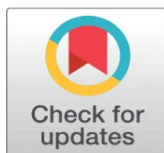
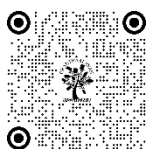


LANGUAGE AND PLEASURE RESHAPE POWER DYNAMICS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S THE HANDMAID'S TALE

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ABSTRACT

After being published in 1985, Margaret Atwood's well praised work *The Handmaid's Tale* quickly gained recognition and was included in the canon of literature. Offred, a handmaid in a totalitarian society where people are constantly watched, is the protagonist of this dystopian novel. In this repressive culture, power is heavily exercised in all spheres of life. This essay employs media researcher John Fiske's cultural theories to investigate the workings of power. It explores language's dual uses as a tool of resistance and authority, emphasizing the roles pleasure and discipline play in Gilead's power structure. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, people continuously rebel whenever they get the chance, even in the face of a totalitarian government. As such, they are neither simple commodities nor passive things. This essay also examines the significant impact that pleasure plays in these people's resistance and captivity. Lastly, it clarifies how people use guerilla warfare to oppose the ruling class.

Keywords: Totalitarian, Language, Pleasure, Power, Dystopian, Cultural Theories

1. INTRODUCTION

The Handmaid's Tale, one of Margaret Atwood's most highly acclaimed books, shot to bestseller status after its 1985 publication. The book depicts the tale of women's bodies and spirits being sold into slavery in a patriarchal world. The Republic of Gilead, a brutal totalitarian government, has gained control of the United States in this dystopian society. In Atwood's future, widespread human sterility is a significant worldwide problem. It is a place where "women are totally under the control of male members of the patriarchal society" (Zarrinjooe & Kalantarian, 2017, p. 66). Moreover, liberty and individuality are empty signifiers in the context of Gilead. Even names and identities are imposed on the subjects by the system. In this dystopia, "women have no rights over their physical and emotional selves" (Tennant, 2019, p. 12), and they are considered as means for reproduction and are enchained to the dominant patriarchal ideology. These women are called handmaids and they "are fertile women young enough to bear children" (Tennant, 2019, p. 12). The objective of this paper is to investigate the roles that language and power play as two essential components in the formation of identity. It also aims to show how pleasure contributes to the localisation and extension of power. With its lengthy history, dystopian literature provides a useful framework for analysing sexual politics and power relations where oppressive forces control people's bodies. The handmaids' corpses become analytical focal points in this setting. Moreover, "dystopias essentially deal with power" (Bloom, 2004, p. 82).

The overwhelming majority of dystopian literature deals with socio-political themes; however, in light of growing environmental concerns, several contemporary works in the genre have included post-apocalyptic worlds wrecked by natural disasters and global warming. Radiation, pollution, and oppression provide the perfect dystopian backdrop for *The Handmaid's Tale* to examine how a totalitarian government exercises and distributes political power. Furthermore, "dystopias are notable for the obsessiveness, if not the finesse, with which their elites attempt to eliminate dissent" (Hanson, 1994, p. 56). This excessive concern is portrayed in *The Handmaid's Tale* in its most extreme form. Offred, the main character, is a woman forced to abide by laws that oppress the feminine body via constant subordination. This analysis will examine how power functions inside Gilead's oppressive system and how the government shapes subjects and identities in the book using Fiske's cultural theories. In this context, Cultural Studies is to be regarded as "the expression of a projected alliance between various social groups" (Jameson, 1993, p. 17).

Our Cultural Studies method seeks to show how Gilead's power structure works and how the people and the ruling power, two important forces, are engaged in an ongoing battle. *The Handmaid's Tale* encourages in-depth examination of the idea of power through critical analysis. "Atwood explores in her novels the ways in which individuals become implicated in power relationships" (Özdemir, 2003, p. 57). On the other hand, Atwood depicts a society where women are under extreme tyranny, allowing numerous feministic readings of the novel. "Atwood seeks to examine the political nature of language use" (Hogsette, 1997, p. 265) by depicting the power of language in shaping identities. It is, therefore, intended to illuminate some of the recent research conducted on these two issues. It is a fact that one cannot live outside of an ideology since "subjectivity is primarily an experience" (Mansfield, 2000, p. 6), and all our experiences are taking place within ideologies. In our everyday lives, we are surrounded by countless discourses which sometimes are in an alliance and sometimes in opposition to one another. This leads to a network of interrelated ideological discourses. Mirzayee (2019) draws a link between the Bible and the ideology being practised in the Republic of Gilead; she asserts, "the leaders of Gilead have found scriptural justifications for their treatment of women" (p. 117).

