the totalitarian regime's priorities lying in reproduction and fertility. The response to this greeting must be "May the Lord open," which is a prayer signifying the power of God to choose to or not to help the fertility of a woman's body. Similarly, "Under his Eye" is used instead of saying goodbye. This new way of bidding farewell can be taken both as the eye of God and the patriarchal authority represented by the Eyes who pry into every facet of the lives of people.

In almost all totalitarian systems, fertility has been a significant objective for the authority since totalitarian governments want children to be born into this environment so that the males grow to become protectors of the regime and females contribute to it as breeders. The increased numbers of people are the regime's guarantee to protect it from inside and outside enemies. Totalitarian regimes encourage women to give birth because it signifies a new beginning that can be shaped solely by the ideology of the regime. Offred, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, delivers Aunt Lydia's statement that: "The future is in your hands" (Atwood, 2017: 57), thus, later adds "For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts" (Atwood, 2017: 127). This new generation, who was born into the totalitarian regime, is more easily shaped than the older generation, who has seen both the previous lifestyle and the current social environment. Young minds who are not "corrupted" with the tradition and customs of the old lifestyle are precious in the sense that their thoughts can be channelized to whatever the authorities want to achieve.

However, in Gilead, mostly due to environmental pollution, not every woman is fertile. Since, as it was explained above, the authority encourages people to give birth, women who cannot procreate or do something useful like Marthas, are declared un-women as opposed to those who are fertile and "valuable sources." Offred, again, demonstrates that: "There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood, 2017: 71). Similarly, Simon de Beauvoir explains the situation of women in *The Second Sex* as: "Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb. An ovary; she is female.

This word is sufficient to define her” (Beauvoir, 1956: 33). According to patriarchy, women are nothing but a bunch of wombs, whose duties are solely to procreate. Fertile women in Gilead, too, are expected to give as many births as they can. Thus, both “fertile” and “barren” women are dehumanized by patriarchy whose aim is to raise a new generation who will unquestioningly abide by their political ideology.

Women’s dehumanization is most clearly observed in the process of childbearing. Biblical legitimization provides the ideological cover that makes this dehumanization invisible and acceptable. Offred talks about the labour process as if a mechanical process is in motion:

Once they drugged women, induced labour, cut them open, sewed them up. No more. No anesthetics, even. Aunt Elizabeth said it was better for the baby, but also: *I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shall bring forth children.* (Atwood, 2017: 124)

Prior to the current totalitarian regime, pregnant women gave birth with the help of drugs that reduced pain. Now, such drugs for surgery are not used. Out of the two bodies that participate in the process of birth, the most important is the baby, next to whom the birthing body is simply instrumental. Therefore, as the Aunts claim, as long as it is good for the baby, the birthing body of the women can suffer as much pain as it can. This idea is likewise justified by the biblical passage where God wants women to endure pain through childbirth as a result of Eve’s disobedience.

In the Bible, the following verse declares that: “Thou shalt be under thy husband’s power, and he shall have dominion over thee” (Genesis 3:16, Douay-Rheims version). Gilead attributes its dehumanization of women to this verse, which provides a basis upon which not only is women’s most primary role defined as reproduction but also their dependence on and inferiority to their husbands is decreed.

One of the ways in which religion is inserted in every field of life in Gilead is done by a machine called Soul Scrolls that prints prayers for people who seek divine guidance. Prayers are practiced in daily life with the use of these machines. Atwood takes this inspiration from the prayer wheels used in Asia.

In some Tibetan and Nepalese villages, giant prayer wheels are placed in streams like water mills, so that the wheels continue to turn all day and night, praying incessantly. Or they are placed on giant posts held high above a village like windmills, turning in the wind, blessing the village. One doesn't have to read the prayers inside the wheel. It's a mechanical form of prayer. (Hassler, 2002: 97)

Gilead's administrative and ideological tools are, in fact, a pastiche made up of a whole range of sources from religion to technology, which are utilized partly and randomly without any reference to their totality. While in Asia, prayer wheels are used to bless the place they live in, in Gilead, they are here to constantly remind people of a particular view of God and His words that teach them full submission to authority. Besides, it is not a choice to not to read the prayers in Gilead. One has to read and apply the principles of religion to her life so that everybody could live in a so-called peaceful life.

Despite this obligation, thoughts are the only things that neither people nor the government can perceive. When Ofglen asks Offred if she believes that God listens to the prayers that come from this machine, Offred says to the reader that she could scream and run away, thus, acting like she is in full compliance of the Gilead authority. However, she says that she does not think so, which causes a sigh of relief from Ofglen, whose genuineness is known only to her (Atwood, 2017: 177). It proves that no matter what measures and precautions the authority takes, real opinions can be kept hidden under unrevealing words and faces. No one would know what one really thinks unless he/she says so. The power of the human mind, its capability to evaluate and to think freely regardless of the current situation they are in are emphasized through this conversation.

Almost everything in Gilead works in solidifying the power of the state and isolating the individual. Technology becomes a useful tool in cutting off human contact and replacing it with absurd and unresponsive machinery. In Chapter 30, Offred's "direct" prayer to God through a telephone is displayed: "Make me fruitful. Mortify my flesh, that I may be multiply. Let me be fulfilled" (Atwood, 2017: 204). While she prays for having a child, the absurdity of her situation does not miss her:

I feel very unreal, talking to You like this. I feel as if I'm talking to a wall. I wish You'd answer. I feel so alone. All alone by the telephone. Except I can't use the telephone. And if I could, who could I call? Oh God. It's no joke. Oh God oh God. How can I keep on living? (Atwood, 2017: 205)

Like any other women in Gilead, Offred is isolated from the social sphere of life; therefore, she feels isolated and tries to find comfort by talking to God, the only source of hope and peace, but she is simultaneously aware that it is totally absurd to pretend as if God is listening at the other end of the line. The state of Gilead is a

living proof of the power of totalitarianism in isolating individuals and causing them to feel weak and powerless in the face of tyranny. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt marks that: “Isolation is the impasse into which men are driven when the political sphere of their lives, where they act together in the pursuit of a common concern, is destroyed” (Arendt, 1979: 474). Similarly, as the citizens of Gilead do not contribute to the process of government work, they are wiped out from the political area of life. Isolation also causes women’s disappearance from not only political but also public life. Isolation causes in each person a deeper sense of state called loneliness where individuals lose sense of reality. Arendt comments on loneliness vis a vis isolation:

While isolation concerns only the political realm of life, loneliness concerns human life as a whole. Totalitarian government, like all tyrannies, certainly could not exist without destroying the public realm of life... It [totalitarian domination] bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man. (Arendt, 1979: 475)

Offred’s loneliness is the natural outcome of the extreme form of isolation that the Gilead government has created. Feeling desperate, she wants to communicate with someone to whom she can open her heart genuinely. In an environment like this, as it is not possible to talk to someone freely, Offred wishes for a companionship that can hear and answer her. The loneliness and isolation, that the rulers of Gilead have developed, lead individuals to feel helpless, and it takes away their sense of belonging to the community. Offred questions how to live a life under such conditions.

Propaganda is crucial in order to keep masses under control. Especially when it resorts to the power of religion and the authority of God, state propaganda becomes unassailable. For Gilead religion is an indispensable part of state propaganda. Religious stories chosen from the Bible are used as a means of propaganda by the rulers of Gilead. In *The Testaments*, Aunt Vidala tells “the story of the Concubine Cut into Twelve Pieces” (Atwood, 2019: 78). It should be noted that the Concubine represents the Handmaids in the Gilead regime. In this story, the concubine runs away from her owner and goes to her father’s house. Her owner comes after her to her father’s place and demands to take the concubine back. Her father feels ashamed as such a thing should not have happened in the first place. The father gives her back

to the man. On their way back to their home in the dark, a stranger invites them to his home. However, some individuals “with sinful urges” visit the place the man and the concubine spend the night. These individuals want to do “shameful things” to the man, but it would not be very appropriate to do to a man. So, the man and the host offer them the concubine instead. At the end of the story, it is told that when the sun is up, the man finds her dead body in front of the house. It is a didactic story that teaches women not to run away from their homes. Otherwise, they would share the same destiny as the concubine; their dead bodies could be displayed or cut into pieces to set an example for the living about what would happen to them if they rebelled against the rules of the authority.

“Many men doing lustful things all at once will kill a girl,” said Aunt Vidala. “This story is God’s way of telling us that we should be content with our lot and not rebel against it.” The man in charge should be honoured by the woman, she said. If not, this was the result. God always made the punishment fit the crime. (Atwood, 2019: 78-79)

This is a story from the Hebrew Bible called “Levite’s Concubine.” The story is used as propaganda by the totalitarian government. It can be deduced that propaganda is not only used to offer an escape for citizens to a new, fancy world that is not related to reality but also as warning to the Handmaids. No matter what hardships and pain a woman lives, she should not leave her nest since there are sinful men who kill a runaway woman. Hence, the killers are not to be blamed, but the woman is to be held guilty of escaping from her master at home and thus, of revolting against God who tells people “to be content with their lot.” The story can also be regarded as a threat. By using a story from the Bible, the authority justifies their wrong doings by the authority of God. The totalitarian regime maintains its ideology by brainwashing people with a religious story that is in fact nothing but propaganda for the authority.

In *The Testaments*, the selective use and ideological interpretation of the Bible still continues. According to Aunt Vidala what Eve’s problem was “too much imagination.” Agnes quotes her: “Forbidden things are open to the imagination. That was why Eve ate the Apple of Knowledge, said Aunt Vidala: too much imagination. So, it was better not to know some things. Otherwise, your petals get scattered” (Atwood, 2019: 15). This time, the creation story is stated to stop girls questioning the conditions of the current social order. Unlike in *The Handmaid’s Tale* in which

Eve is portrayed as a woman who was deceived, in this case, Eve is blamed for being curious. The undertone of this reference stands as a threat for girls as it is narrated to scare those who are keen and looking for logical answers and explanations for the current established system. At one point, Agnes says “I wanted to ask why it had to be like this, but I already knew the answer: because it was God's plan. That was how the Aunts got out of everything” (Atwood, 2019: 82). Every attempt to question is thus avoided and questions are answered with references to God's plan, so every act of imagination or curiosity is stopped in the face of the unquestionable and mysterious ways of God.

Although the Handmaids listen to these stories, they never have access to the real source they come from. Only Aunts and Commanders have access to books which are mostly about religion. Commanders read Biblical stories in their homes to women as well. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred talks about this ritual of gathering and listening to such stories.

It's the usual story, the usual stories. God to Adam, God to Noah. *Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.* Then comes the mouldy old Rachel and Leah stuff we had drummed into us at the Centre. *Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.* And so on and so forth. We had it read us every breakfast... (Atwood, 2017: 99)

Gilead uses the Bible to justify and reason their attempt to increase the birth rates. The story is repeatedly told to the women of Gilead as the order in the community will be more reasonable if women are informed about how God wants productive women to multiply. During a Prayvaganza, the Commander reads the following:

“Let the women learn in silence with all subjection.” Here he looks us over. “All,” he repeats. “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.” (Atwood, 2017: 233)

The Commander interprets the Bible to justify the ideology of the state in order to subjugate the women of Gilead. As Gilead is ruled by a patriarchal group of men, only the passages in which women are overpowered by the authority of men are

narrated. Throughout the speech above, the so-called superiority of men over women is highly emphasized. As the Commander touches on the story of creation, his message clearly points towards the primacy and superiority of men to women even when the first human beings are formed, highlighting that the first man being formed was Adam. In such stories, the deceived one is always a woman and the act of deception is interpreted as the woman's weakness while the man is not held responsible for being cheated. Therefore, the only salvation of women occurs through the childbearing. In Gilead, the significance of giving birth is consistently reiterated as this is one of the main goals of the regime.

