

The Biopower and Biopolitics Concepts and Reflections of Them on Women in Margaret Atwood's Novel *The Handmaid's Tale*

Margaret Atwood'un Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü Adlı Romanında Biyo-iktidar ve Biyopolitika Kavramlarının Kadınlar Üzerindeki Yansımaları

Ülkü Güleşçe*

Highlights:

- When applying these theoretical frameworks based on Michel Foucault's concepts of bio-power and biopolitics to *The Handmaid's Tale*, it was seen how widespread, and destructive the control of female life by specific forces is.
- The control of language by certain authorities contributes to the persecution of women's rights, reinforces the ideological foundations of the regime, and strengthens its influence through de-identification.
- This article has explored the intersection of women's experiences in a dystopian world with the 'real' one by considering factors such as physical and social class differences, which serve as discriminators

Abstract: Considering both Michel Foucault's disciplinary, bio-power, and biopolitics concepts, I will support Atwood's insights about women's growing subjugation and argue with relevant examples from the novel that in the near future, the family unit will be torn apart by power relations under the control of an oppressive regime and neoconservative ideology. With the rising neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies all around the world, people have begun to lose their hopes in bright futures and felt the bell jar over their heads in the 21st century. Margaret Atwood began to carry the banner for feminist dystopias with *The Handmaid's Tale*, written in 1985. In a country called Gilead, ruled by a totalitarian regime, women are considered slaves who perform certain inferior tasks and exist in order to give birth to healthy ubermensch babies for Commanders. In creating this dystopian world, Atwood emphasizes the deformation in society and establishes a hierarchy system in which women are objectified, and marginalized. In this way, she shows the reader how a patriarchal society is shaped through fiction and Atwood criticizes all the institutions in their own way. *The Handmaid's Tale*, as an essential example of feminist dystopian literature, reveals women's future struggle for freedom and the oppression they will be subjected to, and Atwood meticulously narrates their story. This novel by Atwood holds a mirror to the political and social problems of our time, leading readers to ponder and question the future within the framework of a dystopian universe.

Keywords: Dystopia, Totalitarian Discourse, Biopolitics, Biopower, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood.

* Ph.D. Student, İstanbul University, ugulesce2@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-5545-1998.

Öne Çıkanlar:

- Michel Foucault'un biyo-iktidar ve biyopolitika kavramlarından yola çıkarak bu teorik çerçeveleri *The Handmaid's Tale* üzerine uygularken, kadın yaşamının belli güçler tarafından kontrolünün ne denli yaygın ve yıkıcı olduğu görülmüştür.
- Dilin belli otoriteler tarafından kontrolü kadın zulmüne katkıda bulunur, rejimin ideolojik temellerini artırır ve kimliksizleştirme ile etkisini pekiştirir.
- Bu makale distopik bir dünyada fiziksel ve sosyal sınıf farklılıkları gibi faktörleri göz önünde bulundurarak kadınların deneyimlerinin 'gerçek' dünya ile kesişimselliğini araştırmıştır.