Totalitarian governments require an ideology that is more potent than any other kind of governance in order to maintain its rule over individual civil and human rights. To win people's consent in such an authoritarian state, in this case, Gilead, is almost impossible because "...religious beliefs stop being what they are and become instead something else: an ideology" (Rachik, 2009, p. 347). Religion does not become a vehicle of ideology. Instead, it becomes the ideology itself. Many tenets of critical approaches concerning the essence of power and how power works in its sociological sense are derived primarily from Marxism and as McQuarrie & Spaulding (1989) point out "the concept of power occupies a central place in Marxist theory" (p. 347). In this regard, Roozbeh (2018) investigates the novel in terms of Marxist theories considering the handmaids to be commodities. He further argues that "not only do they [not] possess anything in the society of the proletariat but also they themselves are considered like commodities and goods which are possessed by the bourgeoisie" (p. 19). This assumption is quite radical and extreme. It is indeed reasonable to address the similarities between handmaids and the proletarians. The significant advantage of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is that it "rejects the negative discourse patterns of male-oriented dystopian fiction" (Briedik, 2021, p. 59). Atwood's narrative illustrates the active participation of female characters in the foundation of power relations. Consequently, this participation destabilizes the male-oriented dystopia. Zarrinjooee and Kalantarian analyse the novel in the light of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory. They claim the central discourse of oppression for women is biology: "in *The Handmaid's Tale* biology is the key factor for woman's oppression. Patriarchy has always convinced women concerning their biology" (Zarrinjooee & Kalantarian, 2017, p. 68), asserting that women are biologically inferior. Nevertheless, the fundamental justification of tyranny and oppression both on male and female subjects is rooted in an extreme religious ideology. Atwood's Gilead was "a society that valued many of the same rigid Old Testament principles" (Moldovan, 2020, p. 104). Even for the justification of the role of women as only child bearers, references to different versions of the Bible are given: "the biblical story in which the barren Rachel directs her husband Jacob to 'go in unto' her servant Billah" (Neuman, 2006, p. 857). The biblical references are to feed the dominant ideology. "Atwood looks at the patriarchal biblical history from the perspective of its female 'victims', however, only some men in this tale are given some privileges" (Staels, 1995, p. 455). Women are not allowed to have orgasm even during ceremonial sexual relations with particular men. Men's bodies and identities essentially become nothing more than platforms for sperm to procreate when the female body and identity are restricted. These progeny are then shaped into hosts for the parasitic system. The Republic of Gilead uses a variety of coercive and ideological mechanisms to uphold its control over people in addition to its religious ideology.

Language is indeed a robust vehicle in the formation of an ideology since "language becomes the site of power in order to practice its objectives" (Namjoo, 2019, p. 87). Kouhestani endeavours to elucidate the role of language and discourse in shaping and cementing ideology in the novel. She argues that "language is the foundation for thoughts and those who

can control the language can also restrict the thought" (2013, p. 612). Furthermore, Kouhestani claims that Offred "has strict control over her own language" (2013, p. 612). She does not have a language of her own, and there is no language of one's own. Since language has several accents by nature, how it is employed in different social circumstances is what counts. Thus, the multiaccentual nature of language is confirmed. We shall talk more about this idea in relation to resistance and subjugation in Gilead. Power that is localised and imperialised affects almost everything we come into contact with on a daily basis in addition to acting as a social force. Power "is a systematic set of operations upon people which works to ensure the maintenance of social order" (Fiske, 2011, p. 11). Maintaining social order is not necessarily limited to the social contexts.

