Scripts and Counter-Scripts of Gender in Contemporary Feminist Dystopia

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Abstract

Dystopia has been and continues to be one of the most popular literary genres today. The authors like Ray Bradbury, George Orwell, and Margaret Atwood have attracted their audience with the portrayal of worlds much different than the utopian, idealistic ones. Out of dystopia emerged a sub-genre of feminist dystopia – dystopian novels focusing mostly on women's issues, and their voices and point of view. The most prominent work of feminist dystopia is Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale. The Handmaid's Tale* has inspired many authors to focus on similar topics and broaden the scope of feminist dystopian novels. One of them is *Vox* by Christina Dalcher. The two novels are thirty years apart but deal with similar women's issues such as oppression, attacks on their reproductive rights, the loss of economic and bodily agency, and so on. This thesis is going to apply the psychoanalitical terms "script" and "counter-script" to the field of literature to explain the way how the scripts of gender represent people and the world today and how the counter-scripts of gender represent the oppressive totalitarian treatment of women.

Keywords: feminism, dystopia, gender, script, counter-script, *The Handmaid's Tale, Vox*

Contents

Introduction

More than half a century ago, dystopia grew popular with the novels such as Ray Bradbury's *Farenheit 451*, George Orwell's *1984,* and later Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. For a genre that is not overly optimistic, it has fascinatingly flourished for quite some time now, being especially well-received by the community of young adult readers with the novels like *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* driven the world into frenzy. It can, with certainty, be said that Bradbury, Orwell, and Atwood laid the groundwork for every other dystopian author as most of today's dystopian novels have been influenced by the three aforementioned classics in some way, shape, or form.

When discussing the authors who set the groundwork in dystopia, it is necessary to mention the importance of Margaret Atwood in the formation of feminist dystopia as a sub-genre. Feminist dystopia has been putting the focus on women and their struggles in dystopian literature. Although Atwood does not describe her novels as feminist dystopias but as speculative fiction, the themes and issues of *The Handmaid's Tale* perfectly encapsulate the characteristics of feminist dystopia.

Feminist dystopia is often centered around a patriarchal totalitarian regime, which makes women worthless and invisible in the newly formed society, and it showcases the importance of men and their power over women. Most of feminist dystopias deal with the theme of confining women into the domestic sphere of the past where they had very limited rights and benefits. Consequently, the traditional stereotypes in these novels are very prominent and will be discussed through the scripts and counter-scripts of gender.

This thesis will analyse the portrayal of radical patriarchies in feminist dystopias. The focus is going to be on the analysis of traditional gender role stereotypes forced upon both men and women, and on those who oppose the enforced gender rules. The first chapter offers a brief overview of gender, gender performativity including double standards, along with gender stereotypes and roles. The second chapter explains what dystopia is, with the focus on feminist dystopia and dystopian tropes. It also provides the background theory on patriarchy, which is a common context of feminist dystopia. The third chapter centers around the scripts and counter-scripts of gender in the novels *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood and *Vox* by Christina Dalcher. These novels were chosen because they all focus on the United States of America going from a liberal country to a traditional patriarchy,

as well as because the similarities between the stories are jarring, even though there has been more than thirty years between the publication of the novels.

1. Gender

1.1. The Definition of the Term

Gender has always been a thought-provoking matter, constantly discussed in various ways by many different people. It has been explored by scientists and psychologists as well as by regular people who are trying to improve their own lives, relationships, and broaden their knowledge. That fact has caused gender to become one of the most notorious topics to converse about, because with the rise of social media everybody has been giving their own opinion on what gender is or should be. World Health Organisation defines gender as the "characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other" ("Gender and Health"). WHO thus asserts that gender is not something that is biological but something that is socially and culturally constructed. Anne Cranny-Francis and others seem to support WHO's definition since they do not see gender as the sex one is – a man or a woman, but as "a set of meanings that sexes assume in particular societies" (3). Edwin S. Segal also describes gender in a similar way, stating that "gender is taken to refer to a culturally based complex of norms, values, and behaviours that a particular culture assigns to one biological sex or another" (3). Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman explain how they defined gender to their students: as "an achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means" (125). Due to gender being presented as the cumulation of cultural and social norms, it is extremely hard to define it. Many cultures have different gender norms that are completely natural to them, yet are not as natural to some other cultures. Along with that, society is constantly evolving and so is the concept of gender, but not all people progress on the same level, which causes altercations and misunderstandings on various topics linked to gender.

1.2. The Difference Between Gender and Similar Terms

It is very important to differentiate between gender and sex because these two terms cannot be interchangeably used although they are often discussed in the same context. While gender is seen as a social and cultural construct, sex refers "to the different biological and physiological characteristics of females, males and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs" ("Gender and Health"). Hans Bertens simplifies the terms by saying that sex refers to how females and males are represented biologically, and gender how they are represented culturally and socially (qtd. in Bensaad 25). The two terms are different but linked to one another and often discussed in the same context because whenever gender inequality or gender oppression are argued, it is impossible to use one without the other. Another term that often gets misplaced in conversation and is seen as one of the possible synonyms is sexuality. For Segal, sexuality is an individualized concept that refers to the ways in which individuals "structure their sexual and gender performances, and the partners toward whom they direct their behaviour and emotional attachments" (3). Whereas sexuality can be a factor that affects the behaviour of individuals in a culture or a society, it is not synonymous with the terms gender and sex. The last term to be discussed is gender fluidity. Many researchers in the field of gender studies, firstly Judith Butler (qtd. in Fontanella et al. 2554), have defined gender identity as a binary, dichotomous construct in which individuals can be male or female. Harold Garfinkel, among others, states that "different people possess shifting amounts of 'maleness' and 'femaleness' and their innate perception of themselves does not fit with the sex assigned at birth" (qtd. in Fontanella et al. 2554), which makes them fluid and able to transition from one gender into the other. This ability might affect their behaviour in a way that they might not enact the behaviours prescribed by the society to their assigned gender, as well as it might affect their sexuality. Every aforementioned term is a sole, specific term equally important for one's gender identity, but they are also all closely related and can be discussed along each other.

1.3. Gender Performativity and the Double Standard

According to *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, the concept of gender got used during the early 1970s (Pilcher and Whelehan ix). It was used as an analytic category,

similarly to class or race, to form a boundary between biological sex differences and the way those differences affected and portrayed behaviours and competencies, which were then assigned as either "masculine" or "feminine."

The most important researcher and the creator of the term gender performativity is Judith Butler. She first introduced the term gender performativity in her *Gender Trouble*; Butler's idea of gender performativity is grounded on the fact that "gender is a repeated performance that re-enacts a set of socially established norms" (qtd. in Moosavinia and Yousefi 162). Butler thus rejects the idea that gender is strictly fixed and argues that gender is culturally and socially constructed by "repeating a set of discursive performances, entailing whatever a person is socially allowed to say and enact" (qtd. in Moosavinia and Yousefi 162) and that "the perpetuation of these norms defines masculinity and femininity and distinguishes a man from a woman" (qtd. in Moosavinia and Yousefi 162). In short, Butler shows that "gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act" (Salih 55). Butler also makes sure to clarify that people are not free to choose which gender they are going to enact; this is already chosen for them by the society.

As society determines gender behaviours and norms, it is necessary to mention that it has a preferred gender from the dawn of time. Pilcher and Whelehan (56) claim that the purpose of differentiating between sex and gender was mainly necessary to argue that the biological differences between sexes had been amplified in favour of the patriarchal system of power to force women into thinking they were more fit for "domestic" roles. In a patriarchal society, our current society, women are frequently perceived as "the other" or as "the second sex," which makes them vulnerable to discrimination and marginalization. Gilarek claims that "the androcentric character of patriarchy inherently confines women to the fringes of society" (222) and Matthews further explains that "the hierarchy of being associates man with transcendental, disembodied reason and woman with irrational and uncontrollable nature, physicality, and materiality" (4).

As the differences between the sexes are overexaggerated in favour of men, that grants them the right to act according to their own wishes, with society firmly on their side. According to feminist analyses in *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, gender performativity is governed by double standards as "men's power to define the content of formal and informal behavioural cultures means that the criteria or standards used to evaluate and regulate women often differ to those used for men" (Pilcher and Whelehan 34). Being not

equal for all, they are “double standards,” one standard for men and the other for women. In the context of an androcentric culture, men have more benefits from the double standards than women (Pilcher and Whelehan 34).

The double standard is mostly associated with the informal norms and rules of behaviour, especially within sexual culture. Although Western society has become more liberal over the past few decades, sociologists still argue that there continue to be very noticeable differences between the norms and rules concerning men’s sexuality and women’s sexuality (Hawkes qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 34). The double standard of sexuality means that most of sexual behaviours women would be condemned for are the same behaviours men would be praised for. The most common behaviours that have been researched are the number of heterosexual partners and the opinion and practice of one night stands. In the conducted survey by Pilcher and Whelehan (35), men said that they had had a higher number of heterosexual partners, compared to women. There is a tendency to condone any number of sexual partners for men yet shame women for doing the same thing. The survey also inquired about their attitude toward casual sex where 63 per cent of women surveyed said that “one-night stands” were wrong, while only 36 per cent of men said the same thing. Lee points out how “a girl’s standing can be destroyed by insinuations about her sexual morality; a boy’s reputation in contrast is usually enhanced by his sexual exploits” (qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 35). Hence, the survey shows that men are encouraged to participate in certain behaviours while women are belittled for it. Gender performativity assigned to both genders is vastly different, yet somehow justified by the society as something that is supposed to be that way.

Pilcher and Whelehan emphasize another double standard – the society’s attitude toward ageing. According to the authors, as they mature, men and women are evaluated by different standards, and this as well goes in favour of older men. Since society sees physical attractiveness as woman’s most important trait, the most valued qualities and attributes in women seem to be in jeopardy by each passing year. Men’s value, on the other hand, does not depend on their looks but their ability to provide financially. Therefore, the signs of ageing in men are not as negatively perceived as they are in women. Society imposes particular behaviours and rules on women that make them conscious of their age and encourage them to conceal the signs of ageing on their faces and their bodies because women have to be physically attractive their whole life, while in men the signs of ageing like wrinkles and grey hair are seen as “life experience” (Pilcher and Whelehan 35).

1.4. Gender Stereotypes and Roles

According to Deborah L. Best, gender stereotypes refer to "the psychological traits and behaviors that are believed to occur with differential frequency in the two gender groups" (11). She further argues that stereotypes are often used as support for traditional gender roles (e.g., women are nurses, men are construction workers) and may serve as socialization models for children. Best also points out that stereotypes help predict others' behaviors but fail to recognize individual differences and overlap between groups: for example, she asserts that men are usually portrayed as aggressive and this is applied to the entire gender, yet there are some women who are more aggressive than some men, therefore their individuality is getting erased when applying a stereotype to the whole gender (11).