Öz: Bu makalede Michel Foucault'un disiplin, biyo-iktidar ve biyopolitika kavramları dikkate alınarak, Atwood'un kadınların giderek artan ve daha da artacak olan tutsaklığına dair öngörülerini desteklerken, gelecekte aile biriminin baskıcı bir rejim ve neo-muhafazakâr ideolojinin kontrolü altında, güç ilişkileri tarafından parçalanacağı savı da romandan ilgili örnekler vererek tartışacağım. Tüm dünyada yükselen neoliberal ve neo-muhafazakâr ideolojiyle birlikte, insanlar 21. yüzyılda parlak gelecek umutlarını kaybetmeye başladılar ve sözüm ona cam bir fanusun ruhlarına geçirildiğini tüm zerrelereyle hissetmeye başladılar. Margaret Atwood, 1985 yılında yazdığı *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü* ile feminist distopyalar için bayrağı göndere çekti. Totaliter bir rejim tarafından yönetilen Gilead adlı ülkede, kadınlar belirli aşağı görevleri yapan köleler olarak kabul edilmekte ve Komutanlar için sağlıklı üstün bebekler doğurmak amacıyla var olmaktadır. Atwood, bu distopik dünyayı yaratırken toplumda deformasyona vurgu yapar ve kadınların nesneleştirildiği, marjinalleştirildiği bir hiyerarşi sistemi kurar. Bu şekilde patriarkal bir toplumun nasıl şekillendiğini okuyucuya kurmaca üzerinden gösterip, tüm kurumları kendi özellerinde eleştirir. *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*, feminist distopya edebiyatının önemli bir örneği olarak kadınların gelecekteki özgürlük mücadelesini ve maruz kaldıkları baskıları titizlikle ele alıp, gözler önüne serer. Atwood'un bu romanı, çağımızın politik ve toplumsal sorunlarına ayna tutarak, okuyucuları düşündürmeye ve geleceği distopik bir evren özelinde sorgulamaya yönlendirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Distopya, Totaliter Söylem, Bio-politika, Bioiktidar, *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*, Margaret Atwood.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü, çağdaş toplumdaki feminist eleştirileri ve toplumsal yapıların gelecekteki potansiyel tehlikelerini derinlemesine ele alan bir eserdir. Distopik bir roman kaleme alırken, Atwood toplumdaki çarpıklığı vurgulayarak Gilead'da kadınların nesneleştirildiği ve marjinalleştirildiği bir hiyerarşiyi sıkı sıkıya eleştirir. Bu makalede Atwood'un distopik vizyonu, mevcut toplumsal eğilimleri analiz ederken Foucault'nun teorileriyle birleştirilerek feminist bir perspektif sunmaktadır. Roman, baskıcı rejimlerin kadın bedenini kontrol etme ve kadınları sadece üreme araçları olarak görmeye yönelik çabalarını ele alırken, toplumdaki güç ilişkilerini de derinden sorgulamaktadır. Atwood'un romanı, güç ve direniş arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi incelerken gelecekteki olası senaryoların üzerine de düşündürmektedir.

Kadın karakterlerin yaşadığı acı dolu deneyimler, okuyucuya toplumdaki patriyarkal yapıların ve cinsiyet temelli baskıların etkisini gösterir. Roman, kadınların sessizliğe itilmesi ve

güçsüzleştirilmesi gibi konulara dikkat çekerken aynı zamanda direniş, dayanışma ve umut gibi görkemli temaları da ele alır. Atwood'un eseri, güç ve direniş arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi de inceler. Roman, toplumda güçlü ve baskıcı bir rejim altında yaşayan kadınların yaşadığı zorlukları gözler önüne sererken aynı zamanda insanın direnme ve özgürlük arayışındaki kararlılığını da vurgular. *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*, okuyuculara gelecekteki olası senaryolar üzerine düşünme fırsatı sunar. Atwood'un distopik dünyası, günümüz toplumsal sorunlarına bir ayna tutarken Foucault'nun güç ve kontrol mekanizmalarıyla birleştirilen feminist bir bakış açısıyla toplumsal değişimi, yönetsel politikaları, kadınların biopolitikalar sonucu nasıl metalaştığı gerçeğini sorgular. Roman, insan hakları, cinsiyet eşitliği ve özgürlük gibi konuları ele alırken okuyucuyu toplumsal yapıları sorgulamaya ve gelecekteki olası tehlikelere karşı dikkatli olmaya da çağırır.

Foucault'a göre biyo-iktidar, bireysel bedenleri kontrol etmekten çok, nüfusları yönetmek ve kontrol etmekle ilgilidir. Çeşitli teknikler ve teknolojiler aracılığıyla, insan yaşamını nüfus düzeyinde yönetmeyi ve düzenlemeyi içerir. Biyo-iktidarın temel mekanizmaları olarak beden disiplini ve nüfus kontrolü, Foucault'a göre biyo-iktidarın etkilediği iki temel mekanizmadır. Bireysel bedenler üzerinde kontrolün sağlanması, onları itaatkâr ve üretken hale getirmek için yapılan eylemler olarak beden disiplini olarak adlandırılır. Bu, okullar, işyerleri ve hapishaneler gibi çeşitli kurumlar aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilir, bu kurumlar insanların davranışlarını, tercihlerini ve yeteneklerini şekillendirir ve düzenler. Öte yandan, nüfus düzenlemesi, daha büyük sosyal grupların kontrolünü ve genel refahlarının artırılmasını içerir. Bu, kamu sağlığı düzenlemelerinin oluşturulması, nüfus yönetimi ve bir toplumun üretim potansiyelinin teşvik edilmesi gibi alanlarda gözlemlenebilir. Foucault, bio-iktidar kavramıyla düzenin gün yüzü görmemiş, karanlık yönlerine dikkat çekmektedir. Bunlar arasında insanların metalaştırılması, cinselliğin denetlenmesi ve kimin yaşayıp kimin öleceğine karar veren bir biyopolitikanın yükselişi bulunur. Sonuç olarak, fiziksel gücün emek gücüne dönüştürülmesi, gücün uygulanmasında önemli bir yön olsa da Foucault'un biyo-iktidar kavramı, bireysel ve toplumsal düzeyde yaşamın yönetimi ve nüfus kontrolünü de içeren daha geniş bir güç ilişkileri anlayışını ifade eder.

