

THE PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURE IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S NOVEL, THE HANDMAID'S TALE

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Abstract

Back in the old days, the hunting and gathering period shaped the division of labor between men and women, the former being hunters, and the latter gatherers. While men were engaged in battue, i.e. herd hunting, women mostly hunted small animals and gathered plants to share tasks in society. Considering that battue often ended in failure, this period was indeed a time when mostly women covered their family's food supply. Since women took on the task of care as well as gathering, they essentially had the most critical tasks of society during this period. As a natural consequence of this situation, society had a matriarchal structure.

With the transition to a sedentary life and the subsequent domestication of animals, men took over most of the farming and livestock work on themselves. Thus, the means of production came under the rule of men. This led women to take care of their family and home, and restricted women's space. Therefore, society underwent a transformation from a matriarchal to a patriarchal structure.

On the other hand, women started to take their place in production again with the effect of the Industrial Revolution. They endeavored to rebuild their identity in the patriarchal order, to create a change in the social structure and thinking of society, as well as to make room for themselves in working life. Yet, from the 18th century onwards, the patriarchal social structure has maintained its dominance. In this social order, women's struggle for social, economic and legal rights has been continuing without interruption. In her dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood addresses women's issues, gender and cultural dogmas in patriarchal social structure. The novel investigates the place of women in society in the Republic of Gilead, as well as the patriarchal structure in a critical manner. In this context, this study is designed to explore the type of role that patriarchy casts for women in Atwood's work, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and to elaborate on how women are pressured by cultural patterns in this patriarchal structure. Plus, The main contribution of the article to the field will be to reveal how the patriarchal order legitimizes itself and how it is internalized by the society.

Keywords: Gender, Social structure, Women's identity, Margaret Atwood

MARGARET ATWOOD'UN DAMIZLIK KIZIN ÖYKÜSÜ ROMANINDA ATAERKİL YAPI

Öz

Avcı toplayıcı dönem erkek ile kadın arasında iş bölümünün avcı ve toplayıcı olarak gerçekleştiği bir dönemdir. Sürek avına çıkan erkeklere karşın küçük hayvanları avlayan ve yenebilecek bitkileri toplayan kadınlar toplumda bir iş bölümü gerçekleştirmişlerdir. Avcılığın çoğunlukla başarısızlıkla sonuçlandığı düşünüldüğünde bu dönem aslında ailenin gıda temininin çoklukla kadın tarafından karşılandığı bir dönemdir. Kadın toplayıcılığın yanı sıra bakım görevini de üstlendiğinden

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toplumun aslında en kritik görevleri bu dönemde onlardadır. Bu durumun doğal sonucu olarak da toplum anaerkil bir yapıda sürmüştür.

İnsanların yerleşik hayata geçmesi ve sonrasında da hayvanların ehlileştirilmesi ile birlikte erkekler tarla ve hayvancılık işlerinin büyük bir kısmını kendi üzerine almış dolayısıyla üretim araçları erkeklerin egemenliğine girmiştir. Bu durum kadının aile ve evle ilgilenmesine neden olmuş kadının alanını kısıtlamış ve toplum anaerkil yapıdan ataerkil yapıya bir dönüşüme uğramıştır.

Sanayi Devrimi ile birlikte yeniden üretime katılmaya başlayan kadınlar ataerkil düzen içerisinde kimliklerini yeniden inşa etmeye ve toplumun sosyal yapısında ve düşüncesinde değişiklik yaratmaya aynı zamanda da kendilerine iş hayatında yer açmaya çalışmışlardır. 18. Yüzyıldan günümüze kadar hâkimiyetini devam ettiren ataerkil yapı içerisinde kadınların toplumsal, sosyal, ekonomik ve yasal haklarını kazanma mücadeleleri de kesintisiz olarak devam etmektedir. Margaret Atwood 'The Handmaid's Tale' adlı distopik romanında ataerkil yapı içerisinde kadını, toplumsal cinsiyeti ve kültürel dogmaları ele almaktadır. Roman, Gilead Cumhuriyeti'nde kadının toplumdaki yerini, ataerkil yapıyı ele almakta ve bunun eleştirisini yapmaktadır. Bu çalışmada Atwood'un 'The Handmaid's Tale' adlı eserinde ataerkil yapının kadına nasıl bir rol biçtiği ve bu ataerkil yapıda kadının nasıl kültürel kalıplar içerisinde sıkıştırıldığı detaylı olarak incelenecektir. Makalenin alana en temel katkısı ise ataerkil düzenin kendisini nasıl meşrulaştırdığı ve toplum tarafından bunun nasıl içselleştirildiğinin ortaya çıkarılması olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal cinsiyet, Toplumsal yapı, Kadın kimliği, Margaret Atwood

