



International Journal of Social Sciences

ISSN:2587-2591

DOI Number:<http://dx.doi.org/10.30830/tobider.sayi.15.2>

Volume 7/3

2023 p. 23-34

**COERCED REPRODUCTIVITY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S
SPECULATIVE, FEMINIST ECO-DYSTOPIA, THE HANDMAID'S TALE
MARGARET ATWOOD'UN SPEKÜLATİF FEMİNİST EKO-DİSTOPYASI
DAMIZLIK KIZIN ÖYKÜSÜ ROMANINDA ZORUNLU ÜREME**

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ABSTRACT

Entering the long-held white, male-dominated domain of science-fiction, feminist writers, inspired by the 1960s second-wave feminist awakening and consciousness, have started to use science-fiction genre as a “fruitful venue” for exploration of the radical entanglement between eco-catastrophic scenarios and misogynistic, sexist ideologies, and impositions. Being one of these influential and prolific, feminist science-fiction writers, rather a speculative fiction writer, Margaret Atwood, in her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, focuses on the interrelatedness of women and environment, their dual subjugation, abuse, and exploitation in the not-too-distant speculative world. She depicts that in the case of environmental disasters and/or ecological instability, women, becoming the most disadvantaged group, get subjected to docility, exploitation, and various horrendous practices, thus they suffer and pay the consequences of ecological devastation gravely. Portraying post-collapse USA, where the president, members of the parliament, and senate are killed and the US judicial system is suspended, the story takes place in what is now called the Gilead Republic, run by a group of totalitarian and despotic commanders. In this grim world order, infertility as a result of environmental degradation and ecological crises, becomes a huge problem, leading this oppressive government to take severe actions. Through invasive and selective methods, fertile women are collected as “herds” and first “tamed,” then reduced to forced breeding and handed over to rich, elite and high-ranking male commanders to be used and exploited as breeding machines. The paper entails an exploration of how the escalating eco-catastrophic problems and disasters cause the female body to grotesquely transform into a “biological vessel” (Roos, 2008, p. 45). In this paper, the horrific scientific intervention applied to the female body and the quest to save the society from

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environmental collapse is examined by Michel Foucault's biopolitics and the concept of biopower.

Keywords: *Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale, Michel Foucault, Biopolitics, Biopower*

ÖZ

Bilimkurgunun uzun süredir devam eden beyaz, erkek egemen alanına müdahale eden feminist yazarlar, 1960'ların ikinci dalga feminist uyanışından ve bilincinden ilham alarak, bilimkurgu türünü ekolojik felaket ile kadın düşmanı senaryoları arasındaki radikal dolaşıklığı, cinsiyetçi ideolojiler ve dayatmaları incelemek için "verimli bir alan" olarak kullanmaya başlamışlardır. Bu etkili ve üretken feminist bilimkurgu yazarlarından biri olan, daha ziyade spekülatif kurgu yazarı olarak anılan Margaret Atwood, 1985 tarihli *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü* romanında çok uzak olmayan spekülatif distopik bir dünyada kadınlar ile çevre arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkisine, bunların ikili boyunduruğuna, istismarına ve sömürüsüne odaklanmaktadır. Atwood, çevre felaketleri ve/veya ekolojik istikrarsızlık durumunda en dezavantajlı grup haline gelen kadınların uysallığa, sömürüye ve çeşitli korkunç uygulamalara maruz kaldıklarını, dolayısıyla ekolojik yıkımın acısını ve bedelini çok ağır bir şekilde ödediklerini betimlemektedir. Başkan, parlamento üyeleri ve senatonun öldürüldüğü ve ABD yargı sisteminin askıya alındığı çöküş sonrası ABD'yi anlatan hikâye, bir grup totaliter ve despotik komutan tarafından yönetilen, Gilead Cumhuriyeti olarak adlandırılan yerde geçmektedir. Bu kasvetli dünya düzeninde, çevresel bozulma ve ekolojik krizler sonucu oluşan kısırılık büyük bir sorun haline gelir ve bu durum, baskıcı hükümeti şiddetli eylemler uygulamaya sevk eder. İstilacı ve seçici yöntemlerle doğurgan kadınlar "sürü" olarak toplanır; önce "evcilleştirilir," ardından da zorla üremeye indirgenip üreme makinesi olarak kullanılmak ve sömürülmek üzere zengin, elit ve yüksek rütbeli erkek komutanlara teslim edilir. Makale, artan eko-felaket sorunların ve felaketlerin kadın bedeninin nasıl tuhaf bir şekilde "biyolojik bir kab"a (Roos, 2008, p. 45) dönüşmesine neden olduğu bir araştırma içermektedir. Bu makalede, kadın bedenine uygulanan korkunç bilimsel müdahale ve burada toplumu çevresel çöküşten kurtarma arayışı, Michel Foucault'nun biyopolitikası ve biyo-iktidar kavramı üzerinden incelenmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Margaret Atwood, Damızlık Kızın Hikayesi, Michel Foucault, Biyopolitika, Biyo-İktidar*