Bu makalede, birçok eleştirmen tarafından cinsiyet kavramına eşit mesafede durduğu için eleştirilen Michel Foucault'un biyo-iktidar ve biyopolitika kavramlarını göz önünde bulundurarak, Atwood'un mevcut neocon anlayışın neticesi olarak, kadınlara karşı giderek artacağını öngördüğü sosyal, politik ve psikolojik tutsaklığa dair fikirlerinin, romandan örneklerle tartışılması hedeflenir. Toplumun en küçük yapı taşı olan aile biriminin baskıcı bir rejim ve neo-muhafazakâr ideolojinin kontrolü altında güç ilişkileri tarafından parçalanacağını savunan Atwood kurduğu distopik evrende okuyucuya bu savını kanıtlamayı adeta kendine şiar edinir. *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*, romanı günümüzdeki toplumsal ve politik eğilimleri eleştirel bir şekilde inceleyerek kadınların

gelecekteki statüsü ve özgürlüğü konusunda önemli bir uyarı niteliği taşımaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Atwood'un tahminlerini desteklemek için romanın çeşitli bölümlerinden alıntılar kullanılacak ve Foucault'nun kavramlarına dayanarak betimsel içerik analizi sunulacak. Bu analiz, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin şekillenmesi ve kadınların güçlendirilmesi konusundaki önemli tartışmalara ışık tutmayı amaçlar.

Introduction

In his writings, the terms “biopower” and “biopolitics” were first used by the well-known French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault. Since then, these terms have become crucial in discussions concerning the relationship between power, politics, and human life. These ideas, which he initially presented in 1976 lectures at the Collège de France, are especially appropriate when studying societal control, governmentality, and the regulation of populations.

The term “biopower” describes the methods by which governmental entities wield authority over people and populations, including the use of direct coercion and force and strategies and mechanisms that control and manage the course of living things. It involves regulating aspects of human biology, such as birth, death, reproduction, and health, in order to improve and run society. With the aim of influencing individual behaviour and population dynamics, Foucault claims that biopower uses both disciplinary and regulatory methods.

On the other side, biopolitics examines how political authority and biological realities of existence intertwine. It includes the methods used by authorities to make choices and put laws into place that influence the population's health, welfare, and procreation. Biopolitics is the study of how the state manages life, including how to govern people and individual bodies through social programs, public health regulations, and immigration laws. These ideas take on a new level of intrigue when analyzing literary works because they offer a critical lens for examining how stories reflect and oppose the power relationships and governing factors that influence the lives of characters and society.

The Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood, is one of these ground-breaking dystopias. It explores the core ideologies of the religious right wings and seeks to critique them by demonstrating their implausibility. Although dystopias are rarely meant to be precise predictions of the future, Atwood's writing manages to give readers a sense of belief in a chaotic, depressing, and blatantly patriarchal future. Atwood paints a dreadful picture of a society run by an authoritarian ruler in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where power struggles rip the American family apart. This depiction has its roots in the neoconservative worldview that has ruled the world for decades; Atwood examines this issue through her vivid story. Atwood develops a persuasive case exposing

these beliefs' perilous effects on individual autonomy and social well-being by drawing on Michel Foucault's ideas, particularly those of disciplinary authority, bio-power, and biopolitics. In Foucault's view, disciplinary authority functions through monitoring and control to shape people's behaviour and enforce conformity. Women's bodies are exploited in the world of Gilead, reduced to serving only as a means of reproduction and subjugated to a rigid biopower regime. The state determines who is allowed to procreate, which also maintains a repressive patriarchal order by a system of Handmaids.