The concept of stereotype was introduced into social science in 1922, when Walter Lippman used it to describe "the 'typical picture' that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group" (qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 166). As a 'typical picture' about a social group, a stereotype may be "negative or positive, accurate or inaccurate, justified or unjustified" (Pilcher and Whelehan 167). Some easily recognised gender stereotypes are, for example, that women are emotional and unpredictable, bad drivers, and like chocolate, or that men are rational, bad at housework, and like sport. Gender stereotype can also be defined "as a standardised and often pejorative idea or image held about an individual on the basis of their gender" (Pilcher and Whelehan 167). Willard Enteman explains that "at a general level, the effects of stereotyping can mean that, rather than treating people as individuals, we treat them instead as artificial persons, which means as an extension of the category we have constructed" (qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 167).

Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies also includes a few studies conducted in order to confirm the existence of gender stereotypes. In a study of secondary schools, Riddell (qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 167) discovered that the teachers' attitudes towards girls and boys were different. They stereotyped girls as "mature, neat and conscientious," while boys were seen as "aggressive and lacking in discipline." Because of that, a much more time and attention was given to boys in order to keep the peace in the classroom. Riddell also found that many teachers, because of gender stereotypes, saw girls as future mothers and therefore did not even consider them as potential workers and denied them the same opportunities as boys. Moreover, different studies (Lobban; Best qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 167) of reading

materials and textbooks used in schools also seem to perpetuate gender stereotypes. Masculine characters overshadow feminine characters and are offered a bigger variety of roles, while quite a few female characters are put in domestic settings.

Research on gender stereotyping in the media also suggests that femininity is mostly tied to domesticity and sexuality. Tuchman (qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 167) examined media depictions of American women from the 1950s onwards and found out that women were stereotyped either as sexual objects or as housewives. Tuchman argues that such limited representations fail to accurately depict women's lives.

Researchers generally classify gender role beliefs on the spectrum from traditional to modern. Traditional ideologies are still advocating that men are more "important" and therefore allowed to control and dominate women. On the other hand, modern ideologies are more egalitarian as they argue that both genders are equally important, and any kind of dominance is improper. Social learning theories consider gender role development to be the result of cumulative experience. According to theorists, parents, teachers, peers, and other socialization agents are responsible for shaping of children's gender-related behaviours "through reinforcement and punishment, modeling, expectations, toy choices, and other differential treatment of boys and girls" (Best 21).

In line with the traditional society, the man is considered to be a symbol of power who is supposed to work and earn money while women are discouraged to go outside the four walls of their houses (Upadhyay 27). Women are only valued for sexual pleasure and for doing monotonous domestic works like washing clothes and cooking food. There has also been a tradition of denying women the right to education, and while Western culture has been working on improving the inequality between the genders, even today in some non-Western cultures, "women are responsible for cooking, food preparation, carrying water, caring for clothing, and making household things, and men are involved with hunting, metalwork, and weapon making, and travel further from home" (D'Andrade qtd. in Best 17). Yet, even in Western countries, where women have moved actively into the labor force, they have not had a comparable reduction in household duties. In the United States, Switzerland, Sweden, Canada, Italy, Poland, and Romania, the overwhelming majority of household work is performed by women, regardless of their occupational status (Best 17).

2. Dystopia

2.1. The Definition of the Genre

Dystopia is a genre that emerged in the twentieth century as a response to the genre of utopia, which seeks to create an ideal life. The idea of utopia came from the myth of Eden from Plato's *Republic*, where it is described as an ideal, perfect world (Babaeeqtd. in Bensaad 7). Zuckerman describes dystopia as a world in which societies live under a totalitarian regime exercised by an authoritarian government, and is maintained with extreme oppression and brainwashing through propaganda and media (qtd. in Bensaad 7). Dystopia has been defined by many theorists as an imagined society in which the living conditions are extremely negative. It is characterized by extreme oppression and despondence, with citizens living in a dehumanized way, under the illusion of a well-faired society (Bensaad 8). Bensaad also argues that the difference between utopia and dystopia is the fact that utopia is more imaginary while dystopia is more realistic, which means that the events in dystopian novels can be found in the real life, experienced by people (8). Even Margaret Atwood stated that in *The Handmaid's Tale*, "there's not a single detail . . . that does not have a corresponding reality, either in contemporary conditions or historical fact" (McCombs qtd. in Kouhestani 132). Daniels and Bowen (426) explain that dystopian fiction offers the reader a glimpse of a hypothetical future that is seemingly horrific, while challenging the reader to consider the reality of these same horrors. In dystopian fiction, social changes transform given culture to the point where "in the name of social progress, women are forced to regress" (Daniels and Bowen 426).[1] There are many events in history that inspired the rise of dystopia. According to the website *Utopia and Dystopia Information,* "industrial revolution, World War I, the Russian Revolution, growing awareness of environmental damage, rapid progress of technology, as well as fear that machine could take power were the reasons for appearance of creation of Dystopian literature." It is important to note that dystopia (like utopia) uses "fiction to engage ideas" (Templin 152), which makes the theme more important than the character. Therefore, the "characters' importance derives less from their individual natures and personal idiosyncrasies than from their roles in advancing thematic concerns" (Templin 152).

[1]This will further be discussed in the chapter about feminist dystopia.

Daniels and Bowen further argue that the horrors of dystopian societies are often portrayed through the distortion of leisure. As defined by Burnett and Rollin (2000), anti-leisure in dystopian fiction is "closely akin to our acceptable leisure, but perverted to suit dystopian ends" because "dystopias use leisure as a means of retaining power of the elite by regulating identity, suppressing individual thought, manipulating self-sufficiency and moderation, providing distraction and requiring non-voluntary and often vicious forms of leisure" (qtd. in Daniels and Bowen 2-3).

2. 2. The Dystopian Tropes in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Vox*

Every genre has its tropes and characteristics, and dystopia is not different. Whether it is a classic dystopian novel or a young adult one published in recent years, they all deal with similar themes and problems. Some of them have already been mentioned, such as oppression, totalitarianism, propaganda, and so on. This chapter is going to delve further into the most common dystopian tropes as well as exemplify them with the help of the novels *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Vox*.

The first and most common characteristic of dystopia is the totalitarian setting. The totalitarian regime is the crucial part of any dystopian story. Shalini defines totalitarianism as "a form of government that theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of the individual's life to the authority of the government" (qtd. in Bensaad 20). According to Hannah Arendt, totalitarian governments replace all prior traditions and political institutions with new ones that serve a specific and singular goal of totalitarian state (qtd. in Bensaad 20). Totalitarian society consists of people in power and people living in fear, hierarchically divided. These characteristics of the totalitarian regime are perfectly portrayed in *The Handmaid's Tale* where the Commanders of the Faithful are in charge of the country they created – the Republic of Gilead – and all the other people are divided into sub-groups. Men are either Guardians, Eyes, or Angels, whereas women are either Wives, Marthas, Aunts, or Handmaids. They have no freedom and are expected to act in accordance with the set rules. In *Vox*, the divide is not as wide and as specific, the people are only divided according to genders, where men have all their usual rights and benefits whereas women have almost none.

The power of ideology is a characteristic that goes hand in hand with the totalitarian regime. In totalitarian societies, leaders use specific ways to control citizens. They usually do it "by making them believe a certain ideology, in order to convince them to act and behave in specific ways to serve their own benefit" (Bensaad 14). Bensaad further specifies that the aim of totalitarian societies is to reinforce these ideologies and beliefs in the minds of the citizens by changing old traditions and beliefs with new ones and implementing them in different social institutions through propaganda (15). Propaganda is, according to Cambridge English Dictionary, "information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions." Propaganda and surveillance are two prevalent tools used to control citizens in a dystopian society. In both novels, the new ideology is spread through the news, especially on television, on mandatory gatherings and so on, where people are forced to see and listen to other people's punishments, the country's war successes, etc. Another way how the ideology is spread is through children in schools by exchanging their traditional school subjects with the ones that fit the new ideology better. In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, there is an entire network of surveillance in Gilead, which is made up partly of the men employed as Eyes, as well as the Handmaids since they are encouraged to spy on each other when they are in company out of the commanders' houses. In *Vox*, every single place, including the homes, is filled with cameras that monitor the behaviour of people, especially women. Even some family members are willing to spy and betray their own family for the sake of the society.

In dystopian societies, what suffers the most is individuality. Gerhard explains that in dystopian societies "the concept of individualism is eliminated, and people are utterly subordinated by a totalitarian government" (qtd. in Bensaad 19). Moreover, Gottlieb argues that the "intention of limiting the individual is arguably to enforce not only uncritical obedience to the state but also a quasi-religious worship of the state ideology" (12). Ultimately, Bensaad claims that the private life an individual used to have has now become controlled by the government and has been exposed to public authorities. Gottlieb furthermore claims that by limiting the privacy of individuals, the dictatorship is successful in destroying the "very core of the individual mind and personality – what remains is the pliable, numb consciousness of massman" (12). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, no one has their own individuality, not even the Commanders because even they must obey certain rules and duties. The ones who suffer the most though are the Handmaids. They are used only for reproduction

and are not allowed to do or think about anything else. They all look the same, they all eat the same food so they can stay as healthy as possible, and their only task is to go shopping in order to use walking as an exercise, which is supposed to help with the pregnancy. In *Vox*, the lack of individuality mostly comes from women's speech restriction and enforced domesticity. As they can only say up to 100 words per day, they shorten their sentences and mostly nod their heads or answer with yes or no, which limits any kind of individuality or personality. They have also lost their jobs and been forced into domestic roles, which equals all women to housekeepers.

Oppression is another very common characteristic that can be found in almost every dystopian novel. According to the American political theorist and feminist Iris Young, "oppression is the state of treating other people as less human, that is in a dehumanized manner, by denying their language, education, and other opportunities" (1). Young asserts that there are five faces or types of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Most of these types can be found in both novels, women are suffering from both sexual and labour exploitation, they are marginalized with almost no rights or benefits whatsoever, they are powerless and at the mercy of their husbands or other men, and are severely violated in many different areas, from free speech to non-consensual sexual activity.

2.3. Feminist Dystopia

Dystopian genre, and science fiction in general, have been an exclusively masculine genres for a long time, not because women were not writing, but because their work was not taken seriously. The works focusing on female topics or including women as more than a man's sidekick were labelled "diaper fiction." The subgenre of feminist dystopia awakened with the novels like Rose Macaulay's *What Not*, Charlotte Haldane's *Man's World*, and Naomi Mitchison's *We Have Been Warned*. Feminist dystopia usually "warns against the harmful consequences of patriarchy, and questions its political and/or moral theory by depicting a future in which this ideology grounds the systemic oppression of the female sex by the male sex" (Little qtd. in Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2). This genre "specifically addresses gender ideologies and issues, and often uses current social conditions to show the sexism inherent in societies that follow a patriarchal model" (Stankow-Mercer qtd. in Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2). Judith

A. Little further argues that feminist SF dystopias "imaginatively mirror actual abominable treatment of women" (16), which explains why feminist dystopias put the focus on horrid themes such as sexual violence, forced reproduction, abortion, and reproductive control. Feminists are particularly interested in stories like this because women have always been on the margins of society, they have often been "the objects rather than the creators of narrative" (Stein 269). Karen Stein also points out that another common topic in female dystopias is women's loss of language and how they struggle to get it back. Yet, the feminist dystopian texts of the 1970s and onwards do not "present a finished 'product,' but rather the exploration of the very construction of an alternative and improved societal vision" (Mohr 8). Therefore, while male dystopias usually end up with the totalitarian regime still standing, feminist dystopias seek to solve the dystopian problems encountered in the story.