However, as Foucault (1992) states, "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, p. 93). An entity that determines almost everything in a social context and exists everywhere and controls our understanding of knowledge, truth, and reality assiduously represents itself in the thoughts and feelings of every individual. Fiske divides power into two oppositional categories. On the one hand, it deals with "imperialising power" (Fiske, 2016, p. 11), which is the power of the dominant that aims to enlarge its scope of dominance, and on the other hand, there exists "localising power" (Fiske, 2016, p. 11), which aims to preserve a space for every individual as an opposite force to imperialising power. Deeply rooted in Marxism, Cultural Studies has established itself in interdisciplinary fields from literature to sociology. "It would be a mistake to see cultural studies as a new discipline" (Turner, 2009, p. 9) since many tenets of cultural studies have existed long before the formation of cultural studies as a school of thought. Cultural studies' revolutionary significance in theory is how it creates links between fields of study to shape a comprehensive understanding of the subject it probes. Moreover, it does not, in any sense, limit itself to one field of study. "Cultural Studies was in part the consequence of the deconstructive impact of mass culture itself in the human sciences" (Beverley, 1992, p. 19). Marxist theorists for a long time saw popular culture as a mirror of the prevailing ideology and concentrated mostly on the notion that power belonged to the bourgeoisie class. Culture is an environment where meaning is continuously produced and reconstructed. It is possible to view this creation and replication of meaning as an ongoing conflict between opposing forces.

"Culture is the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience, and such meanings necessarily produce a social identity for the people involved" (Fiske, 2011, p. 1). In this sense, individuals become subjects to the production of meaning since it directly involves shaping their identities. Moreover, "there has been an intellectual tradition dedicated to analysing the role that culture plays in both resistance and repression" (McClennen, 2011, p. 192). Consequently, cultural critics can primarily concentrate on how power is formed, its mechanisms, and how resistance emerges within social contexts. This involves examining culture and its ability to generate meaning as both a form of resistance and a means of exercising power. "Culture... is a constant succession of social practices; it is therefore inherently political" (Fiske, 2011, p. 1). Analysing these continuous social behaviours helps clarify the idea of subject development and promotes a deeper comprehension of power and meaning. Imperialising power is more successful than localising power since the former symbolises the authority of the subordinate. It is by no means ineffectual, though. Within both competing forces, meaning is always being formed. Localising power seeks to provide people the freedom to identify themselves according to their own preferences as opposed to the supremacy of the group, whereas imperialising power seeks to maintain hegemony.

"Any social system... needs a system of meanings and values... to hold it in place or to help motivate it to change" (Fiske, 2016, p. 13). The influence of the localising power depends mainly on how imperialising power has managed to induce hegemony. Power utilises everything at hand to ensure the stability of the terrain it dominates, including the realm of meaning. For this reason, it contributes largely to the formation of culture, which involves "the constant process of producing meanings" (Fiske, 2011, p. 1). In Althusserian terms, it uses both ideological and repressive state apparatuses. A repressive form of power that has been successfully hegemonized is discipline. "Discipline is the means by which people's consciousness and behaviour are adapted to the requirements of power as it is applied in a specific social organisation" (Fiske, 2016, p. 56). Power does not rely only on one thing to ensure its maintenance, and discipline is what proves to be quite efficient in sustaining subordination. The fundamental place where discipline is practised is the body, "for the body is the primary site of social experience" (Fiske, 2016, p. 41).

Therefore, it is the most fundamental and significant site of physical struggle. Foucault (1992) considers a disciplined society "populated by docile, obedient, normalised subjects" (p. 255) which is a society where bodies are thoroughly disciplined. When the dominant power has enough control over the dominant culture, it can dictate how meanings are produced in the social context, which in turn affects how people identify with themselves. Gilead hopes to increase its hold on the domain of meaning in this way. Language is the domain of all that takes place in a social setting, including

knowledge and truth. They are both byproducts of the language connected to a certain episteme. Language creates meaning and therefore it is "a crucial site of struggle, for all our circulation systems it is the one with the widest terrain of operation" (Fiske, 2016, p. 30). The struggle in the terrain of language is interminable. It never stops operating since meaning never stops being produced. "Though it is available to all members of a society, it is neither neutral nor equally available" (Fiske, 2016, p. 30). Because Offred and the other handmaids have little access to language, it is difficult for them to become autonomous subjects. One of the most important factors in determining the power of imperial and dominant forces is linguistic availability. Those with linguistic skills have the power to mould reality, truth, and knowledge. In the end, language creates a network of meanings that builds social structures. Power dynamics within this system shape people's lives by creating meaning. These "meanings necessarily produce a social identity for the people involved" (Fiske, 2011, p. 1).