In the novel, the state's extensive control over women's lives, including their physical and emotional health, is illustrative of biopolitics. As a result of the state's determination to control every area of women's lives, they are constantly watched over and have limited movement. The harsh laws and norms enforced on women, notably the Handmaids, who are treated as nothing more than reproductive machines in *The Handmaid's Tale*, exemplify this type of dominance. Every step they make is scrutinized, and any deviation from the rules is immediately sanctioned, showing how far disciplinary authority can enter and stifle individual freedom. The authoritarian regime in the dystopian world portrayed in the book uses biopower to control female bodies and restrict fertility. With their designated Commanders, handmaids are forced into ritualized sexual interactions where their only duty is reproduction. This degrading exploitation is similar to Foucault's idea of biopower, which holds that the state has control over the bodies and reproductive systems of the populace and reduces people to nothing more than manipulable objects. Moreover, Atwood incorporates the concept of biopolitics into her critique of the neoconservative ideology. Biopolitics examines the intersection of power and biological life, focusing on how governments and institutions manage and govern populations' health, well-being, and survival. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the ruling regime exploits biopolitical control by dictating who can bear children and under what circumstances, effectively regulating the future of the population. By emphasizing the dangerous consequences of such authority, Atwood underscores the risks inherent in allowing ideologies that prioritize power and control over individual agency to dominate society. Atwood depicts a community in the future that is tainted by the extreme expressions of the religious right wings' views and the neoconservative ideology in a realistic and horrifying manner. The cautionary novel *The Handmaid's Tale* challenges readers to consider the effects of society's decisions and the significance of preserving individual liberties. Atwood encourages readers to critically assess their surroundings and work for a future that values human decency, equality, and autonomy by emphasizing and exaggerating certain tendencies. The complex interplay of power, ideology, and individual agency in a dystopian world will be put at the forefront through content analysis. The concepts of Foucault will be analyzed with pertinent references to the novel, and the

insight of Atwood about the near future of societies and women under the neoconservative regimes will be shed light on.

Foucault's biopolitics and biopower concepts, and Gilead's folk

With the momentum of capitalism, governments' discourse of repression ultimately resulted in the predominant standards and according to Foucault, the establishment of contemporary systems like liberalism and neoliberalism, which put an emphasis on population management rather than individual repression, is directly related to the development of biopower and biopolitics. Biopower and biopolitics represent a wide range of parts, from how power is exercised, including punishment and discipline, to controlling and regulating life.

The concept of biopolitics by Michel Foucault refers to how power is applied over bodies and populations to operate and control life. In Gilead, the regime utilizes biopolitical control over the bodies of the handmaids, using them for reproductive purposes in a society where birth rates have declined due to chemical leaks. The lines indicate the catastrophe of destruction;

Stillbirths, miscarriages, and genetic deformities were widespread and on the increase, and this trend has been linked to the various nuclear-plant accidents, shut down and incidents of sabotage that characterized the period, as well as to leakages from chemical and biological-warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites...(Atwood, 1997: 316-317).

Sex is just a tool to produce a healthy generation for the Gilead regime's welfare. The novel illustrates how power can be applied through the control of reproduction and the regulation of bodies, and how this can lead to the oppression and subjugation of individuals and groups. The government has started to raise its supremacy over women and make them think that having sex is a duty or a mission to be fulfilled. The Gilead government views sex as little more than a tool for reproduction. Indoctrinated with the idea that having sex is not a question of personal choice or pleasure but rather a responsibility or mission to carry out, the government consistently exerts its dominance over women. The regime further reduces women's autonomy and agency by portraying sex as a primarily reproductive act, turning them into just reproductive vessels. The idea that women's bodies are subject to control and exploitation by the governing powers is reinforced by this instrumentalization of sex, which highlights the oppressive nature of the government. In Gilead, only married couples are free to have sex, but the other members of society can be sentenced to death if they attempt to do it and the government itself controls this act. As Foucault (1990) argues in *The History of Sexuality*, marriage as a social institution has taken the sexual discourse as its sole property. It has total control over what is and is not said about sexuality.

Those who hold power condemn sex for pleasure as they regard it as a pointless waste of energy and time, and this is precisely what Foucault argues in his hypothesis.

According to Foucault, bio-power has been an indispensable element of governments. Because, with the everlasting production process, the physical strength possessed by the human body is transformed into labour power and used as production power for the welfare of the future of the country. The idea of bio-power also describes how contemporary cultures utilize control over people and populations. The methods in which power is exercised over the biological components of human life, such as birth and death rates, health, and population control. (Foucault, 1990, p.141)