Feminist dystopias often "involve transgressions of subject/object, male/female, master/slave, nature/nurture, nature/culture, mind/body, sanity/madness, self/other, literacy/orality, codes/stereotypes" (Mohr 12) as their thematic concerns. Almost all the aforementioned transgressions are noticeable in the novels this thesis is focused on, but perhaps the most controversial topic dealt with in feminist dystopian novels is motherhood/mothering. While Rich interprets "motherhood" as a "patriarchal institution," she sees "mothering" as something that is "female-centered and empowering" (qtd. in Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2). Like Rich, Firestone (1970), Allen (1984) and Stanworth (1987) perceive motherhood as a "biological trap for women and as building up the very basis for gender inequality" (qtd. in Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2). In short, feminists see motherhood as a way of oppression while they see mothering as something natural and worth exploring in the novels.

Overall, feminist dystopias can be described as the "projections of past and present misogynistic realities" (Aliaga-Lavrijsen 2) and are more focused on women's issues, but that does not make the novels misandrist. Templin (150) points out that Atwood has put the focus on the subjugation and victimization of women, but she does not categorize all women as natural victims and all men as evil. Some women in *The Handmaid's Tale* have allied themselves with the values of the Gileadean patriarchy and joined in oppressing other women, and some men oppose the evil male majority.

2.4. Patriarchy

According to *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, patriarchy is the "rule by the male head of a social unit" (Pilcher and Whelehan 93). The patriarch has the power over other members of the social unit, usually family, all women, children, and young men, until a certain age of maturity. In the early days, patriarchy was the source of women's oppression, as they were at the mercy of firstly their fathers and later husbands. However, since the early twentieth century, feminist writers have used the concept of patriarchy to refer to "the social system of masculine domination over women" (Pilcher and Whelehan 93). Patriarchy has been a significant concept in gender studies used to identify the bases of women's subordination to men. Bensaad argues that patriarchal societies are characterized by male dominance, where "they use violence to reinforce the acceptance of patriarchal beliefs especially on women and if there is any resistance or rejection they use certain punishments in order to teach them lessons about appropriate gender role" (25). Hence, feminists argue for the existence of "patriarchal ideology," which "encourages men and women to act in conformity with certain types of behaviour and to have certain life expectations which they act upon in their material lives" (Pilcher and Whelehan 78). The patriarchal ideology is present in the twenty first century because many men and women are still forced to enact the assigned patriarchal behaviours.

According to Heidi Hartmann, there is a connection between patriarchy and capitalism, which seems to work in harmony to disadvantage women: "job segregation invariably means that it is men who hold the jobs with greater material rewards, not least relatively high wages, compared to women" (qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 31). This starts a vicious cycle of women being paid less and therefore being more likely to marry in order to help themselves financially; men expect their wives to perform domestic chores for their husbands, which makes women even weaker in the labour market.

Domestic labour is not the only way patriarchy exploits women. Shulamith Firestone suggests that patriarchy "exploits women's biological capacity to reproduce as their essential weakness" (qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 57). Similarly, Aisha Matthews argues that child rearing is "a fundamental structure through which the patriarchal hegemony can effectively control women and reproduction" (14).

The reason why the patriarchy is here explained as an individual term is because patriarchy comes hand in hand with dystopian novels, particularly feminist ones as "the negative aspects of patriarchy, including the marginalization of women, are typically exposed by means of dystopian visions" (Gilarek 222). According to Gilarek, masculinist dystopias feature the worlds of male dominance, where discrimination and sexism are carried to the extreme (222). In both novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Vox*, the patriarchal societies are noticeable from the first glimpse into the new traditional, totalitarian countries. In both novels, women lost their jobs and their rights to hold property, their own money was transferred to the account of their first male relative. In both novels, women are domesticated to the point where their only purpose is to do housework, be good wives for their husbands, give birth, and care for the children – all the characteristics of the patriarchal society a hundred years ago.

3. The Scripts and Counter-scripts of Gender in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* and Christina Dalcher's *Vox*

3.1. Scripts and Counter-scripts Explained

The terms *script* and *counter-script* are the key terms in psychology and psychoanalysis. The theory of script was developed by Eric Berne and his co-workers, of whom the most notable is Claude Steiner, in the mid 1960s (Melwin Joy 7). Eric Berne defines the script as "a life plan, made in childhood, reinforced by the parents, 'justified' by subsequent events and culminating in a chosen alternative" (qtd. in Manchester Institute for Psychotherapy 36). Steiner et al. explain that people, often very early in their lives, conclude that their lives will unfold in a predictable way; they predict their lives are going to be "short, long, healthy, unhealthy, happy, unhappy depressed or angry, successful or failed, active or passive" (6), thus life script occurs "when the conclusion is that life will be bad or self-damaging" (6). When something positive happens in a person's life, that person sees that event as a counter-script to their life: "when life is guided by a script there are always periods in which the person appears to be evading his or her unhappy fate. This seemingly normal period of the script is called the counterscript" (Steiner et al. 6). The counter-script is only temporary and invariably collapses, and the original scripting starts again. Steiner et al. assert

that, for example, a counter-script for an alcoholic may be a period of sobriety (Steiner et al. 6).

Kris Gutierrez and Betsy Rymes explain that scripts and counter-scripts can be observed in classroom settings as well. The primary script in the classroom appears to be exclusively in the control of the teacher "whose own socialization reflects the dominant cultural values invoked in schools" (Gutierrez and Rymes 446). Students contribute to and participate in the teacher script, and those who do not comply with the teacher's rules for participation form their own counter-script (Gutierrez and Rymes 447). These scripts, "characterized by particular social, spatial, and language patterns," are the resources that members use to interpret the activity of others and to guide their own participation (Gutierrez and Rymes 447).

This thesis will apply the given definitions of script and counter-script to the field of literature. As the script represents "a life plan justified by subsequent events and culminating in a chosen alternative" (Berne qtd. in Manchester Institute for Psychotherapy 36), the scripts in this thesis are going to be the events and characters that portray the world as it is today, democratic and liberal. Therefore, the scripts are going to be shown through the characters who represent the resistance against the radically patriarchist countries. The counter-scripts, defined as the "re-versal of the script" (Steiner 133), are going to portray the totalitarian, radical patriarchies and their beliefs, values, and systems that set those worlds hundreds of years behind the scripted, liberal world existing today.

3.2. The Counter-scripts of Gender

3.2.1. The Countries: the Republic of Gilead and the "Pure" USA

Both countries – the Republic of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* and the USA in *Vox* are the enormous totalitarian regimes with a complete lack of care about anything except the ideologies of the men who created them. In both countries, women are demoted to being just a plus one that comes along with a man, a necessary evil with no importance whatsoever except for their reproductive abilities. Under the pretense of bringing back the "better times" of the traditional United States of America, the Gilead men forcibly put women back into the roles of maids, caretakers, and mothers, with no other roles in the society. In *The Handmaid's Tale*,

Commander Fred states that "better never means better for everyone" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 32), meaning that the women in Gilead will never be better than men.

The Republic of Gilead was created out of the old and "broken" United States of America. Sons of Jacob – the creators of Gilead – claimed that the old America has been ruined by pornography, prostitution, and violence against women, as well as by pollution and chemical spills, which made the women of Gilead infertile. The Commanders assassinated the president and members of Congress, claiming that they were taking power temporarily, which was a lie told to keep the nation calm. In the end, they turned the country into a totalitarian patriarchy, which exempts women from absolutely all their rights and "perpetuates a totalitarian regime in which women are 'protected' by a system that defines them by their biological and social statuses" (Matthews 8). In Gilead, the social hierarchy is very strict and monitored, and a law violation is punishable by death. The top of the social hierarchy is occupied by men – the founders of the country called Commanders, and their Wives. Each of the Commanders has a Martha – a cook – to help, and a Handmaid – a woman who is solely there to birth them a child. Men are divided into Guardians, Eyes – surveillance, and Angels – soldiers. The lowest social group are the Unwomen in the Colonies – women who either could not give their Commander a child, or they have done something treasonous.

The Gileadean law has been founded on the extreme version of the Old Testament, and it is extremely oppressive. In Gilead, women are not allowed to work, possess property of their own, or read. Because of the religious beliefs extramarital sex is strictly forbidden. The main law, based on the story of Rachel, Jacob, and Bilhah, forces fertile women "to give birth to babies for elite childless couples" (El Arbaoui 1). These women, called the Handmaids, have no rights and are devaluated to state property. In the novel, they are referred to as the "precious national resources" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 14) and are being smuggled to Canada. El Arbaoui further explains that Gilead's dealings with women are based on a "cramped, fundamentalist translation of the Bible, implying that women are the ownership of their husband, father, or head of family unit" (2). Women are not permitted to do anything that would give them an autonomous voice within this system. They are not permitted to "vote, work, read, write, drink alcohol, have friends, make inquiries, or be interested with their look at all and thus all cosmetic products and normal clothing are prohibited" (El Arbaoui 2); the Handmaids specifically have no significance apart from their reproductive abilities. El Arbaoui defines *The Handmaid's Tale* as the novel that "portrays the social alienation of women and their reduction into static, submissive gender role of wives, wombs,

workers, prostitutes and the confiscation of their human rights such as the rights to education, works, ownership, citizenship and even one's own name and speech" (2).

The citizens of Gilead are not only divided into distinct groups but are fully alienated from one another (Kiss 63). The surveillance is heavy, and the citizens are not only monitored by the government but they also spy on each other; they are even encouraged to do so, which makes them lose trust in each other. The surveillance is mostly forced upon women. The Handmaids monitor each other on their walks, carefully paying attention not to miss anything that could be treasonous, but other women do it too. The Marthas and the Wives heavily monitor the Handmaids but also each other. It is common knowledge to everyone that Marthas are the biggest gossips in the system, and nothing escapes unnoticed by them. All the monitoring and strict laws show that the Gilead's regime goes far back into tradition and conservativeness just to make sure they are as far as possible from the liberal USA they once lived in.

In *Vox,* the dystopian totalitarian setting is imposed by The Pure Movement in the once contemporary United States of America. Women's rights, and mainly their voice, are completely suppressed by the patriarchal and religious ideologies of the government (Pinakoulia 193). The Pure Movement, an organization led by the government and Reverend Carl Corbin, aims to bring back the "domesticity" of the past times. Every woman, no matter her age, has been given an electrical metal bracelet that allows them to speak only 100 words a day. The Movement claims that this is the right way to help bring the country back to its traditional roots and save women from "ruining themselves" as they had been doing throughout the years.