Following the second-wave feminist awakening and consciousness of the 1960s, science-fiction, a genre traditionally dominated and controlled by white, heterosexual male hegemony, became a "fruitful venue" for feminist writers to explore the radical entanglements between eco-catastrophic scenarios and misogynistic, sexist ideologies and impositions. The genre that explores the particular experiences of male protagonists in numerous and challenging geographies was given a new, fresh life with that feminist intervention and interpretation. Under the influence of some feminist works, notably, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949, 1953), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969), the notions of women's gender, identity, self, autonomy, individuality, sexuality, and bodily politics have been reconstituted by female science-fiction writers in their works in an endeavor to save these concepts from male-dominated representations and portrayals. To this particular end, several feminist science-fiction authors chose to write experimentally in the dystopian

tradition, a branch of speculative science-fiction that is primarily the purview of men, and presented an alternative futuristic society from a feminist viewpoint. In their dystopic portrayal of a disciplinary, totalitarian and gloomy society, these writers explore excessive pressures, restriction of freedoms, bureaucratic and technological control, surveillance and restrictions, mitigated lives, along with negative and oppressive reflections of evolving science, medicine and technology, blended with their (material) feminist interpretation and outlook. The techno-scientific and biomedical developments that may affect social life in a stifling and suffocating way, the predictions and possible wearing damages in addition to the potential dangers of these technologies are also put under microscope.

Being a prolific science-fiction author, Margaret Atwood has written a number of books, with a particular emphasis on the intersections between feminism, environmentalism, and domestic politics, as well as the effects of biotechnological and biomedical advancements on human rights, especially those relating to women's rights, bodies, reproductivity and autonomy. *The Handmaid's Tale*, which was released in 1985 and made a significant impact by fusing feminist themes with dystopia, won the Governor's General Award, the Arthur C. Clarke Best Science Fiction Award, the Toronto Arts, and the Los Angeles Times Fiction Awards in 1986. In the not-too-distant future and speculative Anthropocene setting, the novel focuses on the interdependence of women and the environment, as well as their concomitant slavery, dual abuse and destruction. In the depicted desolate world, accelerated environmental contamination and chemical poisoning have caused sterility, opening the door for the sacrifice of some fertile women—referred to as the handmaids—to save the nation from extinction. Thus, this paper examines horrifying scientific interventions performed to the female body and the attempt to preserve the society from environmental collapse in relation to Michel Foucault's biopolitics and the concept of biopower. It entails an exploration of how the escalating eco-catastrophic problems and disasters cause the female body to grotesquely transform into a "biological vessel" (Roos, 2008, p. 45).

Focusing on the issue of infertility and sterility caused by environmental toxicity and combining domestic politics, feminism, and environmentalism, Atwood draws our attention to the impacts of biotechnological and biological advancements on human rights, particularly on the freedoms, rights, and bodies of women as well as on their sexual orientations and identities. She favors the more inclusive term "speculative fiction" to describe her work because it goes beyond science-fiction and is based on intriguing and plausible events that have already occurred or are about to in our troubling reality. In fact, wanting to set a warning against the likelihood of eminent eco-catastrophes, Atwood states that "there's a precedent in real life for everything in the book, I decided not to put anything in that somebody somewhere hadn't already done. But you write these books so they won't come true" (2017, *People*).

Because she typically refers to actual present difficulties and challenges set arise in real life, her extensive work undoubtedly fits under the category of speculative fiction, which "proposes carries in itself a huge amount of probability" (Kuznicki, 2017, p. 16). However, I believe it would be more accurate to classify *The Handmaid's Tale* as eco-dystopia, a subgenre of speculative fiction. This is because environmental catastrophes give the novel a dystopian tone. Therefore, it is pertinent to state that Atwood investigates the negative and gloomy effects of a disastrous social life in such a dystopian setting, and

the issues she cautions about the potential risks and wear-and-tear effects of technological advancements that may disproportionately harm women. The extreme conservatism that the government embraces in this dystopian environment and the renewed animosity towards women and the dramatic rise of fundamentalist religious patriarchy are largely caused by eco-disasters as a result of accelerating technological and industrial impacts. When examples of George Orwell's dystopian society started to appear in modern reality and the idea of an ideal and perfect society started to falter, Margaret Atwood began to produce prolifically in the manner of Orwell. She picked up the dystopian narrative where George Orwell left off, voicing environmental concerns in an effort to warn people about the current, catastrophic and unprecedented climate problems.