In another Prayvaganza, Offred indicates that there is a banner outside the building which says, "GOD IS A NATIONAL RESOURCE" (Atwood, 2017: 225). The double meaning of the banner is impossible to miss: On the one hand the Gilead authorities announce that in everything they do they depend on the authority of God; therefore, their actions are sanctified and supported by God. On the other hand, much like the bodies of women, God has been transformed into a "resource," a tool to be utilized for a yet higher end. Thus, the Gilead rulers locate themselves and their mission higher than God and the mission that God announces for people.

Like any totalitarian regime, Gilead uses even God as part its propaganda tools. Ironically, Gilead authorities recreate a new version of God that serves their ends. As something created, their version of God, much like the meanings of the banner, is self-contradictory. Much like Hitler's Germany, propaganda is the major tool of the state's existence. Arendt claims that:

Totalitarian propaganda thrives on this escape from reality into fiction, from coincidence into consistency. The chief disability of totalitarian propaganda is that it cannot fulfill this longing of the masses for a completely consistent, comprehensible, and predictable world without seriously conflicting with common sense. (Arendt, 1979: 352)

In this case, Gilead proposes God as a solution to problems that the citizens face in life. By organizing events like Prayvaganza, the masses of Gilead are expected to forget about the misery of real life. This ritual provides them an escape from death and oppression to which the authority has subjected people. The belief system that was composed by the theocratic government offers God as a tool to be used by the citizens. Therefore, Arendt declares that totalitarian propaganda has a defect in a way

that does not correspond to common sense. Although propaganda offers an “escape from reality to fiction,” the masses, the citizens of Gilead in this case, cannot be satisfied with what the regime offers since state propagandas lack consistency. For the masses such a ceremony like this one is a temporary escape that provides a fake sense of belonging as long as it lasts, but once it is over, they are fully aware that reality will strike hard again. Such escapes point at how impossible their world has become:

[W]hile it is true that the masses are obsessed by a desire to escape from reality because in their essential homelessness they can no longer bear its accidental, incomprehensible aspects, it is also true that their longing for fiction has some connection with those capacities of the human mind whose structural consistency is superior to mere occurrence. The masses' escape from reality is a verdict against the world in which they are forced to live and in which they cannot exist. (Arendt, 1979: 352)

The masses have no rights to gather unless it is arranged and regulated by the government. They are isolated from their social setting, and condemned to a deep feeling of loneliness, as Arendt points out that, they want to hold onto something even if the propaganda does not have consistency. Although it is a need of the human mind to seek shelter in fiction, the masses' longing for fiction, however, is contrary to the rational aspects of the human mind. Despite this desire for fiction, in the end, propaganda as a strategy is doomed to fail as it is opposed to the rationality of the human mind.

In *The Testaments*, having mostly managed to subjugate the masses inside, the Gilead government enlarges its propaganda tools to the neighboring nation Canada through a group of young women called “Pearl Girls.” Acting the role of missionaries, they are responsible to attract young women of reproductive age to Gilead by spreading the ideology of their state. The specific word choice of “pearl” for this job is significant because pearls are symbols of purity and perfection. The term also refers to the religious story called *The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value*. This is a story which is about a merchant who collects pearls. One day, in a bazaar, he recognizes a perfect-looking large pearl which symbolizes the perfection of Jesus Christ. He sells everything he owns to buy this perfect pearl. The moral of the story is that after finding Jesus every single thing in life loses its meaning. The merchant's life changes after having the splendid pearl or, in this case, Jesus. Similarly, when

one joins Pearl Girls, the same thing happens: previous lifestyle is sacrificed for the next one which includes devoting oneself to a holy figure. Becoming a pearl girl requires following a religious path and devoting oneself to a superior figure.

Unlike the domestic religious propaganda, this particular propaganda employs the soft power in religion embodied by the white clad pearl girls devoted to Jesus, a figure of love and unconditional acceptance. This outward softness, however, is only a mask on Gilead's desire to add further power to itself. Religion and God in either case become tools to increase Gilead's power. Aunt Lydia explains the significance of the duties of the Pearl Girls to their country:

I return these pearls to you pure as the state in which I received them, may they be blessed to the service of the next Pearl Girl who wears them with pride during her mission. Thanks to the Divine Will, I have added to Gilead's treasure trove of valuable gems. May I present Jade [Daisy], a precious Pearl of Great Price, saved from certain destruction. May she be purified from worldly pollution, cleanse of unchaste desires, cauterized from sin, and consecrated to whatever service is allotted to her in Gilead. (Atwood, 2019: 274)

The so-called pristine side of Gilead is represented by this name. Daisy remembers while still in Canada her impression on the Pearl Girls: "These [women who visit The Clothes Hound] were the young women in long silvery dresses and white hats who called themselves Pearl Girls and said they were missionaries doing God's work for Gilead" (Atwood, 2019: 44). They are supposed to draw attention with their luxuriant look while trying to attract people to Gilead. The authority of Gilead uses Pearl Girls as a tool to portray a soft image for outside observers. It is aimed for foreigners to think that Gilead may not be as horrible as everybody has been talking about as the representatives of the regime are looking pure.

Aunt Lydia later reveals that Pearl Girls were her idea because since every other religion has missionaries, she said, "So why not ours?" (Atwood, 2019: 64). They are designed as living proofs that Christianity in its pure form is exercised only in Gilead; therefore, they take it upon themselves to send missionaries of this "uncorrupted" form of religion to other places where people lost touch with the essence of true Christianity. Thus, they are the missionaries of Gilead, which has, they claim, formed a true taking based on the Bible. However, the truth is a far cry from such claims. Because in fact they misuse the principles of Christianity and the

teachings of the Bible in order to justify their actions; it is, in fact, to such twisted form of faith that Gilead needs missionaries to gain new believers.

Gilead religion promises a fake hope of redemption for those who have lost their way. Daisy says that the Pearl Girls hand over brochures on which the following are written: “Fallen? God Can Still Forgive You!” and “Homeless? There Is a Home for You in Gilead” (Atwood, 2019: 45). By the help of the Pearl Girls, Gilead aims to lure those who feel desperate and guilty of their sins and to those who are in need. Thus, the authority of Gilead offers them liberation from all the burdens that people have experienced outside Gilead.

Pearl Girls’ mission also includes creating public opinion outside Gilead for the return of Baby Nicole, who is always the unchanging topic in the content of the brochures:

There was always at least one brochure about Baby Nicole. “Give Back Baby Nicole!” “Baby Nicole Belongs in Gilead!” ...Now Baby Nicole was the poster child for Gilead. On every Pearl Girls brochure there was the same picture of her. She looked like a baby, nothing special, but she was practically a saint in Gilead, said our teacher. She was an icon for us too: every time there was an anti-Gilead protest in Canada, there would be the picture, and slogans like BABY NICOLE! SYMBOL OF FREEDOM! Or BABY NICOLE! LEADING THE WAY! As if a baby could lead the way on anything, I would think to myself. (Atwood, 2019: 45)

Baby Nicole, who was kidnapped from Gilead, is a national symbol for Gilead. Pearl Girls, here, are also in charge of handing out these brochures to find Baby Nicole and to take her back where she “belongs.” The meaning of Baby Nicole for Gileadeans contradicts what she means for the people in Canada. For Gilead, Baby Nicole is a saint-like image of martyrdom in the hands of the Canadian government, which refused to give Nicole back. For Canada, on the other hand, she is a symbol of freedom; she is saved from the oppression of Gilead.

The Pearl Girls within the borders of Gilead are perceived as courageous and risk-taking saviors. Agnes, for instance, explains that: “At the Vidala School we hadn't been told much about the Pearl Girls—only that they were courageous, and took risks and made sacrifices for Gilead, and we should respect them” (Atwood, 2019: 291). The sacrifice that is implied is the death of Aunt Adrianna who “had been found dead in a condo that she and her Pearl Girls’ companion had rented.” The Canadian police, however, explains that it is suicide as “self-strangulation is a

common method of suicide” (Atwood, 2019: 55). Although her death is said to be a sacrifice for their country, the possible real reason for this death is ignored by the authority of Gilead. Aunt Adrianna, in fact, probably killed herself to be freed of the duties that Gilead charges with. Her suicide is proof that even the agents of Gilead cannot stand to see another possible way of living other than the lifestyle in Gilead. Feeling trapped in the oppressive regime, they cannot find any exit to run away from Gilead. Therefore, two choices to escape from Gilead lie before the Pearl Girls: it is either with suicide or becoming another “baby Nicole” if they choose to run away. While this is the harsh condition that the Pearl Girls face every day in Gilead; however, a pearl who kills herself will be just another person to be turned into a symbol of sacrifice in the name of spreading the propaganda and luring outsiders to Gilead.

The Pearl Girls display sympathy to the ones who look miserable. That is one of their ways to attract them to Gilead. Daisy, knowing that, puts herself in a miserable situation, starts to live on the streets and poses as if she has an abusive boyfriend, Garth. She does so, for she wants the Pearl Girls to come and find her so that she could help the resistance group, Mayday, that has already been involved in acts of rebellion in Gilead. Looking tragic, Daisy asserts that:

They asked if I was happy, and I shook my head no. Then they looked at my tattoo, and said I was a very special person to have undergone all that suffering for God, and they were glad I knew God cherished me. And Gilead would cherish me too because I was a precious flower, and especially every girl of my age, and I was in Gilead I would be treated like the special girl I was, and protected, and no one—no man—would ever be able to hurt me. (Atwood, 2019: 265-266)

Gilead’s fiction of phony peace and happiness that has been created for the masses is that everything is as it should be and the salvation from the mistakes of the past is possible with this new order. This fiction displays Gilead to outsiders as a just place that everybody gets what he/she deserves just as Daisy is promised to be treated like a precious flower, for she deserves that. The miserable girls like her need to be protected and cherished under the wings of this welcoming government of Gilead, the illusion that the Pearl Girls are in charge of creating.

After Daisy’s acceptance to Gilead, Aunt Beatrice affirms the significance of the duties of the Pearl Girls to their country:

I return these pearls to you pure as the state in which I received them, may they be blessed to the service of the next Pearl Girl who wears them with pride during her mission. Thanks to the Divine Will, I have added to Gilead's treasure trove of valuable gems. May I present Jade [Daisy], a precious Pearl of Great Price, saved from certain destruction. May she be purified from worldly pollution, cleanse of unchaste desires, cauterized from sin, and consecrated to whatever service is allotted to her in Gilead. (Atwood, 2019: 274)

Some of the outsiders who feel lost might be attracted by the promises of peace and love, and they are accepted to Gilead to be trained as Pearl Girl. Every stranger is converted to a Pearl so that they also could join the mission of attracting desperate people in Gilead. The work that has been done by the Pearl Girls is something to be proud of because they have been adding "valuable gems" to their country. What the Pearls do is regarded as a holy work that is done by the permission of the Divine Will. Daisy's changing her name to Jade serves double purpose: Daisy avoids being recognized in Gilead as the daughter of Mayday members. Taking a new name has yet another meaning for Gileadeans: With her new name, Jade is expected to be purified from the pollution of the outer world of sins and lewdness in Canada. Gilead's role, in this case, is to give a helping hand to people to save them from the sins of their past life by the holy mission of the Pearl Girls.