Introduction

During the hunting-gathering period, people were constantly on alert looking for food they needed to survive. Despite trying to produce various tools and developing several hunting strategies, people still failed to achieve sustained success in hunting. As a natural consequence of this situation, women took on the role of gathering edible plants in nature and hunting small animals. At the same time, women had always been of primary importance in families and therefore in society, as they fulfilled both the responsibility of care and the constant supply of food. This importance attributed to women can be understood from the Venus Figurines or wall drawings from the hunting-gathering period, as well as in the idea of lineage coming from women (Paglia, 2004: p. 66).

This understanding continued in the early stages of the transition to a sedentary life. Although men continued to be engaged in hunting with battue group hunting strategies and more powerful tools, and although the chances of success were greater than before, they again failed to provide sustainable foods. Contrarily, women started to farm in the early stages of the sedentary life, learning how to cultivate crops and thus, they started to constantly provide food for people. This social order continued in the matriarchal manner, however, it started to change when men domesticated animals and started to use them in farming, in other words, they seized the means



of production. Followed by this development, women started to take care only of household chores while they undertook only supporting roles in farming. Thus, they were pushed to a secondary position in society (Childe, 2009: p. 61).

Until the 18th century, women continued to be excluded from the labor force and failed to sell their labor. The Industrial Revolution, on the other hand, caused a labor deficit. This deficit was filled with women, as they were seen as cheaper labor. This, in turn, accelerated women's struggle to make room for themselves in the patriarchal order. This struggle started mainly against the social, legal and economic restrictions imposed on women by the patriarchal order and is still ongoing today.

Addressing these restrictions imposed on women by the patriarchal social order in her novels, Margaret Atwood is a writer using multiple tilts, different styles and literary genres in her works. Also, Atwood's novels are connected to each other through a certain theme. Atwood's novels, *The Edible Woman*, *Surfing* and *Lady Oracle* focus on the theme of consumer society. *Life Before Man*, *Bodily Harm* and *The Handmaid's Tale* elaborate on social power relationships, while *Cat's Eye*, *The Robber Bride* and *Alias Grace* focus on the past and present of the main characters (Palumbo, 2000: p. 73). The common point of her works is that they emphasize how the restrictions imposed on the main characters impact and concern these characters (Palumbo, 2000: p. 73).

In Atwood's works *The Edible Woman*, *Surfing* and *Lady Oracle*, the main characters first live within the boundaries of the consumer society and naturally accept this situation. Later, however, they go through several experiences and turn into characters that society cannot accept, going beyond social limits. In the novels *Life Before Man*, *Bodily Harm* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, the focus is on women. The books temper with the events, transformations, identities and impositions that women experience in society. At the same time, they underline that women and men do not give the same reactions to the same problems or experiences (Palumbo, 2000: p. 79). In the novel *Cat's Eye*, the female character tries to understand her present by thinking about the problems she experienced in the past. *The Robber Bride* and *Alias Grace* tackle the past experiences of the characters and analyze their repercussions to the present day. However, the author fictionalizes the female characters in these novels as villains. In doing so, Atwood criticizes many stereotypes imposed on women such as being good and being sacrificing and grateful, advocating that women have the right to be bad (Macpherson, 2010: p. 68).