Consequently, the purpose of creating meanings is to construct identities. The Multiaccentuality of Language Language permits the existence of discourse, and the shaping of hegemony begins with discourse. Through this, the subject becomes "an effect of power relations but also actively participates in and affirms those practices that emanate from and support that power configuration" (Rae, 2021, p. 90). Rae adds, the subject "is not fully determined by those power relations and so is able to reflect on and act in accordance with or against them" (p. 90). Though language is available primarily to the imperialising power, it appears to be in service of localising power. "Language is multiaccentual. That is, it always has the potential to be spoken with different accents that inflect its meanings towards the interests of different social formations" (Fiske, 2016, p. 31). This multiaccentuality of language accounts for constant resistance to the imperialising power. As a result, "this imperialising use of language represses this multiaccentual potential and attempts to establish the singular accent" (Fiske, 2016, p. 31). This imperialising force relies on repression or hegemony to maintain its existence. In its attempt to recognise and subdue opposing forces, power is overcome by excessive differentiation and strives to control the unknown. The party in a position of power always derives satisfaction from using that authority. In other words, pleasure resides in exercising power to bend the subversive; "pleasure exists only in opposition to unpleasure" (Fiske, 2016, p. 31).

Hence, what becomes pleasurable for those in charge of power is unpleasure to those who have no access to power. Humans are unconsciously resistant to power and that resistance gives them a sense of pleasure. "Pleasure is closely related to power; for the powerless, the pleasure in resisting/ evading power is at least as great as the pleasure of exerting power for the powerful" (Fiske, 2011, p. 17). Resisting/evading power occurs on several grounds. It appears primarily in producing meaning where the subjects create oppositional meanings in relation to the imperialising power. "Within the production and circulation of these meanings lies pleasure" (Fiske, 2011, p. 17). As a result, people like it when they are able to resist discipline both psychologically and physically. The imperialising power does not have to openly acknowledge this pleasure. This kind of resistance recurs and changes all the time, just as language is always interacting with signifiers. As a result, the enjoyment this resistance brings about inspires more acts of disobedience. Alongside the ceaseless flow of language is this constant cycle of pleasure and resistance. Discipline is a basic component of all political systems, acting as a powerful corrective mechanism and establishing norms for different social classes. Since the concept of "normal" is established, recognised, and subject to constraints, power can control it with ease. Furthermore, it reacts to the exercise of power in the same way every time. Consequently, it is possible to control the usual without encountering strong opposition. "The known can be controlled, and the unknown is beyond control" (Fiske, 2011, p. 17). *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts an oppressive government that uses every means at its disposal to maintain the status quo and compel its victims to submit. Control is the foundation of any endeavour to enforce discipline, and it is used wherever possible. "Gilead regime utilises the totalitarian theocracy to subjugate women and use their bodies as political instruments which can produce future generation" (Sadeghi & Mirzapour, 2020, p. 3).

The physical body of the subject becomes highly significant in the process of discipline. As earlier stated, the body is the site of control and discipline. Offred is a handmaid who has lost her sense of identity under the control of the imperialising power. "I'm remembering my feet on these sidewalks... and what I used to wear on them. Sometimes, it was shoes for running, with cushioned soles and breathing holes" (Atwood, 2019, p. 33), she says. It is forbidden for Offred to wear anything she wants as she is a subject who was created by and lives under this authoritarian government. Rather, she has to wear what the government says she must wear. She is unable to choose the commodities she wants to utilise, which makes her feel cut off from her own identity. This creates an identity crisis since "all commodities are consumed as much for their meanings, identities, and pleasures as they are for their material function" (Fiske, 2011, p. 4).

Through the things we buy, the capitalist world gives us a sense of belonging, which in turn brings us pleasure and shapes our individuality. Antagonism arises when these goods are lacking. As with all women living under totalitarian governments, Offred's body becomes a territory that, once taken, enables the subject to be subjugated and helpless by the imperial authority of the patriarchy. The Gilead regime controls and restricts bodies in order to define the perfect subject. But when these boundaries are upheld, there is also a chance for breaking them. As Shams (2020) observes, "for transgression to be possible, there need to be limits" (p. 76), and this takes us to "the intertwined interplay of transgression and limits" (p. 76).