Similarly, in *Vox* religion plays a huge role in deciding the women's position in the society and justifying the patriarchal values and beliefs. Pinakoulia asserts that in *Vox* "women are constantly reminded that any disobedience against men is automatically a disobedience against God" (198). The patriarchy creates the image of the "female 'Other' that is dangerous, evil and thus needs to be controlled" (Pinakoulia 198). The treatment of the female body is also very similar to *The Handmaid's Tale*. Women are rendered to powerless objects that could be sexually abused, which excuses the rape culture. Premarital and extramarital sex is considered illegal in this totalitarian society, but men and women are not equally treated for it. While men are not blamed for an illicit relationship, any woman caught in the act of an illegal relationship is sentenced to public shaming and punishment. The

disciplinary practices and violence are allowed to be inflicted on the female body "through the construction of patriarchal and religious discourses that aim to suppress female agency" (Pinakoulia 199).

The sole formations of the countries represent the counter-script of everything the world represents today, especially of gender. The main goal of these totalitarian regimes seems to be to destroy everything women have been fighting for in the past (through the process of different waves of feminism), which made the traditional USA more liberal. The reversal of the twenty first century rights and beliefs into the old-fashioned, traditionally stereotyped USA is the main ideology of both Gilead and the "Pure" USA. Women's lives in both Gilead and the "Pure" USA are turned upside down when they are forced back into domesticity by men who have again decided by themselves that they are the superior gender. It is important to note that religion seems to be the spark that initiated both totalitarian regimes, making it obvious that the traditional portrayal of male and female roles goes back to the foundations of the orthodox religious thought.

3.2.2. The Handmaids

The Handmaids are the most excluded class in Gilead, with no rights of their own. Their bodies are the state property and everyone else decides what is best for them. In order to tackle the problem of male infertility, which cannot be addressed because in Gilead only women can be fruitful or barren, the government employs the Handmaids, fertile women who have sex with men of high social status in order to reproduce. Each Handmaid can maximally sleep with three men, and if she fails to get impregnated, she will be declared the Unwoman and the government will send her to the Colonies. In contrast, if they deliver healthy babies, "they are permitted to live and die a natural death and are exempted from ever being declared an Unwoman" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 163). In the Republic of Gilead, where sterility has become the rule rather than the exception, the potentially fertile Handmaids are "a politically charged commodity and are treated as such" (Daniels and Bowen 426). The Handmaids are perfectly aware of their position: Offred knows that if she deviates, "she will, like dissenters, be hanged at the wall or sent out to die slowly of radiation sickness" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* "About the Book"). Even though the Handmaids are threatened with murder if they do not obey the laws, the Republic of Gilead does everything in its power to stop

suicide among the Handmaids. Offred knows what they are most afraid of: “it isn’t running away they’re afraid of. We wouldn’t get far. It’s those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* ch. 2). As many of the Handmaids tried to commit suicide, the government makes sure the Handmaids do not have any way of taking their own lives: “they’ve removed anything you could tie a rope to” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* ch. 2). Everything mildly dangerous is removed from their rooms: there are no chandeliers, no open or glass windows, no bathing on their own, and whenever a Handmaid finds a way to end her life, they add whatever she helped herself with to the list of the forbidden items.

The Handmaids are heavily guarded and have strict rules that they have to follow. They have a tattoo of a number and an eye like prisoners usually do. The numbers identify them amongst all other Handmaids and strip them down to state property, while the eye represents the always present surveillance in the Gilead’s dictatorship. No one treats them as part of the society and they are not allowed to have any kind of relationship, not even a friendship; they are completely isolated. The “Handmaids are not the possessor of their bodies and their existence is merely for the usability of their bodies” (Kouhestani 130) as the Gilead society does not allow them to corrupt their bodies with anything. Although the Handmaids seem to have a bit of physical freedom, they have no freedom in other aspects of their life from diet to thinking. Atwood's Handmaids are an extreme example of the almost complete loss of personal leisure spaces. The Wives decide what they can and cannot do in the house, the Marthas decide what they will eat, their diet is severely planned, as well as their physical activity because the “attempts to conceive and bear children might be enhanced by regular physical exercise” (Templin 147). Their “social role after the mandatory brainwashing is to just do their duty in silence” (Kiss 60) as they have “no choice regarding the treatment of their bodies; no permission to select the individuals with whom they pass time; no control over their lives” (Daniels and Bowen 428).

The suppression of the Handmaids is also observable in their identity, or the lack of it. They cover their whole bodies, including their faces. The Handmaids wear red, from the blood of parturition but also from Mary Magdalene (Kiss 60). The wings on their heads are white and there to prevent them from seeing more than they should. Also, “red is easier to see if you happen to be fleeing” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* ch. 2). Girls have to be “impenetrable” and modest, and in Gilead, that means invisibility (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* ch. 5). The Handmaids, as well as other women in Gilead, have also been stripped of

their names as they are "known in relation to the Commander they serve, and other women have adopted new names that are different from the ones they had under the former state" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 167). Offred, in particular, got her name from her Commander Fred, which means she belongs to him – of Fred. Atwood gives another explanation for the name – "offered" (Atwood*, The Handmaid's Tale* "Introduction") as in the sacrificed one. The "lack of a real name contributes heavily to the loss of identity and strips them of an essential means of identification and instead turns them into one of the crowd" (El Arbaoui 2). Jealousy and insecurity are essential parts of the Handmaids' new identity. They keep tabs on each other and any potential pregnancies because babies are the most coveted gifts in Gilead. The pregnant Handmaids have more security when going on their walks just because other Handmaids are so desperate for a child that no one knows how they are going to react out of jealousy. They are all also deeply insecure and scared for their life because their life depends on their ability to procreate, so every time a month passes without a pregnancy they feel like a failure: "each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others, which have become my own" (Atwood*, The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 13). They also show their jealousy during the birth of children.

Even though the Handmaids are instrumental for the existence of the family life in Gilead, they are not at all welcomed by the family they are placed into: "the twisted triangle between Offred, Serena Joy, and their Commander is a perversion of traditional marriage" (Matthews 12) where the story of Rachel, Jacob, and Bilhah is taken too literally. Furthermore, "the Handmaids are continuously biologically exploited, used against their will as living vessels for reproduction in chosen families, without the society taking into consideration that they are human beings, not machines" (Kiss 62). The Handmaids are forced to conceive, carry, and deliver babies that they will never get to raise: "there will be family albums, too, with all the children in them; no Handmaids though. From the point of view of future history, this kind, we'll be invisible" (Atwood*, The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 35). In the scene where Janine gives birth, Offred explains that the handmaids "stand between Janine and the bed, so she won't have to see this" (Atwood*, The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 21), this being the Wives taking children as their own, immediately excluding the Handmaid from the child's life. Matthews points out that "the best aspects of motherhood are denied to the Handmaids while the Wives are handed brand new babies in fresh, clean, hospital beds, surrounded by admiring peers" (16). Another problem the marriage of three has is the sexual aspect of the Ceremony as "the celebration of the Ceremony is not sex within a loving relationship between

a Handmaid, Commander and wife but is actually a celebrated form of rape" (El Arbaoui 3). Offred is not seen as a sexual being but an object on which Commander performs sex as the "body parts other than the vagina stay wrapped since her other body parts are seen as worthless and the Commander's only task is transmitting the semen into the surrogate womb" (El Arbaoui 3). The Commander also stays clothed. The Handmaids are physically held down by the Wives during sex and they are finally penetrated by the undesirable Commanders. In "the former society, the ritual sex-taking place between a Handmaid and a Commander would be construed as rape; for it is done without the consent of the Handmaid" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 164); however, Offred herself asserts that "nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 16). Moosavinia and Yousefi connect the sexual behavior of both genders at the Ceremony to their social place in the society: women have a submissive role in this society, while men have more control and more chances of survival, which is reinforced in the Ceremony more explicitly: the "Handmaid lies down passively, while the man always stands up. He has the agency to act while the woman always remains passive" (165).

The Handmaids represent the counter-script of everything a contemporary woman could ever want to be. Most women today pride themselves on their independence, their university degrees, and their careers, amongst other things. They strive to be free, rule their own lives and have families on their own terms. On the contrary, the Handmaids are portrayed as exactly the opposite, not because they want to be oppressed but because they are forced to. The Handmaids are living through every woman's biggest nightmare: they have completely lost their bodily autonomy. In Gilead, the Handmaids are being forced to sleep with men they do not want to be with, made to feel like a failure if they have not given birth yet, and forced to choose between the state using their body or losing their life. The hardest and most cruel counter-script is the stealing of the act of motherhood. The Handmaids spend their days completely dedicated to getting pregnant, only to later never even raise their children. Everything the Handmaids represent is the reversal of a normal female experience.

3.3. The Women in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Vox*

When talking about women in *The Handmaid's Tale,* the focus is going to be on the Wives, the Daughters, and the Marthas as, along the Handmaids, they are the majority of Gilead's female population. The leaders of Gilead have marginalized women in a way that they have dissected the female role in the patriarchy into three parts. The Handmaids are to get pregnant and produce children; the Wives are to be caretakers of the family; the Marthas are to do the domestic labour. Kiss asserts that this division can be compared with "a household gadget that is multifunctional: that is, all of today's women, who do multiple things, and concomitantly enjoy multiple rights. When, however, the parts are disassembled both functionality and rights are impaired" (63). The government makes sure that women always stick to their roles and maintain animosity towards each other because they know that it is the safest way to rule over them.

The Wives are the most liked and admired female group in the Republic of Gilead. They embody the true womanhood and their only job is taking care of the house and the family. Matthews describes the Wives as the "female figureheads, receiving all of the praise for the family's production of a child and becoming said child's true and only mother" (15). Moosavinia and Yousefi (169) state that the Wives and Daughters are the only women who truly exist in Gileadand as everybody else is nameless. Even though they have the greatest rights a woman is allowed to have in a totalitarian patriarchy, the Wives are still not really valued as human beings. They, similarly to the Handmaids, have to follow the rules given to their group in the society. Kiss claims that "the Wives have to wear the blue of purity, from the Virgin Mary" (60), the colour that portrays them as the most honorable and valuable women in the country. The Wives are the head of the family when the Commanders are not at home. The Marthas and the Handmaids are under their control, and not even the Commander can influence the Wife's decisions in the house: "the transgressions of women in the household, whether Martha or Handmaid, are supposed to be under the jurisdiction of the Wives alone" (Atwood*, The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 26) and if the Wife desires or thinks she has deserved it, she even has the right to hit the Martha or the Handmaid "but not with any implement. Only with their hands" (Atwood*, The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 3).

Although they have seemingly at least some authority in the house, they are still not supposed to do anything but to be good, obedient wives. Their life goal is to fulfil their "female purpose" (Matthews 15) through traditional values. Thus, the Wives can often be

found aimlessly knitting and planting gardens as Gilead prefers "folk art, archaic, made by women, in their spare time, from things that have no further use. A return to traditional values" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 2). The Wives spend days knitting hats, scarfs, and other objects only to dismantle them later and reuse the wool for another pointless knitting project. In addition to knitting, the "garden is the domain of the Commander's Wife" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 3) and many of the Wives have them because "it's something for them to order and maintain and care for" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 3). The Wives spend their afternoons maintaining their gardens; yet they still have to ask Guardians for help because certain things like digging the Wives are not allowed to do. The Wives are portrayed as grown women who "are supposed to be like brain-damaged children, entirely absorbed in indiscriminate sensory impressions" (Matthews 98). As "the social objects of each Commander's home, the Wives must maintain the pretense of pious productivity" (Matthews 16), yet no one sees their work as important or valuable. Their most important role is the one every single Wife is hoping to be entrusted with: the role of a mother. They are hoping for this prized possession to come in their lives, not only to fulfil their life but also to elevate them in the society. After Janine gives birth to "her" child, it is immediately given to the Wife of her Commander. After the birth, the Wives "cluster around the bed, the mother and child, cooing and congratulating. Envy radiates from them" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 21). Not only do they instantly become the one and only mother of the child, but they also get to gloat in front of other Wives who seethe with jealousy.