As can be seen from Atwood's later works, she is a versatile author presenting different perspectives with the techniques and approaches she uses. One of the distinctive features of Atwood is that she connects the past with the present, builds a dystopian world and includes myths in her works. The most remarkable aspect of Atwood's works is that the characters who suffer or struggle with problems are women. Therefore, it can be said that Atwood actually tries to reflect the patriarchal structure of the time in her novels, even by exaggerating the plot or through a dystopian world

1. The Patriarchal Structure and The Place of Women in Society

1.1. Transformation of the Matriarchal Structure into the Patriarchal Structure: Transition from Hunter-Gatherer to Agricultural Society

Throughout the Paleolithic Era, people were engaged in hunting and gathering using diverse tools and they mastered hunting. In order to avoid hunting shortages, people chose living spaces that were also home to the deer, bison and horse. They built their life on hunting and gathering and tried to get the energy they needed from both preys and plants. The end of the Middle Paleolithic Age for omnivorous people corresponded to a period when humanity mastered hunting and gathering.

This period of hunting and gathering led to the emergence of a gender-based division of labor. In the Upper Paleolithic Era, people adopted the hunting method of battue. Therefore, among the members of the group, those who had the highest mobility and ability to maintain their strength decisively for a long time could go hunting. This type of hunting required intense physical strength, and thus, only men attended hunting activities due to their physical advantages (Diakov & Kovalev, 2014: p. 20). Thanks to the new tools developed during this period, the hunting success rate increased. Since battue hunting required coordination as well as communication skills, this is considered a sign that communication between people became operational and significantly improved during this period (Barnard, 2011: p. 35). In addition, division of labor further diversified thanks to the strengthening of communication. In this context, the most physically-gifted members of the group went on battue hunting, while other men began to manufacture tools by staying behind. In the meantime, women were engaged in fulfilling their task of gathering plants. Thus, women's job definition covered gathering herbal products as part of the omnivorous nutrition. However, women were not only responsible for

gathering in this division of labor. In case of failure in battue hunting, women were responsible for hunting small animals in addition to their duty of caring for their children and doing the housework. In other words, the role of women in this division of labor was critical (Braidwood, 2008: p. 83).

Venus figurines found in excavations of historical sites are essential in understanding the importance of women for society during this period. These figurines depict female limbs exaggeratedly to signify the identification of women with nature, which provides humanity with food. At the same time, women's importance increased as permanent providers of food by gathering edible plants and hunting small animals as opposed to battue hunting that failed to achieve sustained success. Hence, these figurines belonging to the hunting-gathering period in history marked by matriarchy depict women elaborately (Paglia, 2004: p. 66).

People sustained their lives in the matriarchal social order in this hunting-gathering period lasting until the Neolithic Era. In the first villages established in the Neolithic Era, the status of women from the hunting-gathering period continued with a collective understanding. However, the division of labor was still available. Women undertook more diverse and comprehensive jobs in this division of labor. In addition to farming together with men, women were responsible for grinding and cooking manufactured cereals, spinning wool, knitting, cooking meals and caring for children. On the other hand, men were engaged in the maintenance of agricultural lands, feeding animals and constructing houses (Childe, 2009: p. 61). In the transition to agricultural society, the turning point in women's loss of status was the domestication of animals and starting to use them in farming as well as freight shipment. In the first rounds of agriculture, men were still engaged in hunting besides farming. However, they quitted hunting as a method of finding a food source after the domestication of animals. Instead, they began to cultivate crops and raise domesticated animals. Along with this turning point, labor was divided into two as household chores and agricultural labor. While women took over the household chores, men undertook all the responsibility of cultivation. In other words, the means of production entered the hegemony of men (Savran & Demiryontan, 2016: p. 36).

Along with the domestication of animals, the issue of who the lineage came from also changed shape. Since cultivation was the responsibility of women in the first agricultural villages and men continued to be engaged in hunting despite low success rate, lineage belonged to women. On the other hand, lineage started to belong to men after the domestication of animals and men's domination of means of production, laying the groundwork for the patriarchal social

structure. With the emergence of states, the resulting need for soldiers further consolidated the patriarchal social structure, and women began to take a second place in society in a supporting role that was limited to household chores (Aytan, 2021: p. 996).