The government of Gilead has the right to ban or set sex free, and the interaction between two lovers is controlled, prohibited, or proscribed by the laws. This proves that sexuality has been used as a discourse to direct people; for Foucault, those who have the power can control the sermon, and in a totalitarian regime, if women do not internalize the new normal, then they may face punishment., and due to the innate imposition of women, they have been exposed to various insults, degradation, and humiliation which have been swept under the carpet for ages by the opposite sex. In Gilead, creating a submissive mass by using women as objects is one of the most prominent policies of the government. The manipulation of sexuality has been used as an instrument to establish oppressive regimes, and women's social and political status in society have been degraded considerably by giving reasons from religious precedents. As the system is constructed with the aim of suppressing women and maximizing taking benefits from them, they are regarded as objects to use, and when men are done, these doll-like women are put aside. For example, if a woman resists or rebels against the regime, her disloyalty will lead to severe consequences. These kinds of women are called 'Unwomen' and are those who work in colonies where radioactive and toxic air poses a constant hazard. In Gilead culture, there is a continuous and terrifying prospect of being taken to "The Colonies". "Unwomen" are exiled to these inhumane Colonies. Cora, who plays the role of Martha at the Waterfords' home, the family to which the main character Offred is sent as a Handmaid, mentions, "they starve to death, and Lord knows what all"(Atwood, p.20). From conception to death, the regime's control over women's lives in Gilead is demonstrative of biopolitics. The state decides who can reproduce, how many children they should have, and what happens to those who rebel or are thought worthless. People are classified and subject to control across the entire society according to how functional they are in some way.

The power elites have what they want from women in various situations, and for Foucault, sexuality is an excellent mechanism through which the government controls its citizens since, to

keep one side robust, they have to create an opposing side. Stepping over the submissive and weak parties, the regime keeps the system going, and by spreading their discourse through various institutions, surveillance, and statistics, they secure their positions. They have a policy; the more obedient, passive vassals they create in society with oppression, fascism, and radicalism, the longer they rule the country. Actually, one of the fundamental differences between biopower and other types of power, like sovereign or disciplinary power, according to Michel Foucault, is how it functions. It does not rely on physical force or direct imposition in the same manner. Instead, the internalization of norms and values that everybody, including women, chooses to accept and embody voluntarily defines biopower. This internalization is a more manipulative and deceptive type of control. In essence, a forced atmosphere where women are conditioned to accept their low status is produced by a mixture of religious indoctrination, governmental propaganda, fear tactics, peer pressure, isolation, and the absence of practical alternatives. It becomes challenging for them to escape the bonds of their subjection because they absorb the repressive narratives and start to see their duties as necessary, if not virtuous, for the sake of the greater good.

The totalitarian regime's apparatuses are passivity and obedience among the citizens of Gilead. In the Republic of Gilead, the government's goal is to have complete control over society (especially women) and to have it internalized. Through brainwashing and rigorous surveillance, they try to establish never-ending authority. These activities are being carried out by security forces such as the Angels, which means the army, the Eyes, which refers to invisible police forces around, and the Guardians. These names are rich in symbolism and have a more profound significance to illustrate, Angels demonstrate how effectively the administration has appropriated and distorted spiritual and religious symbolism to support its tyrannical activities. For Eyes, the secret police, it can be interpreted that there is no escape from inspection, and it indicates an environment of fear and self-censorship. The Guardians employ military force that enforces oppression and restrictions; however, the term digresses the folk about their ultimate purpose as if it is not to maintain power and control over the nation. With these kinds of parties, the power elites create a dystopic, chaotic, distorted environment in which people are always on a knife edge.

As Foucault mentions, governments create some mechanisms, and there is a significant activation and spread of the disciplinary corpus as a result of these security systems. Throughout the centuries, people have suffered under oppressive regimes that have been mainly implemented through fanatic religious groups, and due to their fundamentalist arguments, women have been treated as others. To ensure this security, one must, for instance, make use of a wide range of techniques for monitoring people, diagnosing who they are, categorizing their mental structure, determining their unique pathology, etc.; in other words, one must make use of a wide range of

disciplinary series that proliferates under security mechanisms and is required to make them function (Foucault, et al, 2007, p.22).

As Foucault says, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the country is interlaced by surveillance cameras; every street, road, circus, and open-air space is full of inspection agents. Citizens have become skeptical about what they see around them. Once, the protagonist of the novel, Offred, who is one of those handmaids, meets a guy who is smoking, and he starts whistling and winks her even in such a normal situation, she questions his status and mental health. And she thinks she has been going under a test or that guy is an Eye (Atwood, 2017, p.27). This institutional oppression on people is so powerful that the members of society have become cynical and doubtful about other people.