In other words, "wherever there is a limit, there lies a possibility for transgressing that limit, which reveals the instability of the limit that is there to be transgressed" (Shams, 2020, p. 76). The female body turns into a battlefield in Gilead's political terrain as patriarchy and the rebellious feminine identity clash. What is especially interesting is the reasoning for the Republic of Gilead's ban on personal commodities. "We were a society dying, said Aunt Lydia, of too much choice" (Atwood, 2019, p. 34). Offred regularly uses Aunt Lydia as a symbol of the Republic of Gilead to underline the arguments in favour of the imperialising force. This power perceives itself as threatened by its incapacity to control personal variances and deter violations. As a result, Gilead's authority aims for consistency. However, "the changes in a regime of power must occur at all levels, and finally, must occur at the most micro level, that of the body" (Fiske, 2016, p. 55). The primary components of the political body in Gilead are bodies. The upshot is that maintaining control of one's body is a constant effort. A body that challenges accepted standards reveals the imperialising power's vulnerabilities. "The staging of transgression unfolds a paradox inherent in our existence." That paradox, according to Shams, is that despite "being constructed as affected, regulated and vulnerable beings, we can resist" what forces us into coercion (2020, p. 76), and bend or break the very norms that define our body and existence within a political regime. From this stance, culture is an opponent of the power bloc and can be seen as "a relatively unified, relatively stable alliance of social forces" (Fiske, 2011, p. 8). Utilising the power bloc, the imperialising power attempts to create a unified society "to control, structure, and minimise social differences so that they serve its interests" (Fiske, 2011, p. 8).

Similarly, when Aunt Lydia argues that too much liberty is something despicable, it is because freedom is a threat to the Republic of Gilead's power. "If you have a lot of things, said Aunt Lydia, you get too attached to this material world and you forget about spiritual values. You must cultivate poverty of spirit" (Atwood, 2019, p. 76). Once more, by creating a discourse that appears to promote their interests, the imperialising authority aims to impose hegemony over its subjects. This story effectively denies the body the freedom it craves by emphasising the spirit above the body. Put differently, Aunt Lydia presents freedom as a threat and pushes back all hopes for it to the afterlife's spiritual quest. Her religious viewpoint isolates any concept of freedom from the comprehension of the typical body and self. She creates a "other" body that just wants spiritual deprivation and propagates it as the optimum condition for the spirit and self. This religious discourse is one of the most powerful because it establishes a "other" body that rules the subject's spirit as well as body. Social conventions subsequently render this other body nonexistent. It strays from the ideal of what a subject ought to be; it opposes the prevailing ideology and the consolidation of power.

Although discipline starts with physical control, it transcends the individual and is exemplified in the Republic of Gilead. It involves more than just controlling the body to maintain discipline and order. Shams (2020) argues that "the subject is performatively constructed through power relations and in ethical relation to the other (human or non-human)" (p. 43). In order to destroy the "other" body, the tyrannical Gilead dictatorship imposes severe rules on the human body in the role of a non-human other. This system destroys moral bonds and replaces them with perverted standards that serve its goal of subjugating people's bodies and minds. The body under this regime transcends the bounds of what is deemed normal after ethical relations are shattered, becoming 'other' to the imperialising force. The self is erratic and inconsistent, so it pushes against the boundaries that have been set. This instability and incoherence of the political regime and the possible resurgence of the lost ethical ties result from this. "Wherever there is a limit, there lies a possibility for transgression of that limit, which reveals the instability of the limit that is there to be transgressed" (Shams, 2020, p. 49). Since the knowledge from the previous administration directly threatens the Republic of Gilead's survival, it begins by eliminating any knowledge that contradicts its philosophy. Gilead aims to promote knowledge it deems acceptable while redefining the conceptions of body and self in order to replace this outdated knowledge. It so produces knowledge that can be examined using a Foucauldian framework of episteme as a weapon of control and a principle of hegemony. In addition to producing the knowledge it wants, Gilead's rule makes sure that everyone follows it. They will face disciplinary actions that entail the created knowledge if they do not. "Non-coercive control can only be exercised over people through such knowledge" (Fiske, 2016, p. 68). The Republic of Gilead is an absolutist government, but it constantly depends on disciplined knowledge to keep the body and the intellect under control. Counterforces are

also generated by this information and the power it carries. The discipline that is placed on people is a constant means of enacting power.