In other words, women had to take a passive role in society shortly after the transition to the sedentary life. This passivity of women continued for a long time both in culture and in the social structure. As men held the means of production and took on the role of soldiers to ensure security, women took a supporting role in societies by taking care of home and children, while making a limited contribution to production. This started to change after the Industrial Revolution, when women again took roles in production. At the same time, women also tried to fight for social, legal, economic and social gains within the patriarchal order.

1.2. The Industrial Revolution and the Struggle of Women against the Patriarchal Order

The division of labor and gender order established by the domestication of animals after the transition to agricultural society started to manifest the first signs of change in the 17th century Britain. This was marked by the replacement of feudalism by capitalism. As a reflection of the demands of the bourgeoisie class for equality and freedom, women began to demand the same rights during this period. The Industrial Revolution, as formerly noted, led to a labor deficit, and thus, women, who had been engaged only with family and household chores with a secondary position, could enter the labor market. Although the struggle for the rights of women in the patriarchal order began with the demands of the bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie built a new order with exclusion of women while meeting their own demands. Therefore, the first feminist movement was marked by a struggle for today's most basic rights including the right to education, vote, work in any profession and take on managerial roles (Berktaş, 2010: p. 91). During this period, women struggled against abstract gender discriminations and tried to break down the taboos in society.

From the late 1960s, feminists developed a new approach. According to the feminist understanding during this period, the female identity was built on distinctive features of women. The main argument of this new understanding was that women were different from men, and the female identity of this period was based on this difference. Feminists adopted the approach that different features of women were the key to their freedom. Therefore, according to the new understanding, women endeavored to build their female identity by drawing strength from past



experiences rather than trying to reduce the polarization between men and women (Kılıç, 1998: p. 359). At the same time, advocates of this approach argued that the social environment in which women lived had a limiting effect on women. Therefore, it is an insufficient achievement for women to obtain only legal rights within the patriarchal structure. Change is necessary at the social and cultural level, and this change must begin at home. The duties of being self-sacrificing at home and doing the mandatory tasks must change so that this marks a starting point for building and independent female identity and strengthening women's status in the patriarchal social structure.

In the 1990s, the struggle of women within the patriarchal structure entered a new era. The third wave feminism was founded on the criticism that the struggle in the former period to build a female identity as part of the feminist movement aimed only at the upper-middle-class white women. Thus, this third wave rejected the perception of uniform women and dealt with issues that limited women. This approach also manifested itself as resorting to actions to achieve social change and supporting grassroots education (Özveri, 2009: p. 210). Rejecting generic women's issues and arguing that women's issues must be addressed at the individual level, advocates of this new approach dealt with all phenomena such as politics, gender, nationalism, economy, race, language and social class from the feminist perspective and tried to turn this approach into a theory. In other words, the struggle against the patriarchal order in this period was built on an approach where differences in female identity were brought to the fore and where an individual point of view prevailed instead of a holistic approach (Taş, 2016: pp. 171-172).

As a result, the struggle of women to make room for themselves in the patriarchal order began with the bourgeois revolution. After the Industrial Revolution, women again joined the labor force and started to struggle for their rights against discriminations in the patriarchal order. From the 19th century onwards, this struggle has been continuing. In this regard, this struggle has been reflected in literary works produced in society.

2. The Patriarchal Order and The Place of Women in Society in Atwood's Novel, The Handmaid's Tale

Reflecting the struggle of women within the patriarchal order in her works, the main characters of Atwood's novels are women who are struggling to cope with their problems.



Among these works, her dystopian work, *The Handmaid's Tale*, highlights the patriarchal order most decisively, and strikingly discusses how this order imposes limitations on women's lives. Although this work is dystopian, it reflects the patriarchal order quite well, telling the story of the main character through the roles and restrictions placed on women.

The Republic of Gilead, a military dictatorship, was established as a result of the terrorist attacks against the American state, the geography where the work is set through. In addition to the military dictatorship, there is a strict understanding of Christianity and dominance of theocracy. In a structure dominated by military dictatorship and theocratic understanding, society is built in a strict patriarchal system. The Republic of Gilead controls and regulates the lives, roles and duties of citizens both by legislative power and by the patriarchal system. Due to the low birth rates, the survival and continuation of the descendants of citizens of the Northern United States is also under great threat in this work. The authoritarian government turns this into an opportunity, and bases its power discourse on religion and science.