With the aim of maintaining the future of Gilead, they have some institutions like Red Center in which women are systematically taught that they are the possessions of the government. As Mirayzee (2019) mentions in his article, apart from the radical sexual applications or the widespread discourse of the government, “The Handmaids’ clothes, for instance, could be associated with the clothes a woman wears in some extremist groups of the Islamic religion. The fact that women in the novel are not permitted to abort recalls the reader of the Protestants or the Catholics that did not endure it” (p.115). They recite some sentences from the Bible three times, declaring their loyalty to their Commander by saying “according to her ability, to each according to his needs” (Atwood, 2007, p.127). The government has its bases on religion, and all those applications should follow the Bible’s verses. In a way, the government grades itself as the owner of the holy book and instills that very idea in the Handmaids’ subconscious on purpose. As Nongjai (2013) claims in her article, Atwood aimed to depict “the politics of a government that claims to take the Book of Genesis at its word, and its demonic treatment of female subjects. It is true that patriarchal Gilead refers to the text of the Bible to fit their political, social, and sexual goals” in her novel. (p.181). Using religion as an instrument for ruling people and fulfilling their minds with coined phrases by the members of governmental institutions are the ways that the power elites follow. The Aunts always try to indoctrinate the Handmaids by saying, “You must cultivate poverty of spirit. Blessed are the meek” (Atwood, p.74). The members of political institutions successfully manipulated religious ideas and spread precisely designed terms to change the minds of the populace. By fostering a sense of loyalty and compliance among the public, this tactic enables the ruling regime to keep its hold on power. The ruling class strengthens its grasp on power and ensures the survival of its oppressive system by using religion as a tool of control.

Having religion as a medium, the government makes women associate themselves with holy characters from the sacred book, and these women were the ones who sacrificed themselves for the sake of their targets. As these women have no right to read the holy books in their original form but the adapted version of the regime, they can't oppose them with a reason, but they are forced to succumb.

After a substantial amount of time, the systematic intimidation policy over the citizens results in their resignation to nothingness; they begin to think that the outer world is fearsome, and Offred admits this: "We were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure. In the upper reaches of the atmosphere, you'd come apart, you'd vaporize, there would be no pressure holding you together" (Atwood, 2017, p.143). The second choice is no longer valid; they bow to the inevitable and the authority, tearing them apart each day. Women's subjugation level is increasing as the days go by, and they know that Gilead is an open-air prison, and the walls of the country are their gravestones as they are living dead.

Female identity and subjugation of women in the novel

Disciplinary power, oppression, and surveillance of the government and the regime are so mighty that they are oscillating like a pendulum over the nation. The emphasis is so visible that no matter where people go or what they do, the forces are there like a black Sun sending its morbid rays to Gilead; there is no way to escape. Aunt Lydia creates a climate of fear by saying "Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from" (Atwood, 2017, p.34).

Considering the brooding approach of the regime, it is not inapprehensible that handmaids are branded with tattoos that can be applied to animals or goods only; unfortunately, this act limits their freedom and reminds them where they belong and who they really have to be. They do not have control over their bodies. The regime 'governs' its citizens' bodies as well. The reader learns the existence of tattoos with Offred's lines: "I cannot avoid seeing, now, the small tattoo on my ankle. Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse" (Atwood, p.75). This inhumane application is made to guarantee that handmaids stay where they are and serve their Commanders throughout their lives.

Under these conditions, as usual, women are those who are exposed to distortion, and what Atwood criticizes is not only the society in Gilead but also other societies that have the patriarchal mentality have the same approach of blaming women for every potential fault and the roles of them have been decided by sick minded and blinkered men.

Women have vital roles in Gilead, such as wives, aunts, Marthas, and handmaids. Through these roles that are represented by different colored clothes, they serve Gilead and their commanders, but these so-called titles cover their subjugation. As Atwood mentions in the introduction part of *The Handmaid's Tale*:

The modesty costumes worn by the women of Gilead are derived from Western religious iconography — the Wives wear the blue of purity, from the Virgin Mary; the Handmaids wear red, from the blood of parturition, but also from Mary Magdalene.... The wives of men lower in the social scale are called Econowives, and wear stripes.... Many totalitarianism have used clothing, both forbidden and enforced, to identify and control people — think of yellow stars and Roman purple — and many have ruled behind a religious front. (Atwood, p.8)