While the Wives physically have more freedom than the rest of the women, emotionally they are equally abused and oppressed as other women in Gilead. Aunt Lydia thus observes that "it's not the husbands you have to watch out for, it's the Wives. You should always try to imagine what they must be feeling" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 8). They are forced to "share" their husbands with randomly assigned women who come into their houses, which makes them fear for and defend their marriage. The Wives are required to be part of the Ceremony and watch the entire sexual act but not to say anything against it. Serena Joy hates her Handmaid Offred and makes sure she knows it: "as if the touch of my [Offred's] flesh sickens and contaminates her" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 16). This makes it easy to question who suffers most, the Wife or the Handmaid. Offred and Serena Joy have a terrible relationship full of animosity. The moment Offred enters Serena Joy's house, Serena sets the rules: "'As for my husband,' she said, 'He's just that. My husband. I want that to be perfectly clear. Till death do us part. It's final'" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 3). So,

even though Serena Joy's marriage functions as "a sign of status and a validation of womanly values "(Matthews 12), she will never put it in danger. Matthews further observes that "the possessiveness, jealousy, and venom that exist between Serena Joy and Offred further signify the danger of internalizing patriarchal values" (12). Each of them is defending what they were allowed to keep in the totalitarian society: "when womanhood and womanliness are defined solely by patriarchal standards, those definitions of femininity must be fiercely protected, with each woman fighting ferociously for her own domestic sovereignty and supremacy over other women" (Matthews 12).

The Daughters are also emotionally and physically oppressed. *The Testaments* gives insight into the treatment of the Daughters, the girls who have been born into the totalitarianism and do not know any different. Their wardrobe is heavily monitored to protect them from men: they have their "arms covered, hair covered, skirts down to the knee before you were five and no more than two inches above the ankle after that, because the urges of men were terrible things and those urges needed to be curbed" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 2). They are indoctrinated from the beginning of their lives and most of the indoctrination is forced upon them in school. As soon as they are declared "women," which is when they get their first period, they are able to get married and "the marriages are of course arranged. These girls haven't been allowed to be alone with a man for years" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 2). The Daughter's parents along with one of the main Aunts choose the most appropriate husband for each girl. The way the Gilead's government excuses this is by claiming that this way they all get a man, nobody is left out. They claim that with a rule like this no woman is going to end up alone, they will never be abused, never be left alone with children to fend for them; the government sees arranged marriage as an advantage.

Although the government seems to be overprotective of the Daughters, certain things like rape and sexual assault are still unspoken of and overlooked in Gilead. *The Testaments* shows many examples of different men of different social status trying to assault young girls in schools, yet all those assaulted girls are told to look the other way: "most likely it is minor, or perhaps even imaginary, as so many of these female complaints prove to be" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 24). The instances of assault occur when, for example, a guardian "had run his hands over her legs" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 17) or when "an Econo trash collector had unzipped his trousers in front of her" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 17). The way these accusations are handled is through typical victim blaming – "the first girl had had the backs of her legs whipped for lying, the second had been told that nice girls did not notice the minor

antics of men, they simply looked the other way" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 17). Agnes also experiences sexual assault but is too afraid to speak up because of all the stories she has heard. Before even being of marriageable age, her dentist assaults her and says that it is "about time you saw one of these" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 17) because "you'll have one of them inside you soon enough" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 17).

The Marthas are women who take care of the most things in the Commander's home. Without them, the whole country would not function as well as it does as all high-status families depend on their services. The Marthas are homely and, therefore, serve as maids and servants, taking the traditionally wifely role of housekeeper. They are low-ranking, unmarried women perceived as infertile. The Marthas are not allowed to leave the Commander's house even to go shopping, which the Handmaids do. The Marthas are forced to run the household and do everything that is necessary for the Handmaids, such as feeding – preparing their planned, healthy meals, and bathing – the Handmaids cannot be trusted to bath on their own. Offred herself claims that "to them I am a household chore, one among many" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 8). The government does not see them as dangerous because they do not think the Marthas would ever rebel. They seem to be mostly middle-aged women who have accepted their fate. The Commander's house has two Marthas – Rita and Cora. Rita is an older Martha who does not really show any kind of kindness towards Offred and just makes sure everything is according to rules. Cora, on the other hand, is a younger Martha who likes Offred, and her biggest wish is for Offred to bring a child into their house.

The women in *Vox* have gone from their normal lives to being treated as second-hand citizens in a second. Reverend Carl and the rest of his government have decided that women need to go back to their traditional role – a submissive, obedient wife who only cares about chores and children. The women in *Vox* are extremely physically and emotionally oppressed. Each woman has an electric bracelet that allows them to speak only 100 words per day. If the number is exceeded, they get electric shocks as strong as the number of exceeded words – the more words they say the stronger the electric shocks are. The bracelets "placed on women's wrists further signify the subjugation and objectification of the female body, revealing the connection between language and disciplinary practices" (Pinakoulia 196). Women are only allowed to communicate in certain ways – it is forbidden to use sign language or any other way of secret communication. Every movement of women is under constant surveillance by cameras, which are installed everywhere "waiting to catch any gesture that might be seen as sign language, even the most rudimentary form of nonverbal communication" (Dalcher ch. 8).

Women are also limited when it comes to reading. They have lost their jobs, they cannot advance their careers, they cannot use the books and laptops because they are locked by the husbands. Jean, the protagonist in *Vox*, explains that "after all, one day my daughter will be expected to shop and to run a household, to be a devoted and dutiful wife. You need math for that, but not spelling. Not literature. Not a voice" (Dalcher ch. 1). The most reading they get is on groceries or other small things necessary for domestic work.

The most important female trait in the "Pure" USA is the obedience and submissiveness. Women are constantly bombarded with the Bible sayings and quotes, which the government uses to make them subordinate "for it is shameful that a woman question God-ordained male leadership" (Dalcher ch. 18). The quotes teach them to "be teachers of good things; teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands" (Dalcher ch. 8). Women are called to "obey male leadership with humility and submission, acknowledge that the head of every man is Christ, and that the head of every woman is the man" (Dalcher ch. 18), to accept the fact that "God's plan for woman, whether married or single, is that she adorn herself with shamefacedness and sobriety, and that she exhibit modesty" (Dalcher ch. 18), to only be a tool that men can operate with as they wish. Women are continuously being disrespected by privileged men who only see them as "necessary evils, objects to be fucked and not heard" (Dalcher ch. 7).

The treatment of women in these novels is so far from what women strive for today that it can only be described as the counter-script of gender. Women are seen as weak-minded objects whose brain cannot deal with anything substantial. Not only are women expected to care for housework and children, but they are treated as children themselves. Both the Wives and women in *Vox* are supposed to be completely happy in a traditional marriage where they have no say in anything as well as any economic agency since they have lost their jobs, and therefore no way to get themselves out of oppressive situations. The Daughters are forced into the same traditional marriages as early as they are thirteen with influential men who are well over fifty, and since the marriages are arranged the Daughters are given away like inanimate objects with no feelings whatsoever. The rape culture excused is a prominent problem in the novels, *The Testaments* specifically. Girls are victim-blamed, and no one believes them because they are perceived as overreacting or provoking the man themselves.

3.4. The Men in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Vox*

Men in *The Handmaid's Tale, The Testaments,* and *Vox* are mostly portrayed as traditional, privileged men who think this whole concept is not a bad idea and do not have a problem with women being treated differently, or at least do not think it is as big of a deal as it is. They are comfortable and content in their privilege, able to find an excuse or reasoning for most of women's issues, with a rare exception of recognizing that certain laws and rules are oppressive. In both novels, men have full authority in the public sphere and only slightly less in the private, where women have some agency in the life segments that men do not find interesting – domestic work and children. In Gilead, men are represented as seducers and women as helpless victims who have to act modestly in order to protect themselves from men's wild sexual urges. In Gilead, men are said to be naturally driven by sex while women are not. The stereotypical, traditional statements that men are not capable of taming their animalistic urges are often parts of the Aunts' speeches at the Red Centre where the Handmaids "spend most of their time listening about the dangers of men and their gaze on the body of women" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 166). Furthermore, the Republic of Gilead never identifies infertility as a men's issue because men are never sterile: "there is no such thing as a sterile man any more, at least not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 11).

Although the country is a patriarchy, not all men are equally important in Gilead. The Commanders are at the top of social ladder, and they are the only ones with real power. The Commanders are the main oppressors in Gilead as everyone else must follow their orders – both men and women. The Commanders' creation of the Handmaids was "motivated not by oppression of women but by the necessity of survival" (Kiss 64), thus "taking away their choice, the freedom to decide if and in what way they will be part of this new society, is what makes the Commanders oppressors" (Kiss 64). The Commanders have given themselves too much power in the sense that they decide about everything and find it acceptable that there are entire classes of men and women who are forced into the service of men of higher power. There are other, lower standing, men in the Gileadean system. The Guardians of the Faith are men who live with the Commanders and are seen as men who are not real soldiers but doing routine policing and other menial functions. They help with heavy work around the house, especially to the Wives in their gardens, and the Commanders use them as private chauffeurs. The Guardians are often seen as men who are stupid, older, disabled or too young to be actual

soldiers. The young guards strive to get out of the low rank of guardians and try to become the Angels to gain power, to get a wife and a handmaid, and to have a family life.

Men in both novels show their privilege by thinking that the laws that force women into obedience and submissiveness, and strip them off their rights are not as horrifying as women make them seem. The traditional view of the world is so imprinted into every man's mind that their first reaction is that they will take care of their wife – not that they are upset because their wife's rights are being taken away from her. In the scene where June talks about losing her job, she explains how irritating Luke's indifference was to her. He very easily accepts the fact that she is not allowed to work anymore and tries to soothe her with words like "It's only a job" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 28) and "Hush, he said. . . . You know I'll always take care of you" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 28), which June did not appreciate because to her it seemed as if "he's starting to patronize me" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 28). Jean has a similar problem with her husband. Her husband Patrick did not see the bracelets as such a bad thing. At one point, he tells her: "You know, babe, I wonder if it was better when you didn't talk" (Dalcher ch. 14) and even puts the bracelet back on her wrist himself. As they are not treating women rightly themselves, in *Vox*, men end up teaching younger men superiority and entitlement. Sons treat their own mothers with disrespect and see them as lower human beings just because they are women. Jean's son Steven is a prime example of what indoctrination can do to young, easily influenced, men. At one point, Steven tells Jean that "[w]omen are crazy," and continues with "It's not like it's news, Mom. You know that saying about hysterical women and fits of the mother" (Dalcher ch. 3). He also tells her what she is supposed to be doing: "Like, well, gardening and cooking and stuff like that. Instead of running around working dumb jobs" (Dalcher ch. 8). In another scene, Steven states that he has planned out the life he will have with his girlfriend and future wife: "she'll take care of that house stuff while I'm at work. She loves it. I'll make the decisions, and Julia will go along. Easy-peasy" (Dalcher ch. 22) – the plans that he did not even talk with her about, but with her father: "I haven't talked about it with Julia, . . . I've talked about it with Evan" (Dalcher ch. 22). Some men even use manipulation because they are trying to get the most out of every vulnerable situation: the prime example are the doctors in *The Handmaid's Tale* who try to persuade women to let them sleep with them and make them a child – according to them the Handmaids would not feel a thing and "it'd only take a minute" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 11).