The workings of the Gileadean authority have several faces and a wide variety of methods ranging from a strict division of labor to propaganda. After having control of the country, the totalitarian authority in Gilead, changes the social order by creating a social hierarchy in which several different roles are attributed to every individual in both public and private lives. At the top of this hierarchy, the Commanders are responsible for regulating the life in Gilead, co-operating with the Aunts whose duties are to keep women, especially the Handmaids, in control. The most important function of the female body to be regulated and controlled by the Aunts is reproduction and childbearing. Childbirth is a significant occasion for the authority as it means a brand-new life that can be easily shaped since it has no idea about the past life. This oppressive authority uses terror and violence to keep the citizens under control and it displays the bodies of rebels publicly to warn the ones who have the slightest opinion about coming up against the principles of the government. The military power is used by the totalitarian regime to frighten the masses. Human emotions are destroyed and feelings and relationships of love

between people are strictly forbidden. The citizens reduced, in Arendt's words, to masses, are isolated and lonely as the natural result of lacking communication, love and care. One way of reducing communication to a bare minimum is achieved by prohibiting reading and writing because as both not only connect them to others but also make people curious and encourages them to think and more and more that the government wants to avoid. Brainwashing with propaganda, as other prevalent methods, occupy an important part in the working process of the totalitarian regime. With the help of propaganda, the masses are made obedient subjects that docilely follow the patterns laid out for them by the state apparatuses.

Propaganda has been carried out in different ways in Gilead. For instance, in Prayvaganzas, people are gathered to pray and hear religious sermons. This practice has a cathartic function for the masses as they let out their feelings in these ceremonies because of the fact that they have been under strict rules and cannot do anything about it. Other propaganda tools that have been carried by the totalitarian government are religious moral stories that have been told to little children in schools, the banners on buildings in public realms while in the private sphere and the propaganda continues with the Commander reading passages from the Bible, especially those in which God orders women to obey men in their homes. The higher law in this totalitarian authority comes from the biblical sources, and the figures of authority constantly use quotations from the Bible to justify their deeds, claiming that this life is what God wants them to live in. Propaganda is not only practiced in Gilead, but also practiced outside of Gilead. The authority charges Pearl Girls to further their propaganda. They wear white gowns, symbolizing their purity while portraying a perfect picture of Gilead where everything works flawlessly. Although in Gilead, the masses, always under surveillance, are in danger as they are in front of a barrel of a gun, outside Gilead, a whole different picture is offered by the Pearls in which people live in peace and harmony. In this way, the authority expands its tools of propaganda from inside to outside. Under this totalitarian system, the four narrators of the books, Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Agnes, Daisy and Aunt Lydia in *The Testaments*, talk about their different experiences in Gilead while pointing out what it feels like to be a woman in this theocratic totalitarian regime which will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.2. FEMALE NARRATORS

In the totalitarian environment in the Gilead of both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, women are dehumanized by being reduced to their reproductive capacities. Fertile women, Handmaids, are degraded to walking incubators whose sole responsibility is to give birth to healthy children while Unwomen, the Handmaids that prove incapable of giving birth and women who refuse to fit into the designated categories for women in Gilead, are regarded as nobodies since they are useless according to the new formation of social order. The Aunts, women who are in charge of regulating social life, on the other hand, are expected to fulfill the duties sanctioned by the authority such as training the Handmaids, punishing the ones who do not obey the rules, and taking part in the public punishments: Salvagings and Particutions. *The Handmaid's Tale* offers the story from the perspective of a Handmaid, Offred. Since her experiences and sources of information are limited and subject to constant surveillance, there is much left in darkness in the background. *The Testaments*, likewise, written in first-person narration, however, offers different points of view with its three female narrators, who come from different backgrounds and occupy different statuses and positions in Gilead: Daisy as an outsider, Agnes as a part of the masses in Gilead and Lydia, an Aunt. All these four women narrators have something in common: they are all opposed to the totalitarian ideology; thus, they try to destroy this system in their own way; either it is with recording tapes or having a part in the Mayday operation. Their narratives, taken as a whole, give the readers a more complete picture of the trials and tribulations of each separated group of women.

Offred, the narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale*, is named after her commander, Fred, just like every other Handmaid. The prefix "of-" signifies a possession, implying that the Handmaids are properties who belong to their Commanders. She declares that "My name isn't Offred, I have another name which nobody uses now because it is forbidden. ... I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up one day. I think of this name as buried." (Atwood, 2017: 94). The prohibition of the real names of individuals lays before the reader one of the intentions of the totalitarian regime: It erases all undesired and

unexpected characteristics and idiosyncrasies. Furthermore, because the old name of the Handmaid becomes a past that she cannot forget yet she cannot share with people, she can only be a complete person with a history, a personal name in isolation. The Handmaid's isolation in fact is so much more profound that it deserves to be referred to as loneliness, which, according to Arendt, may take place even one is surrounded by others. "...The lonely man (*eremos*) finds himself surrounded by others with whom he cannot establish contact or to whose hostility he is exposed." It is a state in which

I am actually one, deserted by all others. All thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself; but this dialogue of the two-in-one does not lose contact with the world of my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought. (Arendt, 1979: 476)

Milen Jissov further explains the difference between Arendt's concepts of solitude and loneliness: "For Arendt, loneliness was a profoundly negative experience. She contrasted it with what she called 'solitude.' Solitude was a withdrawal from the company of others and from the outside world in general" (Jissov, 2019:18). Offred, in this case, is also a solitary individual; she is on her own; she tells her story by taping her voice without a listener with her. Although she desperately needs a listener to take her story seriously, sometimes she herself is alienated from its reality:

I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance. If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off. It isn't a story I'm telling. It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden. But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else. Even when there is no one. (Atwood, 2017: 49)

Offred takes it upon herself the mission to transmit the harsh reality that women face every day in Gilead to an imagined listener so that somebody can hear the voices of the women who are oppressed by the totalitarian ideology. Although she does not have an audience right now and tells her story in a monologue, when the day comes, she hopes she will have a listener. Taping her voice makes her life bearable as she hopes someone will find her records. Her solitary state will come to an end when her words meet with an audience, no matter it is now or later.

Offred speaks from the lowest level of the social hierarchy in comparison to the narrators in *The Testaments*. She constantly reveals the ills of the oppressive system that she lives in. In “How Can a Feminist Read *The Handmaid’s Tale*?” it is stated that “Offred refuses to acquiesce to this state and tries to keep a distance from what Gilead teaches her” (Yamamoto, 2006: 198). Her vision sets a stark contrast to the state propaganda. For instance, Gilead keeps brainwashing the masses through the use of media by way of the news of television. Offred knows the things on the television is probably fake: “Who knows if any of it is true? It could be old clips, it could be fake” (Atwood, 2017: 92) and explains “They show us only victories, never defeats. Who wants bad news?” (Atwood, 2017: 93). She lays bare the power of the state media to manipulate and control the content and flow of news as facts are shaped and served to the audience according to the will of the authority. As it is affirmed in *Simulations*: “All media and the official news service only exist to maintain the illusion of actuality—of the reality of the stakes, of the objectivity of the facts. All events are to be read in reverse” (Baudrillard, 1983: 71). In this case, the Gileadean media, conducted by the totalitarian regulations, creates “a new reality” or illusion that overshadows reality. The media is an instrument by which undesired events are censored so that viewers shaped to fit the expectations of the state can comfort themselves without facing the actualities of real life. Offred rejects this kind of feigned reality that is served by media: “What he’s [the anchorman] telling us, his level smile implies, is for our own good. Everything will be all right soon. I promise. There will be peace. You must trust. You must go to sleep, like good children” (Atwood, 2017: 93). The fiction that is presented to the Gilead citizens includes hopeful expectations about the future. Nonetheless, this propaganda does not work on Offred, who, refusing to believe what the news says, provides her audience a different view in contrast to the dominant ideological voice.

The tools of media, controlled and kept under the strict surveillance of government, turn into one of the extremely crucial means in the hands of this totalitarian regime in order to channel the public opinion to their likings. The complete power over control over media is connected with the authoritarian structure. Like every other totalitarian regime, Gilead includes social hierarchy

within the community as well. In *Between Past and Future*, Arendt explains the structure of totalitarian regime:

The proper image of totalitarian rule and organization seems to me to be the structure of the onion, in whose center, in a kind of empty space, the leader is located; whatever he does whether he integrates the body politic as in an authoritarian hierarchy or oppresses his subjects like a tyrant he does it from within, and not from without or above. All the extraordinarily manifold parts of the movement: the front organizations, the various professional societies, the party membership, the party bureaucracy, the elite formations and police groups, are related in such a way that each forms the facade in one direction and the center in the other, that is, plays the role of normal outside world for one layer and the role of radical extremism for another. The great advantage of this system is that the movement provides for each of its layers, even under conditions of totalitarian rule, the fiction of a normal world along with a consciousness of being different from and more radical than it. (Arendt, 1961: 99)

According to the structure Arendt refers to above, the leader is situated at the center, at the very core of the formation of the state. She describes that the layers around the leader stand as people who works within politics, the elite, and the organizations among which the media can also be counted. All these layers, with their separate work from one another, provide a fiction to the citizens of the state.

Being well aware of the fiction they live in, Offred repetitively reminds herself that the life they live in is a reconstruction (Atwood, 2017: 144), meaning that she rejects the reality of her situation. Thus, this life is reconstructed by the authority. As a result of the propaganda of the totalitarian government, the whole society is reconstructed by changing the mindset of the people of Gilead. She also implies that this story that she has been telling is a reconstruction as well which “necessarily involves the loss of the original story” (Staels, 1995: 464). Offred talks about her side of the story as much as she can remember the past. Even though a different perspective is not provided, and the narrator claims that this story is reconstructed by herself, it does not turn Offred into an unreliable narrator as the reader learns everything about the life in Gilead only through her voice.

As Offred’s story is reconstructed by her narration, it is later revealed in the chapter entitled “The Historical Notes,” that her tale is also reconstructed by Professor Pieixoto. He declares that they found many tapes in which the same voice was speaking. The tapes were not arranged in chronological order, so Pieixoto had to put the tapes in order. As such, Offred’s tale is reconstructed by both herself and the professor.

Offred's narrative belies the fiction of Gilead on a variety of levels. For instance, although the women are given a choice to agree or refuse to become Handmaids, their consent to choose is questionable. First and foremost, they are not given a viable alternative option, which is going to the Colonies. Next, after they make the choice, Offred suspects, they are kept in line with administering them drugs.

The readers can observe from her narration that Offred is conscious of how her body is perceived as a woman by the authority. During their preparation to become Handmaids, she often remembers reality to become hazy. She thinks that this was because they were given sedatives to keep them from running away and organize an uprising among themselves. Therefore, to make women adhere to the rules, women are drugged, and one can understand this through her narration below. She clarifies this:

The strange thing is we needed the rest. Many of us went to sleep. We were tired there, a lot of time. We were on some kind of *pill* or *drug* I think, they put it in the food, to keep us *calm*. But maybe not. Maybe it was the place itself. After the first shock, after you'd come to terms, it was better to be lethargic. You could tell yourself you were saving up your strength. (Atwood, 2017: 80, emphasis added)

Offred puts her constant state of numbness down to being drugged to be calm. Totalitarian regime's control over the behaviors and thoughts of the masses goes parallel with its control over their bodies. Thus, to arrange discipline in society, their bodies are made docile through the use of drugs.