Each and every woman has been insulted via their clothing and position in society. Handmaids wear red, and according to Minna Ristolainen, Offred is the embodiment of the Madonna and the Whore, two myths about women, in one person. She is giving herself up to accomplish a greater good and has children who will belong to a better social level. The handmaids are expected to be pure and holy, but their captors see them as lusty, sinful characters who take advantage of their position covertly. (2017, p.20) The author depicts a future society in which women's attire serves as a physical depiction of the duties and statuses to which they are assigned. Except for the Handmaids, whose crimson clothing may easily be distinguishable, women in various social ranks are forced to wear particular colors. The highest-ranking women, known as Wives, dress in blue, while Marthas, who are in charge of childcare and education, dress in dull green. The social hierarchy is reinforced by this color-coded system, which also clearly separates the various responsibilities played by women. Conversely, men are not subject to such overt categorization and instead always dress in black, a hue that denotes respect, power, and authority. Women go by the names of their duties or the commanders for whom they perform services instead of having distinct names. Women are reduced to interchangeable objects because of the lack of personal identity; they resemble computerized figures devoid of agency or individuality. Women's lack of uniqueness creates a sense of dehumanization and strengthens the authoritarian regime's control. The constant feeling of rot and decay that permeates *The Handmaid's Tale* society is a metaphor for the moral and social decline that the tyrannical rule causes. The lack of identity converts women into robot-like figures. The rottenness and decay surround society like fog; the government sets rules according to its radical religious concerns, but as people are under total oppression, the meaningless hierarchy among them causes a great depression, despair, and gloom. The regime's enforced empty order worsens the oppressive circumstances, causing a pervasive sense of helplessness and emotional upheaval among the citizenries. Atwood expertly captures the

catastrophic effect of an authoritarian rule on individual identity and communal cohesion by painstakingly describing dress choices, naming conventions, and the general aura of decay. The degenerating society serves as a potent visual metaphor for the effects of authoritarian control. At the same time, the symbolic use of color and the rejection of personal names underscore the dehumanization that women face. By focusing on these issues, Atwood encourages readers to consider the value of personal choice, freedom of speech, and upholding human dignity in society.

Women are decreased to being objects, as reading and writing are expurgatory activities for them. Handmaids are regarded as “two-legged wombs, ... sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices” (Atwood, p.146), and their human rights and freedom, such as drinking, smoking, wandering freely, and expressing ideas, are restricted. No woman can enter the realm of males since they are bound to do only one thing. Each woman has secondary duties in this regime. If a woman is a Martha, she is just allowed to do cleaning and housework, or if a woman is among the Wives, she rears children and keeps company. Jezebels engage in non-reproductive sex issues, and Aunts educate Handmaids whose only mission is to bear a healthy baby. Unsurprisingly, Princess Jezebel, associated with wickedness in the holy book, is used. The Bible for Jezebel says, “She misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols” (English Standard Version Bible, 2008, Revelation. 2:20).

Biopolitics encompasses policies and regulations used to shape the health of society, control over the population, and biological norms; however, the family institution has also been destroyed and distorted in *The Handmaid's Tale*. To fulfill her ‘sole mission,’ Offred is made to go through the humiliating Ceremony every month, in which Fred, the commander, rapes her in front of his wife. Serena Joy holds her hands while his husband and Offred are having sex. Although the ritual’s only purpose is reproduction, from Serena Joy’s perspective, bearing her husband rape a woman in front of her must be regarded as a Ceremony, and like a machine, she should actively be a part of this ritual, ignoring her womanly feelings. The regime strictly defines and controls these women’s relationships with one another, and in a symbolic way, the reproductive woman serves as the other woman's womb, so it is possible to interpret both women’s bodies through their organs.

Spending time together with Commanders or any men outside the house is forbidden for handmaids, but Offred and the Commander go to the Jezebel’s Hotel, a place where sex slaves are employed, and outside of their authorized mating rituals, Offred and the Commander engage in sexual relationships many times. Although she has no feelings for him, she prefers to be with him “to fill the time, at night instead of sitting alone in her room” and accompanying him, being “no

longer merely a usable body'' for him, gives a bang to her (Atwood, 2017, p.172). People also do not blame the regime itself in an implausible way because of the chaotic, extreme atmosphere it has created, that very rule makes women become the spy or the enemy of other women.