In the Republic of Gilead, the authoritarian regime also determines people's statuses. Women's freedom was not restricted before the Gileadean regime and they had their own identities, while they started to be categorized according to their abilities and birth rates or social status by losing these identities after the foundation of the regime (Goldblatt, 1999: p. 275). The hierarchical order of men and women is different, yet at the top of the hierarchical order of women are the Blue Wives of Commanders. And then follows the White-veiled Daughters of Commanders, the Gray Aunts, the Green Marthas, the Black Widows, the Red Birthmobiles or Handmaids, Econowives and Unwomen. Women take an inactive role in this emerging new stratification. In other words, according to the regime, women must either be passive or ignore their situation in society. In this new stratification, the regime thinks that regardless of their status, women have neither the right to share their opinions nor the right to make their own decisions. In fact, this is a situation where the male-dominated patriarchy creates dependence on itself and therefore on women. Thus, the dependence of women on men is guaranteed (Özçatal, 2011: p. 25). The feminist approach criticizes the fact that man is the subject and woman is the object clearly in the said stratification (Günsberg, 1994: p. 5).

The patriarchal system in the Republic of Gilead establishes a hierarchical structure among women, as well as among men. At the very top of the hierarchical structure are the Eyes and Commanders. These statuses are followed by Angels, Guards and Poor Men, respectively. The patriarchal system in the Republic of Gilead also imposes the absolute superiority of men over

women in terms of hierarchy and status. Accordingly, even men at the lowest level in the male hierarchy are absolutely superior to women at the highest level in the female hierarchy. In other words, the masculine is always superior, while the feminine is always inferior and worthless. The control and domination over persons in the Gilead Republic also manifests itself as a reflection of the patriarchal system. The Angels come after the Eyes and Commanders; the soldiers are hierarchically higher in the military system and the Guards are the people who are busy with daily public order affairs within the same system. Although they took their names from angels as a reflection of theocratic understanding, the Angels put extensive pressure on women and dominate them in the system, and thus they are real objects of fear (Atwood, 1986: p. 4). This oppression and domination is not imposed only by the Angels. As a reflection of the patriarchal system, all men have absolute authority over women, as well as being able to exert pressure and domination.

The authority of all men over women causes women to fear. The Guards are unable to use women for their own pleasure due to their status in society. The guard class consists of fools, the elderly, the disabled or the very young (Atwood, 1986: p. 20). The narrator in the novel thinks that they are dreaming of the Handmaids. However, as a rule, they are strictly forbidden to touch the Handmaids, and if they violate this rule, the punishment is quite severe.

If they think of a kiss, they must then think immediately of the floodlights going on, the rifle shots. They think instead of doing their duty and of promotion to the Angels, and of being allowed possibly to marry, and then, if they are able to gain enough power and live to be old enough, of being allotted a Handmaid of their own. (Atwood, 1986: p. 22)

The hierarchical system of men, like the hierarchical system of women, is formed by the same patriarchal system. Restrictions that are quite strict for women also exist for men, however they are not as strict as for women.

The protagonist of the book is also a Handmaid, who got her name from Of Fred, meaning the property of the Commander (Tennant, 2019: p. 2). It is interesting that Offred does not have such strong feelings as hatred for men, even in the situation she is in. According to Offred, all the men in the system, including Commander Fred, to whom she was assigned, are actually victims of the patriarchal structure. The restrictions of the system from the very bottom to the very top of the hierarchy also exist for men. As for the Commander, although he appears at the top of the male hierarchy, both his life and what he can do are within certain limits established by the patriarchal system. Although the patriarchal system is designed by men, men are trapped in the system they have designed themselves.



It must be hell, to be a man, like that.

It must be just fine.

It must be hell.