To prevent a possible rebellion, women's bodies are turned into passive machines that is expected to reproduce only. Reconstrued and redefined by Gilead, the worth of the Handmaid's bodies is reduced to its reproductive capacities in the service of the government. Since they are left at the mercy of the biological cycles of their bodies beyond their will and control, the Handmaids become alienated from their bodies. Offred's point of view about her body signifies the general understanding of one's own body under totalitarianism.

I sink down into my body as into a swamp, fenland, where only I know the footing. Treacherous ground, my own territory... Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfill the expectations of others, which have become my own. (Atwood, 2017: 83)

Left with little choice outside the one offered to her as a Handmaid, Offred will temporarily internalize the new definition of her body. Her narrative thus demonstrates the process of adopting the totalitarian view by individuals. She begins to think of her body as her own but also as treacherous territory. She is expected to produce babies, but her body can betray Offred with menstruation. She does not have a complete right and control over her body. Thus, the government's and the Commander's expectations related to her body become her own. Not delivering a child is a failure for a woman of reproductive age. In one of her prayers, Offred says:

What we prayed was for emptiness, so we could be worthy to be filled: with grace, with love, with self-denial, semen, and babies. Oh God, King of the universe, thank you for not creating me a man. Oh God, obliterate me. Make me fruitful. Mortify my flesh, that I may be multiplied. Let me be fulfilled. (Atwood, 2019: 204)

It should not be mistaken, however, that Offred becomes a part of the ideology because of her entreaty. Rather, she is very much aware that her "fruitfulness" is the only way to survive in an environment like this. Reduced to undistinguishable parts of masses, individuals in totalitarian regimes, cannot think of a survival organized as a whole, but only their own survival. Hannah Arendt declares in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that:

For masses, in contrast to classes, want victory and success ... in their most abstract form; they are not bound together by those special collective interests which they feel to be essential to their survival as a group and which they therefore may assert even in the face of overwhelming odds. (Arendt, 1979: 350-351)

As it can be observed in Gilead, there is no unity between individuals, in terms of belonging to a class, because it has already been destroyed by the totalitarian government in case of a possible uprising against the regime. The lonely and isolated individuals have no choice but to fulfill the necessities that the totalitarian regime requires. This is the main reason that Offred prays to God to "multiply." In this way, not only will she avoid the ghastly destiny of the Unwomen in the Colonies, but also, she will also carry on her life with the victory of having a baby. As an isolated individual, the only goal for a woman with childbearing capacities is to serve the oppressive state by giving birth so that she would live a life that she is already

familiar with. Offred, in this sense, expresses the difficulties of being a young and reproductive woman under the control of an oppressive state.

Aunt Lydia, who appears in the first book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, as a cruel woman who is responsible for arranging the order in women's life and punishing the rebels, is one of the narrators in *The Testaments*. Since Aunt Lydia in *The Handmaid's Tale* is seen exclusively from Offred's perspective, the reader sees her only as she is seen by Offred. In the sequel, however, the readers have a deeper perspective on Lydia's side of the story. At the beginning of the book, she says "Only dead people are allowed to have statues, but I have been giving one while still alive." This statement signifies her prestigious authority in Gilead. She becomes an exception in the regime for her successful career and dedication to the totalitarian ideology. She describes her statue:

My eyes are fixed on some cosmic point of reference understood to represent my idealism, my unflinching commitment to duty, my determination to move forward despite all obstacles. Not that anything in the sky would be visible to my statue, placed as it is in a morose cluster of trees and shrubs beside the footpath running in front of Ardua Hall. (Atwood, 2019: 3)

Aunt Lydia's statue symbolizes her commitment and contributions to the regime. The statue stands there to remind the masses of the power of a superior order which has rights to regulate their own lives. As being at the zenith of the hierarchy even among the Aunts, Aunt Lydia is known and accepted as a distinguished person among any other woman.

She perceives that the statue "is larger than life, as statues tend to be, and shows me as younger, slimmer, and in better shape than I've been for some time" (Atwood, 2019: 3). The statue, "being larger than life," stands for something bigger than the actual figure of Aunt Lydia. She is depicted as an idealized version of herself by putting her body in an unrealistic size and shape. The readers who know her from the previous book might think that she was portrayed as a villain who had no conscience. By her statement, however, for the first time, the readers witness her state of self-consciousness at the very beginning of *The Testaments*. As an authority figure, she could have perceived herself just the way the statue depicts her. Nevertheless, she is aware of the incompatibility between herself and her statue hinting that she will turn out to be a character that no one would expect her to be. She

remarks that “Already I am petrified” (Atwood, 2019: 3). This sentence also signifies her emotional state of being petrified. The totalitarian regime silences her, thus, she feels scared to be revealed about her intentions.

Aunt Lydia makes it clear that what she has done has to be done so that some hope for the future freedom for people in Gilead would be possible. Like Offred, who chooses not to believe in the totalitarian ideology, Aunt Lydia chooses to fake as if she is doing her tasks that the Commander gives her while trying to destroy the regime. Therefore, Aunt Lydia’s narrative helps fill in some of the many gaps in Offred’s and others’ narratives both in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and in *The Testaments*. Through her narration, she explains the reasons behind her choice:

I made choices, and then, having made them, I had fewer choices. Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and I took the one most travelled by. It was littered with corpses, as such roads are. But as you will have noticed, my own corpse is not among them. (Atwood, 2019: 66)

She had two choices: whether she would object to the totalitarian regime, and let them kill her, or she would (pretend to) adopt the principles and act as if she was one of them. She picked the latter. The fact that choosing the most travelled road helped her stay alive and saved her from being one of the corpses of the rebels. Surviving, she tells the story of how she decided to take this path. Lydia remembers the time when she was taken to watch the executions as the Aunt candidates were taught their tasks if they were accepted.:

On the fifth day there were six women in brown among the shooters. There was also an uproar, as one of them, instead of aiming at the blindfolded ones, pivoted and shot one of the men in black uniforms. She was immediately bludgeoned on the ground and riddled with bullets. There was a collective gasp from the bleachers. So, I thought. That’s one way out. (Atwood, 2019: 144)

Being firsthand witness of the only possibility awaiting those who object the orders of authority, she decides to walk on the path most travelled even though her opinions do not suit her actions. This choice, however, only helps hide an inner self that thinks and acts in complete opposition to government. She becomes a secret enemy of the government, but her enmity has to be kept stringently hidden, for the punishment in totalitarian regimes for enemies is almost always loss of life. Arendt argues the place of the enemy of the tyrannical regimes:

One had at least to be an enemy of tyranny in order to be punished by it. Freedom of opinion was not abolished for those who were brave enough to risk their necks. Theoretically, the choice of opposition remains in totalitarian regimes too; but such freedom is almost invalidated if committing a voluntary act of “punishment” that everyone else may have to bear anyway. (Arendt, 1979: 433)

Although Arendt refers to the Nazis in this part, it is also valid for all totalitarian regimes as they share the same goals: to destroy the ones who do not take part with them. The choice of opposition, as Arendt declares, remains still as opinions cannot be seen clearly from the outside. For this reason, the totalitarian regimes attach great importance to the process of brainwashing so that everyone would be shaped in such a way that they will readily agree with the government. Aunt Lydia, similarly, takes a risk by writing about life in Gilead. Nonetheless she cannot help telling her story because freedom, of opinion or of any other human capacities, is an inalienable part of human nature and it will surface in even the direst of situations.

Her phony dedication and determination to do her duty help her to gain the trust of the authority figures. One of the authoritarian figures that puts so much trust in Aunt Lydia is Commander Judd. Lydia explains that: “He thinks of me as his handiwork: I am the embodiment of his will” (Atwood, 2019: 137). Being used as a tool by the authority, Aunt Lydia is perceived as not only the embodiment of his will but also of the regime’s will. As the totalitarian figure is depicted by Commander Fred in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, in this book, Commander Judd is portrayed as the representative of the oppressive government. In this totalitarian order, the government uses Aunts to reach inside the homes of the masses; they carry the authority of the government to the private sphere. Aunt Lydia performs her duty according to the desires of the authority; in this case, it is Commander Judd. He even exclaims to Aunt Lydia that “We make a great team!” (Atwood, 2019: 141).

Thus, Aunt Lydia is privy to the secrets of the masses and Commander Judd alike. Aunt Lydia, however, shares an anecdote about him to her readers:

Judd has a respectable collection of biographies and histories—Napoleon, Stalin, Ceaușescu, and various other leaders and controllers of men. He has several highly valuable editions that I envy: Doré’s *Inferno*, Dalí’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Picasso’s *Lysistrata*. He has another kind of book, less respectable: vintage pornography, as I knew from having examined it. It is a genre that is tedious in bulk. The mistreatment of the human body has a limited repertoire. (Atwood, 2019: 316)

In an oppressive environment as Gilead, having such books and paintings who remind people of the past was strictly forbidden. Nevertheless, Aunt Lydia's narration shows that Commander Judd does not obey the rules despite being responsible for public order. The first group of works he keeps are his guide to rule the state: he makes use of the biographies of these despotic totalitarian leaders. Such works testify to the existence of totalitarian leaders also in the past. As such for Gilead, possession of their biographies would probably be condoned. But the second group, the paintings, which were inspired by the written works, testify to the great achievements of the past even next to despotic leaders and under totalitarian regimes. They are the undesired reminders of the past for Gilead, and it is here that Commander Judd's collection becomes suspect and subversive.

The remains of the past life are destroyed by totalitarian government so as to restrain the masses from being united. The sense of belonging to a group is destroyed so that a possible act of rebellion could be prevented. They aim to isolate every citizen and expect total loyalty. Arendt clarifies in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that:

Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals. Compared with all other parties and movements, their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member. (Arendt, 1979: 323)

As the name itself signifies, totalitarianism demands "total" obedience from people. Likewise, Gilead expects such level of loyalty from the masses. Yet how could even the strictest government control the inner worlds of people? Aunt Lydia seems to be one of the most loyal and dedicated people in Gilead regime. However, she secretly conspires against Gilead. Her plans put her in a dangerous position that can lead to her death. Aunt Lydia keeps her plans about demolishing the totalitarian regime as a secret and does not talk about this with other Aunts. She says that "One person alone is not a full person: we exist in relation to others. I was one person: I risked becoming no person" (Atwood, 2019: 148). As a member of society, individuals were supposed to "exist" with each other. In oppressive regimes, however, it is not possible for individuals to exist and act collectively because of the atomization of the individuals created by the totalitarian government. In Aunt Lydia's case, she seems to be particularly isolated due to her risk-taking behavior. Her recordings about life

in Gilead and her detailed plan of the Mayday operation put her life at risk that could eventually cause her to become “no person.” Aunt Lydia is highly aware of the danger that she puts herself under and questions her actions:

Am I capable of such duplicity? Could I betray so completely? Having tunnelled this far under the foundations of Gilead with my stash of cordite, might I falter? As I am human, it is entirely possible. In that case, I would destroy those pages I have written so laboriously; and I would destroy you along with them, my future reader. One flare of a match and you’ll be gone—wiped away as if you had never been, as if you will never be. I would deny you existence. What a godlike feeling! Though it is a god of annihilation. I waver, I waver. (Atwood, 2019: 317-318)

Aunt Lydia, here, points out the fragility of everything that she has done all her life. Like her life, her life’s work also stands on an extremely delicate balance, for both of them can be destroyed with no trace. In such a case, not only are the documents but also her readers are lost or never come into existence. The narrator, therefore, has godlike features in the sense that the concrete proof of what happened could be destroyed if the narrator has to do it. Aunt Lydia, being mindful of her own power as a writer, reminds both the readers and her that if she was to be caught, she would destroy all the papers she wrote. Consequently, it would mean the death of her readers since she would not get a chance to be heard by anyone. However, even this proves that totalitarian governments cannot have total control over its people. There are always gaps. This opportunity for Aunt Lydia to record her experiences and plan the downfall of the regime expose these gaps clearly to the readers.