Nonetheless, when discipline is used, it serves both submissive and empowering purposes. Resistance to the political oppression that is becoming more centralised may result from this empowerment. "A disciplined person is one who submits him or herself to the power of a particular way of knowing/ behaving in order to participate in that power" (Fiske, 2016, p. 62). Whenever the subjects yield to the discipline, they participate in that form of power since there might be a form of privilege for the well-disciplined subjects. In other words, subjects that are well embedded and disciplined within the power-knowledge network can transgress the system's limits. In this sense, power also constructs intelligibly gendered identities: "intelligible genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire" (Butler, 1989, p. 22). In this vein, Janine represents an intelligible gendered identity who corresponds directly and indirectly to the needs of the dominant social norms. "It's Janine, telling about how she was gang-raped at fourteen and had an abortion. She told the same story last week. She seemed almost proud of it, while she was telling. It may not even be true" (Atwood, 2019, p. 86). A female body invaded and abused by patriarchal order is the law of the republic being upheld. The female subjects are enslaved bodily and sexually. Being invaded in the Republic of Gilead for the handmaids is a rule. Testifying to this horrible rule and professing the power it holds over subjects are themselves forms of surveillance and control of the subjects and, as Foucault (1992) puts it, a must for Western man, who "has become a confessing animal" (p. 59). Confession also acts as a vehicle for producing and sharing a specific corpus of knowledge. According to this information, a woman who is raped should be held accountable for the crime. This notion casts women as lesser creatures who must bear the weight of immense, alluring power. On the other hand, Janine understands exactly what happens if she agrees to the punishment. The narrator raises doubts about Janine's sincerity about her horrific encounter, implying that Janine is driven by the pleasure that comes with power. "Disciplined individuals have to be constantly examined" (Fiske, 2016, p. 73). This is why testifying takes place every week, and this is why Janine repeatedly retells the same story. She is aware of this interminable process, the fact that she is constantly being tested and acts accordingly. There is a pleasure for a subordinate male "in exerting power over others, especially women" (Fiske, 2010, p. 40). Even the self is subjected to this imposed pleasure. As Fiske asserts, "the pleasures of conformity by which power and its disciplinary thrust are internalised are real pleasures and are widely experienced" (2010, p. 40). For the handmaids, a public realm of pleasure is thus created by their acceptance of being subject to authority. The Commander reading aloud passages from what is likely a modified version of the Bible over the supper table is another instance of how disciplinary knowledge is put into practice. On the other hand, Janine understands exactly what happens if she agrees to the punishment. The narrator raises doubts about Janine's sincerity about her horrific encounter, implying that Janine is driven by the pleasure that comes with power. "I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out too, but there was no way of checking" (Atwood, 2019, p. 105). Offred is cognizant of the so-called Bible's unreliability. It is the only knowledge obtainable, and she has no access to any sort of knowledge apart from this one to resist the dominant power. Religion here proves to be a strong apparatus for Gilead's regime to take over a subject's mind and body "The Gileadean regime abuses women and does so in many ways that echo past abuses of women" (Tennant, 2019, p. 75).

Consequently, the root of all justifications is within religious discourse combined with the political and sexual dominance rather than the biological and physical condition of women as Zarinjooee and Kalantarian (2017, p. 68) stated. The female body is too dangerous and mesmerising for the Gileadean body politic. Therefore, women are put in chains bodily and mentally by dominating the body and practising the imperialising knowledge. The Gileadean power is fortified through the biblical knowledge's circulation. This oppressing power breaks women into many pieces, preventing them from conceiving their bodies and identities outside the religious discourse. Afterwards, this patriarchal oppression interpolates women into its own network, only to later hail them as subordinate subjects whenever it wishes. Language, All Too Language; A Double Agent Previously, the reliability and availability of language were analysed. "Where I am is not a prison but a privilege, as Aunt Lydia said" (Atwood, 2019, p. 14). The Republic of Gilead has meticulously exploited language for its own interest. "In Gilead, as in many other totalitarian dystopias, access to the written word is strongly controlled" (Dam & Polak, 2021, p. 176). These exploitations are aligned with religious and patriarchal discourses. As an instance, the handmaids are not allowed to leave the place, and they are not allowed to go for a walk without permission, they are held captive in a place deprived of all human rights. Naming this imprisonment as a privilege is how hegemony comes to its discursive being.