The novel depicts a post-collapse USA where the president, members of the parliament, and the senate are slain, and the US court system is suspended. The story takes place in what is now known as the Gilead Republic, ruled and administered by a group of dictatorial and autocratic commanders. These misogynistic, militaristic, and puritanical Christian commanders, who identify as Jacob's Sons defend and justify their inhumane acts and abuses by citing Christian doctrine and Old Testament laws. The Gilead Republic has taken over the former United States of America as a hub of censorship, prohibitions, limitations, continual dread, control, and monitoring that systematically strips away identities, individualities, and all sorts of liberties. This limited life is so entrenched that true freedom is an abstract concept too distant to remember. The meaning of the concept of freedom has changed, as the meaning of most terminologies has changed. As one of the handmaid trainers, Aunt Lydia, declares: Once "there was freedom to do things in the time of Anarchy. Now you are given the freedom to avoid things" (Atwood, 1985, p. 141). Serving the system and strictly pursuing the discipline set by the commanders, Aunt Lydia is in endeavor to make the handmaids internalize and naturalize this coerced reproductivity under the pretext of saving humanity and increase human population by pointing out that in the Republic of Gilead "[w]here the edges are we aren't sure, they vary, according to attacks and counterattacks [...] Gilead has no borders. Gilead is within [us]" (Atwood, 1985, p. 39). This clearly stands for the inescapable confinement within the borders of Gilead that compels them to adopt its rules and regulations, and yield meekly to this coerced reproductivity. Ruled by a military-religious dictatorship, in the country of Gilead, priests, Jews, priests, feminists, all LGBTI classes, rebels and anyone who does not conform to gender norms and/or rules, and/or who opposes this order are severely punished, in most cases, hanged on the wall. But most of all, the despotic oppressive government, which uses this patriarchal and totalitarian military political domination, targets the female body and fertility, and implements policy, sanction, and reproductive and biological control. Women who are exposed to this biopolitics are ascribed certain gender roles according to their fertility characteristics or ranks in the society, and classified accordingly. The uniform that every woman wears according to her role and rank is also an indicator of this. Handmaids, marthas, econowives, aunts, commander wives and non-women, and each category has a distinct color of dress according to the hierarchical order, designed by this subjugating system and ruling. They can never wear clothes of any color other than the one of the assigned color. Handmaids wear red, while Wives wear blue, Marthas green, Aunts brown, and econowives wear striped.

A handmaid named Offred, (meaning Fred's) whose name and identity have been stripped from her, recounts the entire tale retrospectively: "My name isn't Offred, I have another

name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried" (Atwood, 1985, p. 84). She alternates between the present and the past, giving the audience the feeling that anything could happen at any moment and get worse unexpectedly and immediately. We gain a complete understanding of the environmentally degraded civilization, followed by draconian impositions and prohibitions, particularly on women's body, identity, and autonomy, from her own narrative. Due to widespread and ubiquitous environmental catastrophes, a damaged ecosystem, nuclear fallout, chemical spills, air and water pollution, toxic poisoning, constant exposure to chemical and industrial pollution, or simply "eco-catastrophes," along with sexually transmitted diseases, the population has drastically decreased in this outrageous and horrendous world:

The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells. Who knows, your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and unborn babies. Maybe a vulture would die of eating you. Maybe you light up in the dark, like an old-fashioned watch. Deathwatch. That's a kind of beetle, it buries carrion. (Atwood, 1985, p.112)