Beside Aunt Lydia, Agnes is one of the narrators in *The Testaments*. She provides a different perspective, of a girl who was born in Gilead and is not therefore a witness to life before the current regime. Nevertheless, the readers can observe that she is not blinded by the ideology. Agnes starts to talk about the injustices that limited her freedom as a girl even in her childhood:

There were swings in one of the parks, but because of our skirts, which might be blown up by the wind and then looked into, we were not to think of taking such a *liberty* as a swing. Only boys could taste that *freedom*; only they could swoop and soar; only they could be airborne. I have still never been on a swing. It remains one of my wishes. (Atwood, 2019: 16, emphasis added)

In the quote about her childhood above, the readers can observe the pervasive gender inequality in society. Therefore, Agnes’ reference to swinging as “liberty” demonstrates that the girls’ deprivation of even the simple pleasures like play,

pleasures that the boys have. She is aware that it is a freedom that is given to the boys although it is also a wish of hers. Swinging, here, symbolizes the freedom that women are deprived of. What Agnes wishes is to have the freedom that men have. Therefore, she expresses her desire for freedom as a young woman referring to a childhood feeling.

When Commander Judd chooses Agnes as his son's new wife, she suddenly remembers a girl who killed herself to avoid marriage and recalls what the Marthas said: "Suicide is a failure of faith," "It makes a real mess" and "Such a slur on the family" (Atwood, 2019: 225). Agnes thinks that if she took such an action, these words would probably be said for her too. She also talks about how the Marthas try to brainwash girls with aphorisms to convince them to marry:

"Every cloud has a silver lining" and "The harder the shell, the sweeter the nut" and even "Diamonds are a girl's best friend." Rosa went so far as to say, as if talking to herself, "Once you're dead, you're dead forever" while looking at me out of the sides of her eyes. (Atwood, 2019: 225)

These aphorisms are used to keep the girls who give a little signal of discomfort about marriage. These words indicate that even though some girls do not want to be married for now, they would enjoy more than they expected because they claim that every hardship ends with prosperity and welfare. For Agnes, the most striking among them is Rosa's words. Her words both imply a threat, as Marthas are considered as spies working at houses and reporting any oddness, and a warning that alerts her not to do something against the authority.

Later, Agnes finds out that one way to escape from marriage is to convince the other Aunts that she is enlightened and has received a calling to be an Aunt. However, in order to become accepted to be an Aunt, she has to feign as if she had this experience. Before she is tested by the Aunts, she has a conversation with Becka who was her friend from school. When Agnes and Becka were classmates, Becka slashed her wrist to avoid marriage so that the Aunts would not let this "crazy" girl to marry as it would be Aunt's fault if this kind of a marriage fails. With this strategy, Becka saves herself from marriage and fakes to receive a calling to be an Aunt, which results her to be one. When she meets Agnes again, Becka recommends her to "act crazy," for if she is thought to be crazy, she says, "They don't want you marrying anyone: it will be their responsibility if you do anything violent" (Atwood,

2019: 245). However, for Agnes, the only way to avoid this seems to pretend like she was born to be an Aunt. Consequently, Agnes chooses to act in an exaggerated way to be accepted among the Aunts.

As a person who was born into the totalitarian regime and did not see any alternative lifestyle, Agnes points out that she once believed in Gilead's ideology. Even the cautionary stories that she had listened to with enthusiasm, like the concubine's story, become charged with a whole new meaning in her mind:

But now I was reading the whole story. I looked for the brave and noble part, I looked for the choice, but none of that was there. The girl was simply shoved out the door and raped to death, then cut up like a cow by a man who'd treated her like a purchased animal when she'd been alive. No wonder she'd run away in the first place. It came as a painful shock: kind, helpful Aunt Estée had lied to us. The truth was not noble, it was horrible. This was what the Aunts meant, then, when they said women's minds were too weak for reading. We would crumble, we would fall apart under the contradictions, we would not be able to hold firm. Up until that time I had not *seriously* doubted the rightness and especially the truthfulness of Gilead's theology. If I'd failed at perfection, I'd concluded that the fault was mine. But as I discovered what had been changed by Gilead, what had been added, and what had been omitted, I feared I might lose my faith. (Atwood, 2019: 303, emphasis added)

The story Agnes refers to is a moral story that advises women to stay at home with their men or else they could be killed in a monstrous way. In the school, Agnes and other students are told that whatever happens to her is the woman's fault as she leaves the house first. However, with becoming an Aunt and learning how to read and write, Agnes figures out that the story is told to manipulate the girls. She recognizes that the woman is right for escaping from home since she is not treated right. Being able to read the story by herself enables her to judge the Aunts who have lied to them. Agnes is an outstanding character who is curious about the formation of the society in Gilead and a rebel as she lies to the Aunts about the call to be an Aunt to not marry. This moment in her narration is when an illumination as to the how Gilead indoctrinates girls like her with lies and hidden threats of punishment not only in the hands of government but also from the most powerful and pervasive of authorities, God. Nonetheless, most of the women in Gilead have not a chance to read. Reading the written text provides the reader possibilities of rereading and commenting on the hidden details whereas oral stories carry the mark of their

storytellers; they are monosemous. Listening to these stories, all the girls are left to believe the fiction the regime created.

Under such circumstances such an audience becomes easily malleable by the authority so much so that the bigger lies they hear, the more easily they are convinced of their truth. Arendt comments on the responses of the masses under the circumstances of the totalitarian regime:

They [the masses] do not believe in anything visible, in the reality of their own experience; they do not trust their eyes and ears but only their imaginations, which may be caught by anything that is at once universal and consistent in itself. What convinces masses are not facts, and even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part. (Arendt, 1979: 351)

The masses believe in what they are served in front of them. The fiction that has been built according to the totalitarian ideology covers the harsh reality of the real world and proposes a consistent life in which everything works in a regular system. In Gilead, this consistent system includes horrible stories that have been taught to children under the name of teaching morals. During their training, the Handmaids-to-be, for example, are taught the importance of giving birth. With propaganda, they are expected to readily and willingly accept the fact that when they are capable of giving birth, they will be given to different houses as Handmaids. The system seems to work so consistently that every future Handmaid feels she lives in a world that makes perfect sense and there is nothing for her to do except perform her given role. The stories that have been told in schools shape the mindset of children at a young age so that they are left no other choice other than becoming a part of the system. Yet, after learning to read and write, Agnes starts to save herself from this persistent system and realizes that Gilead has lied to them.

Once Agnes begins to question Gilead and its teachings, its theology as the most powerful tool of its propaganda and keeping people in order, becomes the center of her questioning. If Gilead is lying about everything else, how can she be sure about the religious teachings that it uses, she asks herself. Yet this is an interrogation that threatens to shatter so much more about Agnes's world. She worries that she would lose her faith in God since one of the things that she relied upon, Gilead, even if she doubted the ways of the authority, let her down. Her realization that Gilead has been feeding people with lies and the system has been

reaching a downfall creates in her nothing less than an epiphany. This also opens to the reader yet another hidden façade of Gilead where nothing is as it seems to be.

The last narrator in *The Testaments* is Daisy, a girl from in Canada. After learning the fact that she is Baby Nicole for whom Gilead is looking, she wants to be included in the Mayday plan, the organization that supports the fall of the regime. As an outsider, Daisy witnesses how her adoptive parents are murdered as they had been somehow related to Gilead: they had Baby Nicole. Daisy's first lesson about the totalitarian regime is its creation of fanatics and their function to keep the state alive. Ada, her friend from Canada explains to her that fanatics are special products of totalitarianism:

"Gilead's not shy about killing," said Ada. "They're fanatics." She said they were supposed to be dedicated to virtuous godly living, but you could believe you were living virtuously and also murder people if you were a fanatic. Fanatics thought that murdering people was virtuous, or murdering certain people. I knew that because we'd done fanatics in school. (Atwood, 2019: 198)

Ada's statement of Gilead summarizes the inner core of all totalitarian regimes. Similarly, as a totalitarian state, Gilead also gains strength thanks to the fanatics who support the decisions of the authority no matter whether these decisions are cruel or not. The fanaticism in totalitarian regime occurs as a natural result of the lack of class-consciousness among the masses (Arendt, 1979: 348). The lines of power are not drawn along the lines of the rich and the poor in this newly formed system. Rather the line that divides the masses from the ruling elite is that of almost divine right; therefore, disobedience to authority is an act against God.

However, this does not mean that poor people do not exist. It is claimed by the authority that one of the reasons of the change in the regime is the lack of food sources. It is probable that some people cannot even survive on such limited sources. On the other hand, the authority figures do not seem to suffer due to this scarcity. Aunt Lydia expresses that she saw Commander Judd with a kind of coffee that is not normally available, and even adding a shot of rum to it (Atwood, 2019: 277). While Judd has a rare kind of coffee, the masses are in a miserable situation. Nonetheless, their suffering is not addressed or even acknowledged by the rulers like Commander Judd. Thus, the masses are made to believe that their conditions are deserved in one way or another and they are bereft of the awareness and communicative to share their

misery with others like them. As atoms in a mass, they live unaware of themselves and of their next-door neighbors without even realizing that as a large group they have more power than the handful of rulers that strike fear in their hearts and souls. They are reduced to being members of the mass, a homogenous structure where differences are melted in one pot. The masses feel so isolated and lonely that they desperately need to be included in a group and fully devote themselves to the will of the authority and follow its rules blindly. They thus make up the fanatics of the regime. They fully devote themselves to the state to the degree where sacrifices are essential. Even if a fanatic dies, it would be for the sake of the state, which is one of the most honorable acts that a devotee can do. The fanatics of Gilead, too, are ready to shed blood for their country.

The responsibility that Daisy takes involves risks as she was raised with open-minded parents in a free country where the ills of an oppressive regime can be clearly observed from afar. She is aware of the level of the fanaticism in Gilead as an outsider. After intentionally getting caught up by the Pearl Girls, who are missionaries of Gilead, Daisy arrives in Gilead with a new name, Jade, and is welcomed by sweet songs about how happy they are for Daisy's inclusion among them. She notes: "They smiled and nodded at me: they seemed really happy. Maybe this won't be so bad, I thought" (Atwood, 2019: 273). The fiction that is created for Daisy is the exact fiction that has been performed in front of the masses of Gilead. While the masses are deceived as if this way of living is the only way to salvation, Daisy is almost deceived that all of the things she heard before coming to Gilead might be exaggerated because of their warm welcoming ceremony. Gilead, here, hides its hideous face both from the strangers and the locals by offering them a feigned reality.