It must be very silent. (Atwood, 1986: p. 22)

In the Gilead Republic, the oppression on women is stricter than that of men, and most of the restrictions apply to women only. The strict control system at the entrances and exits of the city imposed by The Wall is the best example of strict restrictions imposed on all citizens, especially women. As the women called Martha, who do the daily chores of the commanders' houses, say, nothing is safer in the Republic of Gilead than the dead (Atwood, 1986: p. 20). It may even suffice to look at the goodbyes of the Handmaid to see the extent of the restriction imposed on women. The Handmaids say goodbye to each other by saying "Under His Eye" (Atwood, 1986: p. 45). The Eyes constantly monitor these women's goodbyes.

Another restriction in the Gilead Republic is the use of the word sterile. According to the law, there is no such thing as an infertile man, while only women can be fertile or infertile (Atwood, 1986: p. 61). As in the Old Testament, there are no infertile men in Gilead. In the Old Testament, Rachel, Rebecca and Sarah are infertile. Also, Anna and Elizabeth are incapable of having children in the Bible (Adelman, 2021). This is why the name Gilead was given to the Republic as a newly established Christian society. The goal of the newly established regime is to take advantage of the negative aspects of the previous society to legitimize Gilead.

In this world, where men dominate in a patriarchal structure, men cannot be biologically infertile. This weakness and illness is a condition that is peculiar only to women. Even though most of the society, even doctors, know that men are affected by this condition as much as women owing to the developments in the world, the patriarchal system does not accept this biological fact as a reality. The system consolidated this rejection by putting it into law that infertility is a characteristic of women alone. At the same time, they also separate women according to their fertility potential. If women are fertile, they are considered female, and if they do not have fertility, women are sent to colony areas called Unwomen (Atwood, 1986: p. 308). In other words, the patriarchal system determines the womanhood according to fertility.

In the patriarchal system created by the Republic of Gilead, Handmaids are assigned to Commanders. The system also strictly controls the sexual relations, preferences and time between commanders and Handmaids. Moreover, the system imposes certain rules for the duration of the intercourse between commanders and Handmaids. The first of these rules requires the

commander's wife to be part of the mating process to show that they are also part of the whole. This situation also entails the task of the wives of the Commanders to control the process (Atwood, 1986: p. 94). Another rule of the patriarchal regime is that nudity is prohibited. Nudity is prohibited during intercourse, as well. Women must be fully clothed, while the commander must be in uniform. Nudity is prohibited by the regime, except for the angled part under the dresses of Handmaids. The third rule imposed by the regime is that kissing is prohibited during sexual intercourse, and no emotional bonds are allowed under any circumstances. It is imperative that the mating process be mechanical (Bloom, 2004: p. 38). In the process, Offred has difficulty defining the sexual intercourse between her and the commander.

I do not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it; nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. (Atwood, 1986: p. 94).

Thus, the mating process takes place in the form of a reflection of the domination of the patriarchal structure over women. The patriarchal structure involves two women in the process, reducing intercourse to a purely mechanical level. At the same time, this is a rather humiliating situation not only for Handmaids, but also for wives who are forbidden to lead an active sex life because they are infertile. After the intercourse, Serena Joy, the wife of the Commander, needs to give the Handmaid, Offred a ten-minute rest period to increase her chances of conceiving (Bloom, 2004: p. 38).

Thus, it can be observed that the patriarchal structure established absolute domination over people who are considered two separate sexes as men and women. At the bottom of this hierarchy are women. As can be seen from Atwood's dystopian novel, even the lowest stratum of men is superior to the highest hierarchical stratum of women. However, the patriarchal order does not impose oppression and domination only on women. Rather, it imposes certain restrictions also on men. In the novel, women are oppressed in two ways within the patriarchal order, firstly because of their gender, and secondly, they are oppressed by everyone who are positioned at a higher status at than themselves. This order stands out as a structure built by the masculine mentality that established the patriarchal order in order to dominate all people (Tamyay: 2012, p. 251).