The knowledge here is conceived "not as something internal to the agent, but rather as an externally given and structured set of 'claims', or as Foucault would have it, 'statements'" (Miller, 1990, p. 117). The power of the discourse is imposed

on and then internalised in the handmaids through the production of an authoritative set of statements. When meaning is produced, there must be a form of relevance since “the aim of this productivity is, therefore, to produce meanings that are relevant to everyday life” (Fiske, 2011, p. 6). In this sense, only creating meaning without any relevance is ineffective, and as a result, the imperialising power must hold to something which makes the meaning, meaningful, and that is in this case, hegemonic religious discourse. In this totalitarian system where everything is under control, it seems that those in possession of the imperialising power are more aware of how language works, therefore, they have prohibited any form of writing: “writing is in any case forbidden” (Atwood, 2019, p. 50). Previously, it was argued that language is not available equally to every individual. The availability of language directly affects the efficiency of both the imperialising and the localising power. Language is multiaccentual, and it is potentially capable of being in service of the imperialising and the localising power simultaneously. Because of this, writing is forbidden for handmaids, who are under the imperialist authority. The imperialising power aims to limit language use even though it cannot totally eradicate multiaccentuality. One side becomes the master and the other the slave as a result of this restriction. As was previously noted, the only reading material available to handmaids is FAITH. This further limits the vocabulary that can be used and obtained for these subjects. In contrast, “the Aunts are allowed to read and write” (Atwood, 2019, p. 148).

The language is most available to the imperialising assets. These Aunts are those assets and consequently, they are exploiting language as much as they can. The uses of the imperialising and localising power are different. “The imperialising use of language represses this multiaccentual potential and attempts to establish the singular accent of the power-bloc as the only, the natural, the correct one... Localising power, on the other hand, exploits the multiaccentuality” (Fiske, 2016, p. 31). The localising power resists the imperialising power consistently; the subjects of the localising power in the novel are the handmaids. Although they are forbidden from writing and reading freely, they seek to form a resistance to the dominant power. “Resistance is itself a form of power” (Fiske, 2016, p. 76), and it is also necessary for the existence of power. The imperialising power never risks losing control; that is why it constantly monitors pain and pleasure of the body through owning the production of meaning. “Anything out of control is always a potential threat, and always calls up moral, legal, and aesthetic powers to discipline it. The signs of the subordinate out of control terrify the forces of order” (Fiske, 2010, p. 56).

Power and resistance must be continuously struggling in various terrains of their existence to hold on to their existence. Offred, the protagonist of the novel, seems to be conscious of the essence of language. “We are here to define, we must suffer her adjectives” (Atwood, 2019, p. 130). Language inside the prevailing worldview is shaping the subject. As handmaids are given identities and names, expectations are placed on how they should behave. Offred's name, for example, indicates that she is the property of Fred, which is most likely the name of the commander in charge of her household. By giving them titles like these, the prevailing ideology aims to construct identities that are dependent on the commander and do not exist on their own. In order to further deprive people of their identity, mirrors are outlawed in the Republic of Gilead, which further alienates subjects from one another. As such, they have to look for means of identifying as autonomous entities. “My self is a thing I must compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born” (Atwood, 2019, p. 79). The self is disintegrating into a fragmented and alienated entity. This makes it much easier to capture and subdue these broken beings. The process of discipline and control is aided by the assignment of identities and names as well as the development of a sense of self.

To control pleasure and inflict pain, a strict hegemony is established by the Republic's patriarchal power and enforcement. Anything that deviates from this social hierarchy is seen as inappropriate and needs to be removed. Offred is the embodiment of the oppressed people, and she provides us with all of the information about the Republic of Gilead by sharing her thoughts, feelings, and actions with us. “I want to steal something... I am out of place. This is entirely illegal... I am doing something on my own” (Atwood, 2019, p. 114). Offred is resisting the authority that is in charge. Despite having no practical purpose for a knife, she tries to seize it. What matters in this situation is not that she needs the knife; rather, what matters is that she is internally satisfied by the act of resisting itself. Offred finds solace and enjoyment in her defiant behaviour because she is bitter about being a slave. Although she is breaking the law by opposing the powerful authority, she gains a sense of independence from her rebellion and is no longer limited to just carrying out commands. As Fiske argues, “the least politically active are the bodily pleasures of evasion, the dogged refusal of the dominant ideology and its discipline” (2011, p. 8). Gilead is tightly ordered and finding a way out of this order is problematic and perilous. The sort of resistance Offred is practising is fighting the suppressing power on the level of meaning production and the circulation of power. She resists the patriarchal tone and, at the same time, risks a minimum level of danger. This is what de Carteau calls the “Guerrilla Tactics” (2011, p. 56). These “tactics are the art of the weak: they never challenge the powerful in open warfare” (Fiske, 2010, p. 16).