After the acceptance of Daisy to Gilead, Becka and Agnes stay with her in the same place to keep an eye on her. They perceive Daisy as a different kind of woman; a different model, impossible to come across in Gilead. Agnes talks about her observation on Daisy:

When Jade was upstairs in her room, we would often hear thumping noises and muffled sounds. Was it a barbarian form of prayer? I finally had to ask her what she was doing here. "Working out," she said. "It's like exercising. You have to keep strong." "Men are strong in body," said Becka. "And in mind. Women are

strong in spirit. Though moderate exercise is allowed, such as walking, if a woman is of child-bearing age.” (Atwood, 2019: 327)

The difference between people who were born into different environments can be openly observed in this conversation. Becka and Agnes, who are from Gilead, have not seen any alternative way of living. It is natural for them to regard physical exercise as necessary only during pregnancy in order to ease childbirth, and it is only the light kind, not this “barbaric form of prayer,” which goes against the Gilead norms that deem women the physically (and mentally) weaker gender. Agnes continues to ask her “What do you think you need to be strong in body?” because she was becoming curious about her “pagan beliefs” (Atwood, 2019: 327). Any unfamiliar act can be labeled as a pagan belief because brainwashed people are convinced that the only truth in life is the one that they live in. Thus, they call any other contrasting opinion inferior or downright wrong. Daisy, or Jade, however, claims that she does this exercise to defend herself in case a man attacks her. Atwood’s introduction of Daisy to Gilead as a figure that has grown up in a different environment underlines the contrast between the mindsets of the characters shaped by the ideologies in which they were raised. Agnes’s and Daisy’s narrations provide a different perspective on the working process of Gilead while displaying discrepancies between a Gileadean and a foreigner’s views.

The female narrators in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments* present different experiences of different women characters. Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale* provides her version of events from her limited and isolated stance as a Handmaid. Her narration serves to point at the total atomization of the masses in Gilead, whose pasts are erased, and old lives are annihilated. Offred has awareness in the sense that she is not blinded by the oppressive ideology of the state and rejects believing the fiction the state tells her through its propaganda. While standing at the lowest rank of Gilead’s strata, she displays the difficulties of being a Handmaid defined only by her body’s procreative functions, a walking uterus whose sole responsibility is to procreate. Aunt Lydia, though depicted as an evil character in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, is portrayed in *The Testaments* as a smart woman who makes strategies to undermine Gilead from within. Her narration provides an inner view of her intentions behind her actions. She claims that all the evil things she has done should have been done to

gain the trust of the authority. Aunt Lydia explains that since the very beginning, she has seen what would happen to people who are opposed to the ideology of the state. For this reason, she chooses not to be a corpse and she secretly plans the Mayday operation. Just like Offred, she also suffers from being lonely as she can trust no one and puts herself at great risk by tricking the state into believing that she is deeply devoted to her duty. Agnes, on the other hand, is a girl who was raised and educated under the oppressive system of Gilead. Most of the time, she is seen as a character who follows the rules with a little suspicion as to how things work in Gilead because the gender inequality she experienced when even she was little makes a strong and indelible impression on her. Nevertheless, her illumination happens when she learns to read and write after becoming an Aunt. As Agnes realizes the ills of the system, by her narration, the readers get a chance to witness a perspective of a girl whose opinions change when she notices the fiction, the feigned reality created by the authority. Daisy, however, stands as opposed to Agnes as she is an outside figure who was raised under completely different circumstances in which individual freedom is supported. She presents the differences between herself and Gilead women with her actions and speeches. All these four women in these novels display their experiences as women and shed light on womanhood's aspects divided into usable functions in Gilead's totalitarian regime. Coming from different backgrounds, the female narrators provide diverse perspectives on their lives in which they struggle to obey the strict rules of the totalitarian regime of Gilead. For those who observe the changes of the regime while living in a democratic country, it was not particularly pleasant to go through the transition to a totalitarian order. In the next chapter, the hardships the characters faced and the different lifestyles before and during Gilead will be deliberated.

3.3. TRANSITION IN GILEAD

The transition process from a democratic country to a totalitarian state takes place slowly without citizens noticing the small changes. In Gilead, this was also the case. The slow change in the working process of the country and the transformation in public and private life occur without alarming the citizens of the United States

which goes by the name of Gilead later. The government subtly infuses their new ideology to the mind of the masses without making it obvious. The sudden recalls of Offred show that what is “normal” can be changed in the course of time by the authority. She notices that the things that had been accepted as normal in the past are not normal now. Instead, there is a new understanding of what is normal and ordinary. Thinking about her past lifestyle, Offred states that: “Is that how we lived, then? But we lived as usual. Everyone does, most of the time. Whatever is going on is as usual. Even this is as usual, now. We lived, as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it” (Atwood, 2017: 66). She finds it hard to believe that the lifestyle they once had does not seem possible from the vantage point of her present life. Therefore, she holds people including herself responsible for the current oppressive system they live under as they were indifferent to the incidents at that time. It is their “ignoring” that causes them to end up in Gilead:

Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it. There were stories in the newspapers, of course, corpses in ditches or the woods, bludgeoned to death or mutilated, interfered with, as they used to say, but they were about other women, and the men who did such things were other men. None of them were the men we knew. The newspaper stories were like dreams to us, bad dreams dreamt by others. How awful, we would say, and they were, but they were awful without being believable. They were too melodramatic, they had a dimension that was not the dimension of our lives. (Atwood, 2017: 66)

The radical changes that result in the totalitarian government of Gilead do not happen drastically and instantaneously; rather, slow steps are taken in order not to “awake” the citizens. Everybody knew of the murders. However, as the victims were not one of them, they preferred to stay silent and spectate everything as if they were all bad dreams. Offred explains that they were not in the papers; they lived in the “gaps between the stories” (Atwood, 2017: 66-67).

Not only does Offred recall the memories from her past by herself, but also the Commander reminds her of the old habits of their old lives. He gives her a present, an old magazine which is banned by the current regime. She recognizes the importance and the meaning of such magazines under these circumstances:

What was in them was promise. They dealt in transformations; they suggested an endless series of possibilities, extending like the reflections in two mirrors set facing one another, stretching on, replica after replica, to the vanishing point. They suggested one adventure after another, one wardrobe after another, one

improvement after another, one man after another. They suggested rejuvenation, pain overcome and transcended, endless love. The real promise in them was immortality. (Atwood, 2017: 165)

In the past, magazines shaped women to fit into a category in which they have to please men with their dazzling appearances. Magazines gave beauty tips, tips about how to dress nicely and how to please a man in bed etc. They too were the products of a patriarchal system in which women have to look and act “flawless.” As the totalitarian regime seizes power in the US, magazines are banned, claiming that they were materializing women who need to be protected now by this male-oriented authority. This newly formed totalitarian patriarchal regime is in fact partly a product of patriarchal capitalism that the citizens once lived in. Both the totalitarian patriarchal regime and the previous patriarchal capitalism perceive women in the same way: they are commodities that have to satisfy men in daily life. The two regimes, in this way, are not so different than the other. Still there is a significant difference between the regime in the United States and Gilead. Living under totalitarian rules, Offred realizes that even though magazines did shape women, the citizens at least had the freedom to read them or not, to be a part of them or not. There was a freedom of choice. Now this kind of freedom is now destroyed.

The readers learn with the help of Offred’s narration that her mother was an activist who fought for the rights of women. Offred recalls that her mother and her friends were burning magazines in which women were sexualized and abused. She remembers that “Their faces were happy, ecstatic almost” (Atwood, 2017: 48). Offred’s generation thought that everything will remain the same as their mothers, the older generation, had already fought for women’s right. Offred’s generation took the freedom they had for granted. This passive state as women is one of the reasons of totalitarianism as totalitarian leaders saw no resistance while taking small actions limiting women’s freedom.

Femicides in the past are accompanied by the results of extreme exploitation of nature. Before the totalitarian regime seized the state, natural disasters increased in addition to the economic crisis. Picturing a bleak environment, Aunt Lydia, in *The Testaments* explains what kind of place they were living in just before the formation of Gilead:

In that vanished country of mine, things had been on a downward spiral for years. The floods, the fires, the tornadoes, the hurricanes, the droughts, the water shortages, the earthquake... The tanking economy, the joblessness, the falling birth rate. People became frightened. Then they became angry. The absence of viable remedies. The search for someone to blame. (Atwood, 2019: 66)

The increasing fear among people provide the patriarchal figures of Gilead with the excuse and opportunity to seize power so that all of these harms could be cured. Commander Judd justifies the deeds of the regime asserting that the life they lived in were morally declining. What he sees as the moral decline, however, has nothing to do justice or egalitarianism, but a strong patriarchal conservative bias:

We have seen the results of too much laxity, too much hunger for material luxuries, and the absence of the meaningful structures that lead to a balanced and stable society. Our birth rate—for various reasons, but most significantly through the selfish choices of women—is in free fall. You do agree that human beings are at their most unhappy when in the midst of chaos? That rules and boundaries promote stability and thus happiness? (Atwood, 2019: 174)

Every totalitarian leader pretends to offer a helping hand to the citizens who are in a desperate situation while portraying themselves as the saviors of their country. Similarly, the authority of Gilead blames the past for its lack of morality and the collapse of social order. They claim that the recovery will be received if they take control of the state while offering the citizens so-called happiness and stability.

Long before the Republic of Gilead openly announces itself but when it is to totalitarian world view begins to take over the state, Offred recalls her husband, Luke when she loses her job. He wants to make love with Offred despite her feeling of desperation due to being unemployed. Luke does not seem to see anything harmful in this change which puts males on a financially superior level than females:

He doesn't mind this, I thought. He doesn't mind it at all. Maybe he even likes it. We are not each other's, any more. Instead, I am his. Unworthy, unjust, untrue. But that is what happened. So Luke: what I want to ask you now, what I need to know is, Was I right? Because we never talked about it. By the time I could have done that, I was afraid to. I couldn't afford to lose you. (Atwood, 2017: 191-192)

As women no longer had any right in the public domain such as having a job and earning money, they started to become more dependent on male figures while turning into properties that belong to them. Offred states that Luke did not seem to care about or blind to what was yet to come. Since this new form of government is male oriented undermining the rights of women, she was not comfortable with Luke

saying nothing about it. Yet in the end, not only women but men like Luke take their share of the tragedy that has yet to come.

The transition in Gilead starts within the public domain. Women lose their jobs and now, all their money belongs to their closest male kin. Therefore, Luke tries to console Offred saying that “You know I’ll always take care of you.” Startled and disturbed, Offred comments: “I thought, already he’s starting to patronize me. Then I thought, already you’re starting to get paranoid” (Atwood, 2017: 188). Offred is now in a position that she should be taken care of by her husband. It signifies that as a woman, she slowly loses her voice in public and becomes more reliant on her husband because of the inevitable change of the state. Offred explains the day when the change happened.

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. Keep calm, they said on television. Everything is under control... That was when they suspended the Constitution. They said it would be temporary. There wasn’t even any rioting in the streets. People stayed at home at night, watching television, looking for some direction. There wasn’t even an enemy you could put your finger on. (Atwood, 2017: 183)

When they have the power to rule the state, the new government tries to comfort the citizens that everything is just right. This seizure of power occurs by the help of democracy. The US was once a democratic country, so the totalitarian figures seized the power by misusing the freedom that democracy gave. As Arendt remarks totalitarian regimes use and abuse the freedom that has been given by democracy (Arendt, 1979: 312). She also perceives totalitarianism as a form of tyranny (Arendt, 1979: 461). Similarly, Gilead uses the freedom that democracy offers in order to annihilate the freedom of others and thus to destroy the very democracy that brought them to power in the first place.