Another very traditional, stereotypical portrayal of men in both novels is that it does not matter if they have a good, obedient wife at home, it is not in their nature to be with only one woman. Cheating is excused because of the nature of men, because, apparently, they cannot function in a monogamous marriage. The Commander explains to June that the underground clubs mean that "you can't cheat Nature," because "Nature demands variety, for men" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 37). That is the reason why high-status men in Gilead have brothels to visit in their free time; by day they follow the rules they themselves forced upon others, and by night they violate their own laws. Similarly, Jean in *Vox* asserts that she "knew all about the double standard, the private clubs that had cropped up in cities and towns where single men of certain means could go to unload their stress and sperm on professional ladies of the entertaining sort" (Dalcher ch. 27).

It is important to mention that men who resist the totalitarian patriarchy and its rules do not get special treatment for being men and mostly get the death penalty. There is a notorious place for finding executed traitors in Gilead called The Wall, and everybody makes sure to keep tabs on who has ended up there. The Wall is part of Offred's walk when she goes shopping and she goes there specifically to see who got caught and killed. Her reasoning was to make sure Luke was not there because usually it was a place reserved for people they thought as war criminals – most often Mayday men caught helping the Handmaids escape over the border, Jewish men who refused to convert to Christianity, or doctors who were caught performing abortions, an act extremely illegal in Gilead.

Men who are defined in terms of counter-scripts of gender in these feminist dystopias are usually portrayed as people who are incapable of learning and growing, and as people who will never speak out when they see injustice. All of them are depicted as traditional men striving to be the epitome of a biblical "true man." Men are still showcased as people who react on their animal instinct, therefore cannot be with one woman and cannot be blamed for sexual assault.

3.5. Jezebel's

Jezebel's is a brothel created by the Commanders for their own use and for the entertainment of businessmen from other countries. The double standard is prominent as women in Gilead are publicly shamed for every minor disobedience, yet the Commanders can

freely maintain their playground with absolutely no consequences. Templin states that "it is the Commanders who have forced the women at Jezebel's into prostitution and who must bear all moral responsibility for what goes on there – their own adultery to be sure, but also the criminal confinement and forced copulation imposed on the unfortunate women" (148). The women there are the Unwomen who did not want to end up in colonies and were found attractive enough to be turned into play toys for men of power. Some of the women there were prostitutes before Gilead and others were once lawyers, sociologists, and businesswomen but chose this over being a Handmaid or going to the Colonies. The women there are sexually exploited because they are not there willingly; they are turned into prostitutes whose existence allows the Gilead elite to abuse their power by breaking the very rules they have established. Kiss explains that the women there are a mixture of the old society and the new as they are the "working girls . . . from the time before" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 37) who "couldn't be assimilated" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 37).

Tolan describes Jezebel's as "a cynical microcosm of liberal America" (163) where the sex-and-drugs hedonism is closely regulated by an Aunt with a cattle prod. As the women there are seen exclusively as sexual objects, they have to take care of their appearance. The Commander explains to Offred that if she were to end up there she would "have to watch your weight, that's for sure" as "[t]hey're strict about that. Gain ten pounds and they put you in Solitary" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 37). Even Moira resignedly tells Offred she should try to work at the club where they get "three or four years to live, and face cream" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 38).

The Jezebel's shows how real the double standard is in Gilead. Good looking women are always seen as sexual objects and men will do anything just to get the chance to enjoy them. In this case, the men's weakness gives the women the option to stay alive instead of going to the Colonies, but this version of life is not much better. Strangely enough, there are no male prostitutes in brothels, firstly because there is no need for them – homosexuality is forbidden, and there are no women who need their services, but secondly, men are never going to be offered a position like this one to save their life because no one sees them as sexual objects but as human beings. Men in both Gilead and the "Pure" America have better, more dignified, options to survive and are never exploited the way women are.

3.6. The Children in Gilead and the Pure USA

The Testaments is a novel that offers a close look at the upbringing of girls in Gilead. In "the opposite of 'non-sexist childrearing practices,' Gileadean society prescribes domestic craft for daughters and prohibits reading, deepening the inequalities between women and men" (Kiss 60) that were evident in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Yet, "such inequality then triggers the mirroring action of eventual female empowerment" (Kiss 60).

In both Gilead and the "Pure" America, it is obvious that boys and girls have very different upbringings and school systems. In *The Testaments,* it is noticeable how easily indoctrinated girls are as all they know is Gilead and its rules and have no knowledge about any other country outside of Gilead. The Aunts are the ones who are the main indoctrinators who say and teach things affecting the girls' mentality and self-worth. One of many indoctrination examples in the novel occurs when Aunt Vidala explains to the female students how men are expected to do important and useful things, which are "too important for females to meddle with because they had smaller brains that were incapable of thinking large thoughts" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 3). Another example is the Aunts' fabrication of biology in order to show that men are superior: women have certain domestic talents "because of their special brains, which were not hard and focused like the brains of men but soft and damp and warm and enveloping" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 16). The attacks on women's mental abilities are often part of the Aunts' way of influencing the girls and ruining their self-worth; for them, "reading was not for girls: only men were strong enough to deal with the force of it" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 25). They also shame the girls through a falsely told Bible story: "This story is God's way of telling us that we should be content with our lot and not rebel against it" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 14). The story mentioned is *The Concubine*, which Agnes and Becka later discuss and come to conclusion that the real version is much different than the one they have heard in school. Another part of the girl school's curriculum is slutshaming and teaching others to slutshame. The school environment paints the Handmaids as "sluts" from the first day of school. Girls describe the Handmaids as women who "get passed around until they have a baby. They're all sluts anyway, they don't need real names" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 15). Agnes' friend Shunammite explains that "a slut was a woman who'd gone with more men than her husband" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 15) even though they later admit they do not even know what "gone with" means, it is just something they often hear around. The girls are forbidden to do simple things like play on a

swing, because even swings are pronounced a male activity. The girls are so strictly monitored that they are not allowed to have any kind of fun out of fear that their skirts are going to show something that is not allowed to be seen, and therefore ruin their purity: "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" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 3). Along with the strict division between male and female activities, they have the similar division subject-wise. Most of the girls' subjects are domestic: "doing petit-point embroidery for handkerchiefs and footstools and framed pictures: flowers in a vase, fruit in a bowl were the favoured patterns" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 2).

The boys and girls in *Vox* also have very different school systems, with clearly divided school subjects – the boys get everything that could be of importance in life and the girls get domestic work and other trivial things. Pinakoulia explains that from a Foucauldian perspective, the "effective power and discipline over the female body take places mainly at school where the body can be easily manipulated, shaped, and trained" (198). Jean's daughter, Sonia, confesses to her mother that she avoids talking in school to win a special prize. In other words, "the girl's attempt for complete silence is praised and worth receiving a reward for setting a good example to the rest of her classmates" (Pinakoulia 198). Religion plays a very prominent part of indoctrination in schools. At schools, children are heavily encouraged, if not obliged, to attend the course "AP Religious Studies" for credits at college (Dalcher ch. 3). They are taught that "woman is the divinely appointed guardian of the home" (Dalcher ch. 12) and "her position as wife and mother, and the angel of the home, is the holiest, most responsible, and queenlike assigned to mortals" (Dalcher ch. 12). The female identity is explicitly associated with "the Victorian stereotypes attributed to women; they are exclusively defined by their gender roles as wives and mothers, staying at and protecting their space, the home, like a guardian angel" (Pinakoulia 198). According to Pinakoulia, "having this 'queenlike' and sacred status, women in the novel should dismiss all ambition for anything higher as there is nothing else here so high for mortals" (198). Their school books present men in working positions and women in the house: "The bulletin boards were wallpapered with drawings: . . . a man in a suit holding a briefcase there, a woman wearing a straw hat and planting a bed of purple flowers in another corner. . . . girls playing with dolls, boys arranged in a baseball triangle" (Dalcher ch. 17). The girls are taught those stereotyped positions in schools – their main focus is supposed to be on sewing as "each girl—once she's old enough to work the machines without pulling a Sleeping Beauty will have her own digital Singer"

(Dalcher ch. 17), as well as on cooking and gardening. As everything has been related to domestic work, Jean calls the school "home ec on drugs, and not much more" (Dalcher ch. 17). Like the schools in Gilead, the schools in the Pure USA also encourage victim-blaming and slut-shaming. Julia, a teenage girl who has been caught in illegal extramarital activity with Jean's son Steve, faces humiliation and defamation at her school where the teachers make the students call her "whore," "slut" or "harlot."

The counter-scripts of gender in schools are evident. Women are belittled and thought of as people with less brain power than men since birth, and because of that they are only allowed to be educated on how to maintain a home. The school environment further contributes to this. Stereotyped textbooks force the girls further into thinking that only boys can do certain things, therefore making the girls think they are not as worthy as boys are.

3.7. The Aunts as a Counter-script Instrument

The Aunts have always been the mechanism liked by the Commanders yet hated by everyone else. They are portrayed as the abusers created by the Commanders under the pretense of protecting the Handmaids. The Aunts united with the oppressors to further oppress and force other women into obedience, so the Commanders use them as a relatable link between them and other women, in particular the Handmaids. The Aunts are the most powerful female group because they are most similar to men; therefore, the Commanders do not fear they will rebel and betray them. Their main task is brainwashing the Handmaids in a re-education facility known as the Red Centre.

The Aunts spend their time in the Red Centre trying to indoctrinate different submissive concepts and beliefs into the Handmaids. Before starting their job, the Handmaids are trained in the Red Centre as the government believes that "the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* "Historical Notes"). Thus, "on a micro-level, the government allows a matriarchal system taking charge of the Handmaids' education" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 163) as the Aunts are "responsible for the justification of the abnormal life of women through brainwashing and fabricating the truth" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 163). The Aunts force the Handmaids to "renounce their previous identities, to know their place and their

duties, to understand that they have no real rights but will be protected up to a point if they conform, and to think so poorly of themselves that they will accept their assigned fate and not rebel or runaway" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* "Introduction"). Similarly, Kouhestani asserts that "the Aunts teach the Handmaids to recognize their bodies as one unison body that is the property of the nation and a body that is to be given freedom from, rather than a body that is free to do anything" (130). The Aunts play the cards of manipulation and slutshaming so well that the women who lived for years in the liberal America start doubting their previous actions and rights. The Aunts excuse rape culture and use victimblaming to scare women into obedience. According to the Aunts, Janine is guilty for the gang rape accident that happened to her as for a girl, "to be seen is to be penetrated" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 5) and girls have to be "impenetrable" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 5); the reason "God allowed such a terrible thing to happen" was to "teach her a lesson" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 13).