In the Gilead Republic, women are also considered criminals in the patriarchal structure. Therefore, the system legitimizes the oppression against women due to the vices they committed in their past sex lives. Hence, the regime teaches women to keep silent by subjugating them by force on the grounds of immorality (Atwood, 1986: p. 221). Furthermore, the patriarchal regime



legitimizes women's subjugated stratum on the pretext that they were not safe in the former regime. Women who were not safe under the former regime were obliged to protect themselves from threats from men. In the new regime, however, there is no such situation. According to the regime, women are now free from threats such as harassment, sexual abuse or rape (Atwood, 1986: p. 34).

As a reflection of the patriarchal order, the book reveals the Commander's view of women and nature when he takes Offred to a secret club called Jezebel, where there are women who offer sexual services to high-ranking commanders. According to the Commander, all nature and even women are created to dutifully serve men. When Offred asks the Commander why he prefers to go to this place, the Commander says that nature wants variety for men and that women know this. The Commander's answer here indicates the status and place of women in the patriarchal order.

Nature demands variety for men. It stands to reason, it's part of the procreational strategy. It's Nature's plan... Women know that instinctively. Why did they buy so many clothes in the old days? To trick the men into thinking they were several different women. A new one each day"... "So now that we don't have different clothes" I say, "you merely have different women. (Atwood, 1986: p. 237)

The patriarchal order in the Gilead Republic also benefits from the theocratic approach. According to this understanding, men are a species blessed by God and they are special. Blessed men are endowed with both nature and women. As a result of this endowment, women and nature have to serve men. The Commander shares and supports this belief.

In the Gilead Republic, the most oppressed and tyrannized class among women is Handmaids. It is for their fertility that Handmaids are subjected to both sexual, physical and psychological abuse and exploitation by Commanders. The Gilead Regime has legitimized the abuse of Handmaids by the Bible, matching their existence with the Biblical system of Handmaiding. In addition, the regime is quite sensitive to the proper education of Handmaids in accordance with the system. Fertile girls undergo a strict training on the principles of Handmaiding at Reeducation Red Centers. The first training of Handmaids here is on being a woman. Followed by this, they are provided with religious, political and biological trainings. Handmaids are no different from any other prisoner, and their daily activities are sharply planned and subjected to a strict control system to ensure that they abide by this plan. It is forbidden for them to read and write and to talk to each other (Erdem, 2019: p. 38). Their clothes are red, leaving only the face exposed (Atwood, 1986: p. 8).

When Handmaids are assigned to commanders after these trainings, they are not called by a name. Instead, they are called by a name with the addition the prefix of 'of' plus the Commander's name, indicating that she belongs to that Commander. In this regard, the patriarchal regime has turned biological sex into political gender by means of stratification. In this line, statuses are divided not according to the status of women as women, but according to the fertility of women's bodies. Therefore, Handmaids are actually objects for reproduction. They are not objects of love or affection, but rather "two-legged wombs" belonging to men (Atwood, 1986: p. 136). Therefore, women are evaluated only by their fertility in this patriarchal system and hierarchical order, and there are no expectations from them other than serving men and giving birth. Offred feels worthless in this order and describes that she is in a void (Atwood, 1986: p. 228). Commodification of women deprives women of self-expression and the ability to implement their own decisions. Therefore, it alienates women from being human (MacKinnon, 1982: pp. 539-540). Handmaids start their lives at the Red Center and live their lives by playing the roles they are given. This life takes away their identities and causes women to feel worthless.

Offred has also undergone a transformation of her character, leaving behind concepts such as resistance and hope that she believed in her former life, and has turned into a completely submissive character.

Everything they taught at the red Center, everything I've resisted, comes flooding in (...) I resign my body freely, to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am object. I feel for the first time, their true power. (Atwood, 1986: p. 286).

This obedience is desired by the authorities in the Republic of Gilead as shown in their religious approach and rhetoric. Both politicians and the clergy expect women to be obedient by accepting their social status without objection. Handmaids serve both society and the true faith with their reproductive abilities, and they can perform these services when they are a true obedient believer. Therefore, the religious approach does not consider handmaids to be anything different from the machines that actually ensure the continuity of society. The religious approach adopted by the patriarchal order also imposes another duty on Commanders, in addition to sexual intercourse. This task is that they should regularly recite the Bible to the household. The parts that they read from the Bible have to be absolutely related to fertility. The fact that Commanders read the Bible to the household is also an imposition by the system. The parts they read from the Bible were falsified and reorganized by the patriarchal regime.