In order to ease the transition from democracy to totalitarianism, this new form of government suspends the media, transportation and free movement among people, and the legal structure that had upheld the previous government and locks everybody in an immobile state of pause where life as people had known it has come to a halt. Offred continues to describe this process: “Things continued in that state of suspended animation for weeks, although some things did happen. Newspapers were censored and some were closed down, for security reasons they said. The roadblocks

began to appear, and Identipasses” (Atwood, 2017: 183). All tools of media are kept under the control of the authority in order to prevent people realizing the gravity of the situation. In fact, what keeps people in these early stages of Gilead from showing any immediate reaction is the disruption of information channels achieved by the control or total lockdown of media. Later on, when the totalitarian state has had complete control of the media, what is circulated as information and what is really happening will have nothing in common. In *Totalitarian Communications as a Means of Control*, Paul Kecskemeti discusses the use of media by totalitarian regimes in which every single part of it is formed to praise the workings of the government:

...every part of it [media] is designed to enhance respect for the totalitarian government, to generate approval of its policies, and to silence doubts as to the power, benevolence, wisdom, and cohesion of the ruling clique. The image of the world, publicly created day in and day out in the mass communication media, represents an ideal of conformist thinking. (Kecskemeti, 1950: 226)

The control of the media tools is vital for totalitarian governments as it is a direct way to create a fictional world in which all is well. The authority of Gilead takes this path so that the citizens would be kept under control while the totalitarian regime takes its action discreetly.

After the seizure of power, most of the US now becomes Gilead. Everything changes in both public and private spheres in life. The masses, who were once citizens, are convinced that the deeds of the current government are right while the past government failed. Aunt Lydia speaks ill of the past since it is now believed that society is corrupted because of the previous way of life. She claims that “We were a society dying” (Atwood, 2017: 35), that there was no choice but to take such an action that would change the whole system of the past. She makes her point by showing old pornographic clips in which women are abused. Offred reveals that:

Once we had to watch a woman being slowly cut into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out. Consider the alternatives, said Aunt Lydia. You see what things used to be like? That was what they thought of women, then. (Atwood, 2017: 128)

The illusion Gilead creates is that in the past women had been abused, and they needed to be saved. As Offred later states that: “A movie about the past is not the same as the past” (Atwood, 2017: 267). Through propaganda, not only is a fiction for today displayed for the citizens, also the past is fictionalized and distorted. It is true,

the cruel pornographic videos share the same mentality with Gilead, but they did not represent the whole picture of women. The authoritarian figures claim that all women were in reality in such terrible conditions in the past that they were materialized and tortured. In Gilead, all women were supposedly safe from such forms of abuse, yet the book makes clear that this safety is limited with open pornography and governmentally unsanctioned forms of rape. In fact, the perception of women in Gilead is not so different from the worst aspects of patriarchal perceptions of women in the United States; it is even worse. While in the former system there were avenues for free expression and ways of living for women, in Gilead, every woman has to abide by the system in which procreation is their only true office.

While the authority constantly reminds the masses that the things that were done before Gilead were horrible, they often refer to the women who had detected the inchoate beginnings of Gilead even then. Offred mentions the images of these women in protests in documentaries from the past. Aunt Lydia introduces them as Unwomen:

Imagine, said Aunt Lydia, wasting their time like that, when they should have been doing something useful. Back then, the Unwomen were always wasting time. They were encouraged to do it. The government gave them money to do that very thing. (Atwood, 2017: 128)

In Gilead, not only women who had had abortions during the old regime are announced as Unwomen, but also women who had wasted their time at work instead of giving birth or taking care of the domestic work. In Gilead, for women, having a job outside home is now out of the question because there should be one responsibility for them: to give birth. Likewise, if Handmaids, whose sole responsibility is to give birth to healthy children, fail to accomplish this goal, they are declared Unwomen.

In one of the clips of Unwomen, Aunt Lydia shows women who protest the stereotypical roles of women which limited them with the private domain. Offred sees her mother among them. It is true that in the old days, not everything was perfect for women. Even then women were objectified as sex things and targets of advertisements and consumption in magazines and faced violence from men. However, there were other women who supported these underprivileged women, helped them raise their voices, and stand up against patriarchy. Now, however, the

freedom of speech is destroyed, and no one is allowed to voice a different opinion in opposition to the oppressive ideology of the Gilead regime.

Because of this drastic change in life, the concept of freedom gains another meaning. Offred declares: “There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it” (Atwood, 2017: 34). What she signifies with “freedom to” is that once women had the freedom to choose how they were living their lives. On the other hand, “freedom from” implies protection by others. Now, females are under protection from any inconveniences that had happened in the past. Under the condition of the strict totalitarian regime, the past is referred to as a transitional stage towards freedom. It was just part of a process to achieve the “real” freedom that Gilead offers. Offred says, “Freedom, like everything else, is relative” (Atwood, 2017: 242), so the totalitarian government can shape the meaning of concepts according to their own will. Thus, it is claimed that the path that is taken today is the most righteous way to get rid of the anarchic habits of the past and to achieve so-called freedom.

The readers learn the transformation of Offred from a white-collar professional in the United States to a Handmaid in *The Handmaid's Tale* while no information is given about how and from what sources the Aunts become employed by Gilead. In *The Testaments*, Aunt Lydia reveals her past, her becoming an Aunt, and her experiences with the Commanders in the early days of Gilead. The readers learn that she was a judge. Her previous profession stands as a threat to the Gilead regime as she was deciding the fate of criminals. Not only does her profession not fit in the ideal portrayal of a typical woman in Gilead, also her past as an independent decision maker is not compatible with the expectations of the state where even as a woman at the top of the female hierarchy her place comes after the Commander's. When Commander Judd makes an interview with Lydia at the beginning of the Gilead regime, he exposes that she once had an abortion, got divorced and never had children, all of which are corruptions and waste of a woman's body (Atwood, 2019: 171). Almost everything about her is contrary to the idealized version of a woman whose aim is to reproduce children and look after them and serve her husband. But

as a smart woman who knows how to take control, the Commander decides she will be a valuable asset to be included in the positions of Aunts.

After the acceptance of Lydia among the Aunts, she is expected to show full loyalty to the system. She declares her commitment is to a force higher than Gilead: She therefore thinks, “loyalty to a higher truth is not treason, for the ways of God are not the ways of man, and they are *most emphatically not the ways of woman*” (Atwood, 2019: 173; emphasis added). Loyalty to the authority during the construction of a new totalitarian regime is significant. However, Lydia was “once a judge, always a judge” (Atwood, 2019: 253). She was aware of oppressive ideology that looks down on women and denies their rights. Although most of the time, it seemed that she was standing with the authority, it is gradually understood that she was making her way into the system in order get rid of the totalitarian government.

In sum, the transition from a democratic country to a totalitarian state was a slow process in Gilead. Although the process itself is slow in order not to arouse resistance from the citizens, the end result is a drastic change witnessed and narrated by the narrators of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. The seeds of the Gilead regime are planted slowly and surely by the patriarchal remnants within the US society. Pornography, rapes, and murdering of women had been daily occurrences even then. However, many US citizens stay indifferent to such incidents happening around them because they were not one of the corpses in such news. These provide necessary excuses for the Gilead authorities to justify their coup. Offred describes the first steps that totalitarian figures take to transform the state into an oppressive regime is to play the role of a savior. The authority justifies itself by claiming that they had to take precautions to the evils resulted from the wrongs of the past not only in society but also in the environment as in pollution and declining birth rates. Therefore, they depend a great deal on the power of media to propagate their views. Thus, media is one of the first tools that fall under the control of the government in order to manipulate the masses according to its own will. The level of control achieved by the state by the power of media and other tools becomes clear by a comparison between the first generation of Gilead women who had a pre-Gilead past and the first Gilead-born women whose experiences are limited only with the Gilead's totalitarian regime.

The narrators, Offred and Aunt Lydia reveal the distinction between the life in Gilead and the US where the citizens once had a right to stand by the oppressed and victimized people. Agnes, on the other hand, is a girl who has not experienced any alternative lifestyle; thus, she provides the point of view of a girl who was born into the totalitarian regime, despite having doubts about the way things work in Gilead. Daisy, presents the readers a different point of view from outside Gilead, comparing two different conditions of living in Canada and Gilead. Whether they are refugees from the past (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 2017: 239) or girls who were raised under completely different ideologies, the experiences of the female characters are mutual: They witness life under an oppressive patriarchal totalitarian system whilst providing their points of view to compare and contrast life before and outside the totalitarian domination.

CONCLUSION

Patriarchal systems, with a hierarchy based on male values and the degradation of women, lie at the heart of totalitarian regimes. In the literary world, some authors brought to light the issue of women in totalitarian regimes and gave a warning about them. Margaret Atwood is one of them. She successfully created a totalitarian state called Gilead in her books *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. She emphasizes that Gilead comes after the downfall of democracy in the United States as most of the US turns into a totalitarian state. This newly formed regime changes every bit of the democratic rights of citizenship and freedoms of past life while trying to establish its own structure. Gilead “forces both the male and female population to completely re-write their cultural traits, collective behaviors, intimate dispositions and expectations, replacing past aspirations to happiness, fulfillment and other personal hopes with obedience, submission and faith” (Minico, 2019: 11). While resisting men from the old regime are killed, punished, hanged, and displayed to public, women cannot be so easily given up for they are needed as “two legged wombs” (146). Therefore, their degradation takes the shape of giving them a life whose boundaries are strictly designated by their childbearing capacities. Since they are looked upon not as individuals with a free will of their own but as “national treasures,” they are to be kept under close scrutiny. Most of the past is thus thrown away while a new lifestyle is formed where oppressed women are kept under constant surveillance, both in public and private spheres of life.

The two narrators in these books, Offred and Aunt Lydia picture the change in the state while providing flashbacks from past life while Daisy offers the readers a point of view that sees how both different forms of government, one democratic and one totalitarian, work. Agnes, on the other hand, provides a view of a girl who was born under the strict rules of the regime. The experiences of these four women reflect the struggles of women from different backgrounds, different ages, and statuses. Their narration helps the readers comprehend what is living under a totalitarian regime is like. With Arendt's book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the understanding of a totalitarian regime in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

with its workings and strategies while analyzing women's effort of survival becomes coherent.

One of the reasons for the emergence of a totalitarian regime is the indifference of citizens to the signs of threatening political changes in democracies. In her attempt to explicate what gave rise to Hitler's and Mussolini's fascist regimes, Hannah Arendt explains that in Europe "Indifferent masses could easily be the majority in a democratically ruled country" (Arendt, 1979: 312). These indifferent masses can be effortlessly adapted to the totalitarian regime as their passive state results in ignoring what seems to them as minor changes in social and political life. This gradual alteration reminds one of the stories of the boiling frog. In this fable, the frog is slowly boiled to death without realizing it was, in fact, dying. The gradual change becomes the death of the frog. Just as in this story, the unwillingness or indifferent state of the citizens can create a catastrophe as it happened on the way to Gilead.