Moosavinia and Yousefi state that the Aunts use the unacceptable behavior of women under the former government as a mechanism to reinforce the state ideology in relation to women (166). The Aunts go through different things women did before the existence of Gilead and shame them for it in order to make them feel guilty. They criticise how in the past women were "oiling themselves like roast meat on a spit, and bare backs and shoulders, on the street, in public, and legs, not even stockings on them, no wonder those things used to happen" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 10). The Aunts claim rape and sexual assaults happened because women were provoking men. They would even show the Handmaids the Unwomen documentaries in which women were doing things they had been allowed to do before just to warn the Handmaids that they were "wasting their time like that, when they should have been doing something useful" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 20). In addition, "while the Aunts perpetuate the idea that men are sex machines who only want women for sex, they remind the Handmaids that women are created differently" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 166). The Aunts state that God created men with strong sexual urges, but that women are granted control over their reaction to these sexual urges: "He did not make you that way. He made you different. It's up to you to set the boundaries. Later you will be thanked" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 8).

The counter-script of gender in this system is the strong adversity of one group of women towards another. The Aunts' siding with the male oppressors is a form of betrayal where the Aunts force their fellow women to obey them. As the counter-script instrument, the

Aunts are portrayed as extremely misogynistic because they value male opinions over their own gender. This system showcases the Aunts as women who initiate slutshaming and victimblaming as a way of manipulating and controlling other women.

3.8. The LGBT Community in the Novels

The counter-scripts of gender are in the novels mostly shown through the homophobic views and beliefs. The LGBT community is treated very traditionally and conservatively in both novels. The patriarchy represents all the traditional values the community has been fighting against. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the LGBT characters are either sent to the Colonies or to Jezebel's, where Moira, the only known LGBT character, is found in the end. Anything that is not in sync with the traditional heteronormative relationship is heavily condemned in the totalitarian society. In the matter of femininity and masculinity, the government firmly upholds an arbitrary binary system of gender, not only due to the fertility crisis but also because other types of sexuality are not acceptable in terms of religion. In *Vox,* any kind of homosexual relationship is punishable by law as it does not align with the extreme religious rules. In *Vox*, there are no same sex families anymore, the children of same-sex partners have all been moved to live with "their closest male relative—an uncle, a grandfather, an older brother—until the biological parent remarries in the proper way" (Dalcher ch. 17). There are the mentions of LGBT camps or prisons in which they put people of the opposite sex in the same cell in hope they will develop feelings for each other and "fix" themselves. The children are also being taught homophobia in schools, which can be seen through Steven's opinions and beliefs that "[i]t's a life choice, Mom," and "[i]f you can choose one sexuality, you can just as easily choose another" (Dalcher ch. 31).

4. The Scripts of Gender

4.1. The Protagonists June and Jean

June and Jean embody the scripts of gender as we understand them today as well as the resistance against the totalitarian regimes they have been forced to live in. They are fighting for the lost women's rights both directly and indirectly. June is the main character in

The Handmaid's Tale and is referred to as Offred – a Handmaid who belongs to Commander Fred. Jean is a successful scientist who has been forced to part with her career as women are not supposed to work anymore in the "Pure" USA but who has no problem publicly calling out the issues. This chapter is going to discuss the different instances of resistance shown by June and Jean and how those resistances represent the scripts of gender today.

The first act of resistance June exhibits is the constant thinking about the way her life was before, which is something that is forbidden. June spends all of her alone time thinking and analyzing her life when she was a free woman, even though the Aunts in the Red Centre forced them to repress those memories. June claims that she "took too much for granted; I trusted fate, back then" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 5). In the new situation, she refuses to ever forget and focuses on keeping herself and her personality as it is, without conforming and turning into what others expect of her. When June says that "there were stories in the newspapers, . . . 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. . . . We lived in the gaps between the stories" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 10), she indicates that she never thought the acts like those were going to be her personal problem, and now she constantly remembers what she was free to do or how it felt being a woman in a democratic and liberal world. June "craves to experience something as mundane as a laundromat" (Tolan 161) because she had personal belongings then, something she owned herself: "my own clothes, my own soap, my own money, money I had earned myself" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 5). June critically analyzes the pros and cons of the life before; the cons often used by the Aunts as an explanation why they have a better life now. She often thinks of the things she could not do safely in the past: "I never ran at night; and in the daytime, only beside well-frequented roads. . . . don't open your door to a stranger, even if he says he is the police. . . . If anyone whistles, don't turn to look. Don't go into a laundromat, by yourself, at night" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 5), but then she realises that while she had certain safety issues and fears in the past, she was still able to do what she desired; to wear what she wanted, to go where she wanted, to buy whatever she wanted with her own money, which makes her realise that now she has absolutely no control. By doing so, June "judiciously challenges the oppression by utilizing her mind, memory, fantasies and story-telling abilities so as to defy the system that tears out women from their voices" (El Arbaoui 4).

June also shows resistance to the country that enslaved her as a sexually exploited human being. She is sexually used on a monthly basis, which is especially hard for her because she spent years watching her mother protest against the issues that are freely happening now and even being excused (e.g., rape culture, abortion bans). June refuses to be made a willing accomplice in the Ceremony as she asserts that she has been turned into a two-legged womb and does not see herself as a sexual being. Every Ceremony makes her more and more indifferent, which is visible in the way how she describes it: "Commander is fucking . . . the lower part of my body" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 16). She does not define the Ceremony as rape because "nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 16). June also finds masturbation repugnant, and she refuses to even look at herself sexually because she does not want to look at "something that determines me so completely" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 12). While this may seem as not much of a resistance since there is no way for June to feel sexually liberated when she is forced to sleep with men she does not want to, she still shows resistance by not feeling purposeful as many women do. Many Handmaids have embraced this as their job while June did not crack under the pressure of the Aunts in the Red Centre and only goes through with the Ceremony because she has to. She shows resistance by not complying but trying to find a way out, constantly thinking about Luke and how he will understand and accept her as she is when all this is over.

The most important sign of resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale* is love. June often thinks of love. In the beginning, it is always about Luke; about the way they met, how they spent their time together, about their family, their daughter. Love for Luke and their daughter keeps her sane and willing to go on. Soon after coming to the Commander's house, she starts thinking about Nick and her feelings towards him. After an evening full of passion with Nick, June asks herself if "can I be blamed for wanting a real body, to put my arms around? Without it I too am disembodied" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 18). As the lack of love and interpersonal relationships in totalitarian regimes is the result of the government's view of people as just procreators, June's finding and experiencing love is a clear act of defiance.

Spending time with the Commander illegally is also an act of resistance, not only June's but his too. June knows very well that her time with the Commander is illegal because the laws order they should never be alone. She says she knows the Handmaids are not "concubines, geisha girls, or courtesans" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 23) – they are

not there to entertain their Commander, thus there is no point for them to ever spend time together. The Commander and June start with the small acts of defiance like him asking her to play Scrabble, a game forbidden to women since women are not allowed to read. With time, they progress into more illegal actions like him supplying her with and allowing her to read old magazines like *Vogue* or him gifting her hand lotion, which she is not allowed to have. At the end of these secret meetings, the Commander asks June to kiss him, which is strictly forbidden, but it also brings excitement into a life controlled by rules. Moosavinia and Yousefi thus claim that the fact that the Commanders visit the Handmaids in private to have "a normal—as in the old days— communication with them, are all some of the instances in the novel that show Gileadeans' attachment to the former norms" (168).

June also uses stealing as an act of resistance. She could never steal something important or noticeable as she would be punished, but stealing butter, which she uses instead of a moisturiser she could never get, and using it on her body makes her feel as if there is a chance she will get out of Gilead. June would steal it during a meal and hide it in her shoe, then later put it on her skin. Later, when she cannot sleep, she decides to roam the house and steal something. She decides to take a daffodil from one of Serena Joy's flower arrangements. It is not much but it makes her happy because she did something without anyone's permission or knowledge.

Jean is a strong, smart, resourceful woman who did not in any way conform to the new totalitarian "Pure" USA. She has been showing her hatred towards the system since the beginning of its existence, but she did not see how she could make an impact until they offered her her job back, which for them was "unconventional, a little radical even" (Dalcher ch. 17). Motherhood is the driving force for Jean's negotiation of agency and fight against the totalitarian government. In "their attempt to control the female body and sexuality, the hegemonic religious and patriarchal discourses dictate that the position of the mother is the most significant role in the society" (Pinakoulia 203); therefore, the easiest way to oppress women is through reproductive laws. In *Vox*, women's value is mainly defined by their reproductive role, while birth control and abortion are strictly forbidden. However, "instead of restricting her at home, the issue of motherhood leads Jean to pursue freedom and active resistance" (Pinakoulia 203). Through bargaining, Jean manages to make her and her daughter's life a little bit easier as they are allowed to take off their bracelets and speake normally. She is constantly worried that her daughter will not develop her speech simply because she is not allowed to speak, so Jean tries to prolong her work project just for her

daughter to be free longer. Jean becomes extra protective when she finds out she is pregnant. Her biggest fear is having to bring a daughter into a world like hers, oppressed from the second she is born. When she finds out her baby is indeed a girl, all of her precaution goes out of the window and she focuses solely on overthrowing the government.

The power of love and passion is an important topic in *Vox*, and is explored through Jean's relationship with Lorenzo, her colleague. Pinakoulia claims that "throughout the novel, the character of Lorenzo exhibits the exact opposite characteristics to those of her husband, Patrick" (202), which is something Jean notices on a daily basis, and is the fact why her marriage is getting colder and colder by the day. While Patrick remains a passive and "weak" person throughout the novel, Lorenzo shows rebelliousness, courage, and determination to act against the oppressive system; he is the one who gives Jean strength and support to fight against the system she has been put into, as opposed to her husband who is more on the side of the government. This love triangle showcases how the totalitarian way of putting people together logically and lovelessly will never work. Although the totalitarian society forbids extramarital sex and considers it an unforgivable crime or a sin and thus punishable by law, the love is the only way Jean can keep her sanity in a regime like this. As an act of rebelliousness, Jean claims that this affair is "the only method . . . of saying 'Fuck you' to the system" (Dalcher ch. 27).