The pleasure Offred finds from stealing a knife and breaking the order encourages her to perform more of such sorts of actions. When the commander proposes to take her out to the club, she accepts the offer though she could have resisted: "I know without being told what he's proposing is risky, for him but especially for me; but I want to go anyway. I want anything that breaks the monotony, subverts the perceived respectable order of things" (Atwood, 2019, p. 263). She acts in this way because she has before felt the joy that lies within resistance. She keeps acting to subdue the dominating power, increasing the likelihood that she will be destroyed in the process. Offred's greatest condition of resistance is when she continues to have illicit affairs with Nick; if this is discovered, both Offred and Nick will be put to death. Since commodities are unable to oppose the dominant authority, it can be claimed that Offred and the other handmaids are more than just commodities as a result of their resistance. Even if ideological and oppressive governmental apparatuses severely subjugate handmaids, it would be a mistake to overlook all of these forms of pleasure and view the handmaids as nothing more than things. "Resistance is easiest and most pleasurable when what is to be resisted is clear and unambiguous" (Fiske, 2011, p. 36). She acts in this way because she has before felt the joy that lies within resistance. She keeps acting to subdue the dominating power, increasing the likelihood that she will be destroyed in the process. Offred's greatest condition of resistance is when she continues to have illicit affairs with Nick; if this is discovered, both Offred and Nick will be put to death. Since commodities are unable to oppose the dominant authority, it can be claimed that Offred and the other handmaids are more than just commodities as a result of their resistance. Even if ideological and oppressive governmental apparatuses severely subjugate handmaids, it would be a mistake to overlook all of these forms of pleasure and view the handmaids as nothing more than things.

2. CONCLUSION

One could argue that *The Handmaid's Tale* illustrates how language, pleasure, and discipline are intricately entwined with the dynamics and systems of power. There are two different categories of power. The first kind of power is imperial power, which is used throughout the book by the powerful characters including the Commander, the Wives, the Eyes, and the Aunts. Localised power is the second kind and it concerns the subjugated. With addition to having more general authority, those with imperial power also have more language access. Through the use of speech, language, and discipline, they attempt to preserve and increase their authority. Their activities are justified by religious rhetoric, which is the main source of their authority. They also want to use language to impose discipline and achieve hegemony. This religious rhetoric presents what they do as a privilege for the subjugated, so legitimising their actions in a way that perpetuates their supremacy. The Republic of Gilead offers a vision of nirvana for followers of the prevailing ideology, bolstered by biblical allusions. Localised power, which is held by those who are subjugated—in this case, the handmaids—contrasts with this imperial power. They can read only one book at a time and are not allowed to write, thus their linguistic access is limited. Because of this, the handmaids' access to power is far more restricted than the imperial power's. As delegates of the imperial authority, the aunts work to establish a unified, consistent, and dominant voice in the interim. The handmaids, on the other hand, stand for localised power and work to promote a variety of viewpoints. Although there is still struggle, the localised power does not intend to totally destroy the imperial power's voice. Instead, it seeks to provide the handmaids the freedom to develop their own identities and speak for themselves. The enjoyment they get from their deeds of resistance gives the oppressed people in the book, especially Offred, more power. As Offred rebels against being viewed as a neutral object of the ruling authority, she feels good about herself. She objects to the idea that she is only seen as a product. It is also possible to claim that Offred and the other handmaids that is, those who have not completely given in to hegemony are active agents of resistance rather than just objects or commodities. Whenever they can, they rebel and oppose the prevailing power. Those who exert their authority also feel pleasure; this is not just a feeling experienced by the subjugated. For example, Janine gives in to the pressures of the ruling class and therefore enters the discourse of power.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

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None

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