Women have no identity, no name, and they breathe and do what is imposed on them to do. What was kept in Pandora's box was hope, but unfortunately, after Moira, who is a close friend of the protagonist Offred, hangs herself, Offred succumbs and becomes the person that the government has tried to convert her into. She has lost her hopes of being free again as Moira has been a role model for her. Moira was the symbol of resistance; she was carrying the banner of dreams for sovereignty for women. With the death of the one she associates herself with, Offred leaves her to fight, beliefs, and freedom dreams behind and becomes a cog in the wheel of the regime. With no hope for gaining her identity again, she confesses that

everything they taught at the Red Center, everything I've resisted, comes flooding in. I don't want pain...I don't want to be a wingless angel. I want to keep on living, in any form. I resign my body freely, to the use of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject. I feel, for the first time, their true power. (Atwood, 2017, p.298)

She has displayed a passive resistance to what she rejects in Gilead, but Moira's death is the turning point of her life, and the sole option is to obey the strict rules set by the government. The degrading roles imposed by the power elites leave no room for questioning, analyzing, and pondering for women. They are positioned as the silent victims of the so-called mass murder the regime keeps their mute scream volume down.

Conclusion

The Handmaid's Tale is a fascinating, vivid examination of the threats posed by patriarchal cultures that try to oppress and control women's lives through bio-power applications and biopolitics. The novel highlights the oppressive nature of a society that prioritizes the state's power over its citizens' autonomy and agency. It is set in a dystopian future when women are reduced to reproductive vessels.

According to Michel Foucault, "biopower" is the government's power over the populations and bodies of its citizens. This idea is taken to the limit in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where the ruling Gilead regime gradually deprives women of their identities, rights, and autonomy over their bodies. The concepts of biopolitics and biopower are complicatedly entwined. Biopolitics refers to the political control of life itself. A severe social structure and rigid laws governing sexuality and reproduction are only two of Gilead's authoritarian government's many tools to exert biopolitical control.

In the book, the interwoven ideas of biopolitics and biopower, which comprise political control over life, play a multifaceted role. Gilead's government uses various authoritarian tactics, such as harsh sexual and reproductive laws, to impose biopolitical control. The state manipulates life's very fabric by setting rules on how women should become pregnant and give birth, turning them into tools for advancing its political goal. By using these methods, the state not only subjugates individual bodies but also plays with the basic fabric of human existence, turning people into nothing more than reproductive tools.

"The Handmaid's Tale" delivers a powerful indictment of the dangers inherent in society that place a premium on control above individual autonomy and bodily integrity via the prism of biopower and biopolitics. Atwood's portrayal of the repressive Gilead government serves as a sharp warning against the loss of individual liberties and the disastrous effects of women's servitude.

The novel serves as a warning about tyranny, religious extremism, and the reduction of personal freedoms taking root in a neoconservative society. By foreseeing the neoconservative ideology's inevitable rise in America, Margaret Atwood has given a new impulse toward dystopian novels. By referencing the ideas of biopower and biopolitics, Atwood emphasizes the value of preserving individual autonomy and opposing policies that aim to exert control over people's lives and bodies. Through its thought-provoking narrative, the book challenges readers' critical thinking about the effects of such power systems and the importance of preserving equality, freedom, and human dignity in society. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a potent literary analysis of the dangers of patriarchal civilizations and their attempts to repress and govern women's lives with biopower and biopolitics. The dystopian future depicted in the book emphasizes how repressive society can be when it prioritizes state authority above individual agency and reduces women to nothing more than reproductive objects.

References

- Atwood, M. (2017). *The handmaid's tale*. Penguin Random House. UK: Vintage Classics.
- Foucault M. & Hurley R. J. (1990). *The history of sexuality. volume 1 an introduction* (Vintage Books). Vintage.
- Foucault M., Senellart M., Ewald François & Fontana A. (2007). *Security territory population: lectures at the collège de France 1977-78*. Palgrave Macmillan: République Française.
- The ESV Study Bible: English standard version. (2008). Crossway Bibles.

Mirzayee, M. (2019). Female Identity in the Handmaid's Tale. *World Scientific News* 114-123.
https://www.academia.edu/70638017/Female_Identity_in_the_Handmaids_Tale_by_Margaret_Atwood.

Nongjai, M. (2013). Gender Politics in Margaret Atwood's Novel *The Handmaid's Tale*.
Research Scholar, I (II) 179-193.
https://www.academia.edu/72629784/Gender_Politics_in_Margaret_Atwoods_Novel_the_Handmaids_Tale.

Ristolainen, Minna (2017). Colour as a narrative tool in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and TV adaptation. Tampere University. Faculty of Communication Sciences. Comparative Literature.

https://www.academia.edu/35770257/Colour_as_narrative_tool_in_Margaret_Atwoods_the_Handmaids_Tale_and_TV_adaptation.