In the country that is a true counter-script, Jean represents the script of gender. She has a lot of doubts about her feelings towards her husband and even towards her son because she can easily see the disrespect and condescension they show towards her. She wonders whether she would be happier and whether it would be easier if "he [Patrick] shared my silence" (Dalcher ch. 6) or if this is the way it is supposed to be: that he speaks for her. Her mixed feelings towards her son haunt her because even though she gave birth to him and she loves her children, Steven constantly undermines her and treats her more as a maid than his mother. Not only does Jean pay more attention towards the men's behaviour because of her family but she shows more appreciation towards women who are in the same terrible situation as she is. Jean did not particularly care about feminism or activism before, but the need for sisterhood awakens in these trying times. Jean often wonders "what the other women do. How they cope. Do they still find something to enjoy? Do they love their husbands in the same way? Do they hate them, just a little bit?" (Dalcher ch. 6) because she needs the comfort of other women feeling the way she does. Thus, Jean starts caring more about their neighbours Julia and her mother. Jean is the first to stand by Julia's side when she got taken away for a mistake she has

done with her son, which he did not have to answer for. Later, she also shows kindness and worry towards Julia's mother who tried to kill herself because of what happened to her daughter. Jean also recalls "her conversations with Jackie" (Pinakoulia 201), her activist friend who hated president Meyers from the beginning and protested against his election, and is haunted by her own lack of interest and participation in political protests against President Myers. Despite her friend's encouragement, Jean remained passive and chose not to vote at all in the elections. She realizes that even when she had a voice she did not use it for good.

4.2. The Aunts as Rebels in *The Testaments*

The Testaments shows a different side of the Aunts, the one the readers could not see in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The Aunts in *The Testaments* show that not every woman is against other women, but that they are trying to help in the way they think is the safest and smartest. *The Testaments* focuses on women being "selfish" in Gilead's eyes and putting themselves and their safety first, as opposed to blindly following their laws and rules. It also focuses on young women like Agnes and Becka choosing their own life path.

In *The Testaments*, Atwood portrays Aunt Lydia as an educated professional who had worked as a family court judge, was used to power, and could threaten Gilead; she is thus "coerced into collaboration with the power structure" (Kiss 63). She never wanted to be a part of the totalitarian system, but the will to survive won and she decided that if she could not beat them from the outside, she would do so from the inside. Aunt Lydia explains that she had to prove herself to be on the Gilead's side by murdering women in the first Salvagings: "It was like my nightmare, except that the women were blindfolded and when I shot I did not fail. This was Commander Judd's test: fail it, and your commitment to the one true way would be voided. Pass it, and blood was on your hands" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 29). While in *The Handmaid's Tale* Aunt Lydia is portrayed as cold and ruthless, in *The Testaments* it is revealed that it is all a ruse so no one would doubt her intentions. Aunt Lydia turns to be an incredibly valuable double agent working with Mayday, an organization that smuggles women out of Gilead, she is the highest ranked inside person with access to all the classified documents that could bring down Gilead. Aunt Lydia has shown resistance from the first moment she has been arrested to becoming the highest ranked woman in Gilead and yet being a part of the resistance movement. She is the one who came up with the Pearl Girls –

missionaries who travel to other countries only to find a way to smuggle classified information out of the country. Aunt Lydia turns out to be the savior of women in Gilead. Not only does she smuggle out the Handmaids and other scared women, she is also there for the Daughters and tries to help them in any way she can. She is the one who helped Becka and Agnes become the Aunts as opposed to getting married to old Commanders their parents would have chosen against their will.

Agnes and Becka are the two young Aunts who are the faces of the resistance against Gilead. Kiss claims that the "sisterhood would become the major motif in *The Testaments*" (65), which is absolutely true when their relationship is in focus. Agnes and Becka are the Daughters who from their earliest days at school show their distaste towards men and marriage in general. Agnes has always disliked the Gilead's treatment of women but her feelings towards Gilead and marriage increasingly grow worse after she survives sexual assault and witnesses the death of her family's Handmaid during childbirth. The Aunts try to make the Daughters as obedient and docile as possible since the Daugthers have no recollection of the time before Gilead, but Agnes and Becka have been boycotting the life of a Daughter in several different ways, finding issues in many of their duties. Both girls have negative views on men and are unwilling to follow the rules and get married to a randomly appointed stranger. Becka is the first one to make it clear that she would rather choose death than get forcibly married. Agnes recalls the first time she saw Becka attempt to kill herself: she "could not forget her expression: it had a ferocity I had never seen in her before, and which I found very disturbing. It was as if she'd turned into a different person—a much wilder one—though only for a moment" (Atwood, *The Testaments* ch. 28). After Becka gets the opportunity to become an Aunt and in that way avoids marriage, Agnes herself feels inspired and tries everything to get out of her arranged marriage with Commander Judd. She escapes her home and goes to find Aunt Lydia who is the only person that can overrule the decision of her parents. This was their first and the most important step in gaining agency over their own lives as the Aunts are the women with most freedom and the right to education.

Both Agnes and Becka reject everything they have been taught as the Daughters and engage into their new and much more meaningful studies: learning how to read and write. Both young Aunts spend hours in the library to expand their knowledge and see what the world actually is, and through that they find out the amount of power the Aunts have by knowing all Gileadean secrets. After becoming fully educated, Agnes and Becka end up under

Aunt Lydia's wing, becoming her partners in destroying Gilead. Agnes uses the Pearl Girls to go undercover together with her sister Nicole and they smuggle the confidential documents to Canada. Agnes and Becka show immense growth and resistance going from the Daughters who did not know anything except Gilead to being the key people in bringing Gilead down.

4.3. The LGBT Characters and Activists

The LGBT characters and activists are the people who always seem to be the most socially aware. Since they know what it is like to be oppressed, they tend to keep track on what is happening in the world, as opposed to privileged people who do not really have to bother with politics; their rights will not be meddled with anyway. Both novels have female LGBT characters and activists who have been resisting the government and fighting for years to find a way to better the society, yet they are the ones suffering the most in the end.

The most prominent LGBT character in *The Handmaid's Tale* is June's best friend Moira. Moira is the only lesbian introduced in the novel who firmly resists the state ideology. Throughout the novel, she resists several times and is punished every single time, only to be sent to Jezebel's, Gilead's brothel, in the end. Moira is "one female who survives intact the programme of conditioning into the acceptance of female guilt and evil imposed on the Handmaids at the Centre" (Rao qtd. in Mirzayee 118). Yet, "despite Moira's resistance to the state ideology, she has to give up a great part of her freedom and agency to get her sexual freedom" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 169). Moira seems to have more freedom in the brothel, she is allowed to speak and even show her sexuality, but she is still there as a commodity to be sexually exploited by men of socially and politically high status for the next few years, until they decide she is not good looking anymore. After that her freedom is going to be severely cut. She might have been "granted some freedom of choice and speech, however, just like heterosexual women, her actions are highly restricted" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 169).

Moira's acts of resistance towards the Aunts make a really big impact on the Handmaids in the Red Centre. Moosavinia and Yousefi assert that even though Moira leaves June behind after fleeing the Red Centre, her resistance to the government "encourages Offred (June) that despite their unprecedented and anomalous situation, resistance is possible" (171). Moira's resistance inspired not only June but also other Handmaids who spend weeks talking

about Moira's bravery and fearlessness. That is why meeting Moira at Jezebel's disappoints June. June has idealised her and hoped she was somewhere far away from Gilead, so seeing her friend "as a sex slave in a condition utterly different from Offred's (June's) imagination shocks her" (Moosavinia and Yousefi 172), and causes her to feel betrayed:

> 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, swash-buckling, heroism, single-handed combat. Something I lack. Here is what I'd like to tell. I'd like to tell a story about how Moira escaped, for good this time. Or if I couldn't tell you that, I'd like to say she blew up Jezebel's, with fifty Commanders inside it. I'd like her to end with something daring and spectacular, some outrage, something that would befit her. (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* ch. 38)

In the end, no matter how June might feel about the way Moira's life has unfolded, it is necessary to note that Moira did a lot to inspire and motivate other womento resist. At Jezebel's, Moira is the most authentic Moira she could be in a totalitarian society like Gilead. Moira has decided that the place she is currently in is her best option and she is content to live out her life in her current position; this is why she feels at peace and accomplished in the end.

In *Vox*, Jackie Juarez is an LGBT activist who used to go to college with Jean. Jackie is portrayed as a politically active feminist, trying to raise awareness about women's marginalized position and oppression in their society. She was the friend who tried to persuade Jean to become and activist, in fear of what is expecting women and other minorities in the "Pure" America. Jean remembers Jackie's warnings and passionate speeches: "You have no idea, ladies. No goddamned idea. We're on a slippery side to prehistory, girls. Think about it... Think about words like 'spousal permission' and 'paternal consent'. Think about waking up one morning and finding you don't have a voice in anything" (Dalcher ch. 3). Jackie is the person to whom Jean's mind constantly goes back to, thinking about all the warnings and predictions she has given her and Jean did not believe her; Jackie turns out to be an omnipresent voice in her head reminding her that her own passivity brought her here. After the president she was protesting against wins, Jackie gets sent to a conversion therapy camp; a prison where she is not allowed to speak at all – "in Jackie's new world, there are no words to count" (Dalcher ch. 31) and she works "from morning to night" (Dalcher ch. 31). This does not break her though; Jackie shows resistance by standing behind her beliefs and values and does not change them, not even to save herself from suffering. Jean states that "Jackie would

never fold, never work the system, never whore herself out to the president's men in exchange for money or a voice or a month of liberty" (Dalcher ch. 31). Therefore, just like Moira, Jackie's biggest act of resistance is staying true to herself no matter how that affected her life.

Conclusion

Gender issues have been a prominent problem in the world, yet they do not represent the same problem for both genders. Women have, along other minorities, always been overlooked and undervalued. Discrimination has been and is still happening in several fields of work and art, and in this thesis the focus has been on literature. Feminist dystopia has had a negative reputation simply because it has always been focused on women's issues and women's point of view. When asked if *The Handmaid's Tale* is a feminist book, Atwood has answered that she considers her book as feminist because women are shown as "human beings" and "what happens to them is crucial to the theme, structure and plot of the book" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* "Introduction"). According to Atwood, "women are interesting and important; they are not secondary players in human destiny" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* "Introduction") and that is why their stories are important to hear. The analysis of the scripts and counter-scripts in this thesis showcases the differences between the scripted life of the twnty first century and the counter-scripted reversal of that life back into outdated traditions. The counter-scripts bring attention to the way people, mostly women and minorities, have once been treated – insignificantly unless they can be exploited. Through the examination of the counter-scripts of gender, it is noticeable how oppressive traditional patriarchies have been and still are, even though there are people who still condone that way of living. The countries as the counter-scripts show how a traditional government can set back the whole nation and turn it into a dystopia where majority of the people suffer. The double standards are prominently seen in the way the Handmaids and other women cease to exist as real, valuable human beings while the men stay unaffected by the change and only grow more powerful. The LGBT community in a traditional patriarchy is forced into hiding and is treated inhumanly only for not complying to the religious beliefs of the regime. On the other hand, the characters who represent the resistance towards the regime – the scripts – showcase extremely motivational actions in which they put their morals and their beliefs as their main

principles, thus the whole time fighting for their lives and what they think is right; June and Jean for love and for their children, Aunt Lydia for democracy and the fall of patriarchy, Moira and Jackie for the ability to live their life freely and fully. It is important to emphasize that all the activists who are fighting for a better tomorrow in these novels are women. Feminist dystopia analyses all these gender issues in a way that encourages thinking and self-reflection, therefore it is always going to be a key to finding out female points of view on almost all worldwide issues present in the past, today, and those who are still coming in the future.

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