Conclusion

The hunting-gathering period marked the starting point of the gender-based division of labor. This was a matriarchal period when men with high physical capacity attended hunting trips and the rest made weapons, while women were engaged in gathering, caring works and hunting small animals. Hunting was predominantly failing during this period, and people were able to reach food constantly thanks to women gathering plants and hunting small animals. At the same time, women were identified with nature and fertility. Due to both the provision of foods and their fertility, women were considered sacred and lineage was accepted to belong to women.

In the first period after the transition to the agricultural society, men not only continued to hunt, but also did farming jointly together with women. In addition to working together with men in farming, women also undertook the duties of grinding the crops, cooking and maintaining the house. Since hunting did not provide constant food during this period, women were again the primary element of society. The grinding and cooking of food obtained through farming and the constant provision of food provided a privileged position for women.

As men domesticated animals and started to use them in load carrying and farming, women lost the control of production means to men and began to engage in household and care jobs. Along with this sharp turn in society, the emergence of the concept of military service for security reasons significantly strengthened the position of men in society. This situation also formed the beginning of the patriarchal structure of society.

On the other hand, the struggle of women against the patriarchal structure of society began with the Bourgeois Revolution. Women started to fill the labor deficit caused by the Industrial Revolution, allowing women to re-enter the labor market. Despite the re-inclusion of women in the labor market, the restriction set by the patriarchal order for women continued. First feminist movements started with the struggles against the restrictions imposed by the patriarchal order on women, and this struggle continues even today.

Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, examines the structure of society and the place of women in the patriarchal social order. In the novel, the society built on patriarchy exerts pressure and domination on women. Religious arguments as well as the assertion that the old is bad legitimized this oppression and domination. Guardians of the regime take religious arguments from the Bible in support of the patriarchal order, and they have even changed the Bible to use it to legitimize the domination and oppression on women. The regime



established the guards class to sustain this oppression to complement the patriarchal order with authoritarianism.

Women were discriminated in the process of building the society, and they cannot even have solidarity among themselves, let alone oppose the patriarchal order. As a result of legitimization and rationalization, women cooperate with men –the dominant actors of this order– and do not stand up to the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse of Handmaids, or even side with the masculine power.

As a result of this domination and oppression on women, as well as the failure of women to oppose this situation, women, especially Handmaids, give up their past decencies and undergo transformation. In consequence, women who were free in their former lives, acted on their own free will and made their own decisions, have become objects that adapt and submit to the system due to the domination and the pressure of the patriarchal structure and masculine power. In other words, women have transformed into objects as imposed by the patriarchal order.

Although the novel is a dystopian work, it deals with the problems of commodification, oppression and domination experienced by women from the past to the present quite well. In fact, the masculine domination over women reflects the spirit of the time through a dystopian novel. Although such a rigid commodification and domination of the patriarchy as in the dystopian world does not exist today, it is noticeable that women might have internalized this oppression, domination by men and commodification if there was no organized struggle from the Bourgeois Revolution to today. At the same time, the attempt of the patriarchal order in the novel to legitimize its own structure is the same today. The masculine force is aware of the need for legitimization to maintain the patriarchal order, and it is observed to often resort to this path both in the novel and in real life. Every order, wherever it takes place in the real world or the fictional world in a dystopian novel, must have legitimacy in order to survive. The patriarchal order, in whatever environment it takes place, cannot survive without establishing legitimacy in the eyes of the people. For legitimacy, the established domination must be internalized by individuals. When this internalization can be established in the minds of people from a young age, thanks to culture, tradition, religion, belief and norms, the order will be able to survive. This is the only way the patriarchy can survive, whether in dystopian novels or in real life. Although the novel exaggerates the events in order to attract the attention of the readers more, the order works in the same way for every world. In this respect, the novel reveals how the patriarchal order legitimizes itself in today's world and how it is internalized by people.

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