Totalitarian regimes escalate and capitalize on the indifference of the masses. For example, death in Gilead is announced with a bell ringing. This announcement becomes so ordinary that it loses the initial terror it had caused in Offred's mind. She explains that the reason why the bell did not cause that earlier fear and terror may be the fact that she has become "used to" it, as an ordinary practice that can take place any time. As such, even though the bells signify something important, like the loss of someone, normalization is gradually so successfully actualized that at some point the sounds of bells become customary expressions of a-run-of-the-mill practice. This kind of indifference results in two different outcomes: this indifference happens either the masses are blindly following the rules of the state and accept what is required from them, or the state fails to scare the masses with these bells which signify an end of a person's life that means the authority has lost their power to frighten people.

In this totalitarian state, though every individual is oppressed, women are especially abused. The most important source from which totalitarian state takes its power is religion so much so that the workings of the state come to be equated with the will of God. Gilead bases its religion on a selective attitude towards biblical stories and events especially where women's obedience to their husbands is

demanding as part of obedience to God. Any other, more humanitarian parts of the Bible as well as Jesus Christ's forgiveness and all-embracing love for all humanity are never mentioned in Gilead. As a theocratic totalitarian state, Gilead takes a distorted form of Christian religion shaped according to totalitarian ends. Even in the standardized daily speeches of the masses, religion prevails. For example, to use religious greetings is an obligation as it signifies the loyalty to state and God. This system that focuses on women only as birthing machines whose duty is to provide their men with heirs is normalized through religious stories such as that of Sarah and Hagar. Thus, religious passages are shown to convince the masses as what the state requires of them is also ordained by God and the only way to save themselves from the corrupted and immoral life that they once had. In Gilead, every answer to any minorities is concerned with religion in one way or another.

This totalitarian state claims that, in the past, women were brutally corrupted. Now, fake protection is offered. Women are at the supposedly safe hands of male figures. The authority claims that they are strictly opposed to pornography and women "wasting" their bodies with a leisure activity like sex, instead of giving birth. However, a different kind of pornography occurs in Gilead. What the Handmaids experience every day is actually rape. Women have to endure this legalized rape for the sake of giving birth for the state of Gilead. Therefore, this is also another kind of slavery: this time is not race-based, but gender-based.

Atwood's two novels have demonstrated that the greatest focus of totalitarian regimes is almost always women's bodies. The utmost basis upon which totalitarian regimes establish their power over the female body and women is patriarchy. In patriarchal societies, women are perceived as usable objects, either sexually, as "eye candies," or otherwise, who serve the pleasures of males. In our capitalist "democracies" women are often expected to fit strict and unreachable standards of beauty. Such images of women are portrayed and propagated with the help of mass media with advertisements, fashion, and beauty industries. We are all surrounded by these images of women. Therefore, these images are so thoroughly integrated into our lives that we are not aware of these portrayals. Whether it is on television, on the internet, or on billboards, we always see such types of women who are defined and constructed according to the male standards of beauty according to which women

have to be fit, always look beautiful and be flawless with a lovely smile. This flawlessness can be achieved with make-up or plastic surgery. In short, the patriarch offers happiness to women by suggesting “correction” on their faces, and bodies.

While patriarchy in modern Western societies objectifies women in terms of beauty standards, its totalitarian version, on the other hand, objectifies women with their capability of procreation. For totalitarian regimes, procreation has many advantages. One of them is that it is the easiest way to imprison women in homes. Hitler once said that because of women, men were not able to find jobs. With an excuse like this, it was necessary to erase women in public life while giving them the responsibility of being “full-time” mothers. Another advantage of keeping women at home raising children is that this new life signifies a new beginning that is ready to be brainwashed. Unlike people who have already seen the workings of two different governmental systems, newborn babies will be raised in the regime which, when they grow up, they will think, is the ideal one, a way of thinking constructed and maintained with the tools of propaganda. Then, finally, they will turn into loyal supporters of the state if propaganda works well. Totalitarian governments aim to gain more soldiers or loyal followers through births. Therefore, as a result of the increased population, a strong army, that can protect the state from any foreign powers, comes into existence.

Since the ideal for women resides in their “nurturing and kind nature” in totalitarian states, contrary to the representations of women in modern western states, they are not to be valued by their looks but with their capacities for procreation. At first sight these two constructions of womanhood seem to be in conflict. Unlike the women in capitalistic modes of role construction, according to which women are expected to flaunt their beauty, the women in most totalitarian regimes have to stay at home and learn how to be good housewives and good mothers. In the eyes of totalitarian regimes, a woman should not look alluring, so the governments take some measures. They are put into plain clothes that prevent them from attracting males. In some states, only certain types of hairstyles are allowed. The portrayal of women in totalitarian regimes stands in contrast to the wild and vamp representation of women in modern patriarchal societies. The difference between the categorization of women in each order is that a woman has the freedom not to be a part of these

standards in modern democratic forms of patriarchy. Yet, in totalitarian regimes, rules are dictated to women and all acts of violation of the laws are punished. In other words, in such a regime, there is no freedom of choice as to whether a woman wants to be a part of the system.

When regarded from a perspective that delves deep into the sources of, however, the differences and the contrast between the presentation of women totalitarian and modern capitalistic democratic patriarchies begin to dissolve. In the patriarchy, in modern democratic forms and in totalitarianism is based on a debasing of women and on the perception of women as a territory to be conquered. In patriarchy in modern democratic societies, pornography feeds this idea of the debasement of women's bodies. In such pornographic representations, women are shown under the control of men who can exercise unlimited desires on women's bodies. Such fantasies in which women are shown in subordinate positions to men in sexual acts help normalize violence in sex and condones rape as part of the nature of things. The torture applied to women's bodies is expected to become an arousal mechanism for men. This claim on women's bodies embedded into patriarchal thought in all its manifestations also feed the totalitarian idea of the degrading of women.

In fact, despite its prohibition, in totalitarian societies pornography never disappears. It lurks behind all the repressed norms of sexual behavior because the same male-centered perception of women either as pleasure givers or as mere nurturers/birth machines exists in both forms of patriarchy. In other words, once women become defined by what their bodies mean to and how they can serve men, they are forced either to cover their bodies or to expose them in their nakedness. In either case, they are not defined by their self-perception as independent and equally important beings.

Totalitarian regimes assert that they have to change the old ways of living in which women were under oppression while placing a new system that is allegedly safe for women. With a smile on their faces, totalitarian leaders offer a better world where women are now safe under the protection of their husbands at home. They claim that women will not be objectified anymore as in the previous times. However, regarding women as birth machines refutes this idea. The degradation of women's

bodies takes another shape in totalitarian regimes that is not remarkably different than the patriarchal order.

Pornographic images of women are often accompanied by another strand of representations of women. The degradation of women's bodies is also maintained through visual representations to which we are steadily exposed through the media. The image of a perfect-appearing, ideally shaped woman enhanced also by visual technology causes women to feel insecure about themselves. The constant exposure of a certain type of woman causes in ordinary women in real life the feeling of being inadequate. Since most women do not fit into this flawless picture of how a woman should look, they are constantly demanded to transform themselves by makeup, by surgical operations so that they would fit into the category of beauty set by society.

These categories set for women are also another reason for the rising of totalitarian regimes. Even from the early stages of their lives, girls are exposed to gender-based degradation. They are told to play with certain kinds of toys that will prepare them for the roles of being a housewife house and mother, for nurturing and caring. They are also barred from toys that might encourage independent thinking and intelligence. Boys on the other hand are encouraged to play with toys that will support aggressive and violent behavior. These toys are totally off limits for girls because they are believed to destroy the fragile nature of women and lady like behavior and instill in girls the undesired attitude of tomboy. Although men also suffer from some standards of patriarchy which attributes them to be strong rather than being "weak" like girls, women suffer the most from this categorization. Women are expected to have a certain personality who is compatible with their kind and gentle "nature." As girls grow into womanhood with such socialization their roles as housewives and mothers wait readily to fit them. New expressions are now added such as "you should smile more" or "a woman should not curse." Such classifications of women become all the stricter in totalitarian regimes. Similarly, an ideal image of women is created in totalitarianism as well.

The most ideal woman for these systems is being a good mother. It is the most miraculous thing that a woman can experience for all patriarchal images of women including totalitarianism. Thus, even when a woman does not become a mother, it is claimed that this feeling is already in them. Therefore, the choice of not

becoming a mother is going against nature. Motherhood comes with a whole set of characteristics.

The stereotype of the good mother is the attribution of a particular set of characteristics—a capacity for nurturance, attentiveness to the psychological and emotional states of others, willingness to sacrifice one's own desires for the needs of others—to woman's nature. According to the stereotype, most women are born with the talent for mothering; it is not learned. (Seiter, 1986: 66)

Women are born to be mothers as it is in their nature, so it is also part of their nature to be caregivers to the point of selflessness to help those in need. These stereotypes of women are set by the male ideology. It is not surprising this way of thinking is the same for modern patriarchal societies and totalitarian states. Both picture women as weak creatures that are bound to the domestic area of life. This kind of portrayal may potentially and eventually lead to totalitarianism.

To conclude, in totalitarian regimes, the biggest victims are women. Although men also suffer from oppression in such regimes, women's sufferings go far deeper than men's. In addition to being commodified as producers of products and values like men, additionally, women's bodies themselves are reduced to commodities to be put to use for pleasure and procreation. Totalitarianism can exercise extreme forms of cruelty to women which includes murder and rape. As in slavery, women's bodies become tools for the state's continuity, not instruments for enjoyment for the women who inhabit them. Therefore, the woman's will and existence as a person is annihilated in the example of totalitarianism that Atwood provides for her readers. The position of women in the totalitarian communities is so dreadful that some may prefer death over living a life like this. In Gilead, this is also the case. One has two "choices" under totalitarian regimes: it is either to obey by assuming the title given by the authority and fulfill duties or to object to this abhorrent system which results in the death penalty. As women are the most disadvantageous gender in totalitarian regimes, their struggles should be given separate attention from men's experiences. Although the capability of giving birth is a positive feature for a woman, it turns into a threat in the hands of totalitarianism. Thus, procreation turns women into vulnerable creatures in totalitarian regimes. All totalitarian regimes in the world restricted women and had control over women's bodies, especially their productivity. The key to restrain every little thing in life is to have total control over women's

capability of giving birth. The totalitarian governments must supervise this so as to persuade their patriarchal ideologies. Therefore, totalitarian regimes scrutinize the masses, especially women, as much as they can. Despite the surveillance system, however, there are always leaks, missed spots. The totalitarian states cannot reach the mind of the individuals. Every citizen can question the ways their government works in spite of the tools of propaganda regulated by the authority. Even a person who seems to be a loyal supporter of the regime can doubt and try to find a way to break loose from this cruel system. Despite their argument to set things back to the ways of nature, totalitarianism, in fact, goes against human nature and its most basic need for freedom. No matter how the totalitarian authority tries to keep the masses away from any rebellious thoughts by banning everything that reminds people of the habits of the past life or murdering rioters, there are still some spots that cannot be reached and controlled. This is one of the reasons that totalitarian regimes do not last long because totalitarianism is not compatible with human nature. It is correct that human beings are extremely adaptable to their environment. However, the conditions that totalitarian regimes create do not correspond to our natures as these oppressive living conditions are at odds with our survival instincts. At the end of the day, it should not be forgotten that all totalitarian regimes are doomed to fall as Gilead did.

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