Following this utter devastating ecological deterioration, infertility—which Heather Housman refers to as "eco-sickness," an environmental illness that "make[s] visible the intimacy the bodies and the more-than-human world" (2014, p. 21); becomes a concerning issue in this gloomy new global order, following the poignant ecological decline. The repressive regime decides to act harshly against this problem that is threatening the population and status quo. Fertile women, known as Handmaids, are gathered, either voluntarily or involuntarily, from the group of divorcees or "unorthodox ones" (those that do not comply with the societal and cultural norms and standards) and first "tamed" before being forced to breed and then given to wealthy, elite, and high-ranking male commanders to be used and exploited as breeding machines. Having difficulty in facing this dire reality, Offred laments to this debilitating reality: "We are containers, it's only the inside of our bodies that are important. The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all they care, like the shell of a nut" (Atwood, 1985, p. 119). Ironically, these handmaids, reduced to nothing more than functional, viable ovaries, and labelled as "two-legged wombs" are actually the ones who are made responsible for reversing the declining birth rate, brought on by patriarchal mismanagement of biotechnology, weapons, and nuclear waste and saving the world's population from extinction. Their freedoms are entirely compromised, and the only times they are permitted to leave the house are for required shopping trips with their partners. Every privilege is outlawed, including the ability to read, write, dress differently, use makeup, and use fragrance. These handmaids' sole responsibility in the Republic of Gilead is procreation, which is the government's strategy to save the nation from dying out. However, if they tell a lie, even they would be executed in the same way as dissidents: either they would be hung from the ceiling or the wall, or cast outside to rot from radiation poisoning.

For procreation, they are compelled to participate in monthly "ceremony," that is ritualistic sexual encounters with high-ranking commanders whose spouses are unable to have children of their own. The wife is also required to be there for this ritual, and her

role is to tightly grip the handmaid's wrists when the handmaid lowers her skirt after the intercourse. Through this "marriage," the ironic ties of the family structure are created. However, only the status of the woman, whether or not she is fertile, is assessed; the idea of the male being infertile is not even brought up as the narrative progresses as it is stated in the novel: "There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood, 1985, p. 61). This bitterly reveals the fact that the system only targets women accountable for reproduction, fertility, or for the sustainability of the population. For that reason, Offred willingly sleeps with Nick, the driver of the commander, arranged by the commander Fred's wife, Serena, to conceive a child as the commander fails to impregnate her. Nevertheless, his infertility is never discussed or even implied. Since women are primarily valued for their ability to procreate and defined by their reproductive capabilities, if they fail at conceiving, they become useless. Again, they are at risk of either being hanged or labeled as "unwoman" and then transported to colonies to remove the harmful nuclear fallout, work until they are detrimentally exposed to toxicity, and slowly perish from radiation sickness. If they bear a child, the handmaid is transferred to the home of another commander's wife to start the reproduction process all over again. This abhorrent practice is carried out using a Biblical example as part of religious propaganda to justify compelling women to serve as handmaids.: "*Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her*" (Atwood, 1985, p 88, italic in original). The commanders quote a passage from the Bible where Rachel provides Jacob her maid because she is unable to have him children. The intention of this quotation from the Bible is to demonstrate that this forced reproduction is not seen as a rape but rather the accomplishment of their goal and fulfilment of their roles.

In order to legitimize this institutionalized rape and absorb them into the working established order, handmaids are subjected to a disciplinary system and training before being given over to commanders to serve. This system is organized by high-ranking Aunt Lydia in Red Centers. The militaristic leaders of Gilead imagine a return to old traditional way of living and a re-awakening of morality and a promotion of faith-based guidelines to combat social chaos. As Aunt Lydia tells her Handmaid trainees that, "there is more than one kind of freedom [...] Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (Atwood, 1985, p. 24). As she explains, the freedom to choose to bear children, to work, to indulge in any social, cultural political activities is replaced with the freedom to be divorced from all these things. Individuals are now controlled both physically, mentally, and biologically to retain social harmony and obedience. Their identities, agencies, autonomies are stripped off of them as they continuously lament over their loss of selves, loss of bodies, loss of loved ones, and loss of their humanities.

Before being handed over to the commanders, fertile women are trained and domesticated in the Red Center to justify and naturalize this established order, this totalitarian system, and rape: "Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary" (Atwood, 1985. P. 45). The duty of the Aunts, who make an incredible contribution to the continuity and survival of this patriarchal order, is to accustom the stud women to the system by using new religious references, and to force them to obey by fear, threat, and sometimes violence. The Aunts'

responsibility is to oversee the Handmaids, give speeches bolstering Gilead's patriarchal theocracy using new religious allusions, and convert them into what Michel Foucault calls "docility" or "docile bodies" (1975, p. 135) of Gilead's ideology and biopolitics, which "denotes a kind of politics whose ruling model is oriented towards biopower" (Ağır, 2022, p. 153). Docility "joins the analysable body to the manipulable body. A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved (Foucault, 1975, p. 136). This disciplinary training aims to make women forget the past, distance them from their true selves, and constantly exert control over their bodies and brains by imposing the belief that past experiences are based on chaos and anarchy. It is to ensure women's obedience and submission to the world and order established and dominated by commanders. Foucault defines this form of discipline as such: The methods, "which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility might be called disciplines" (1975, p. 137). Thus, the discipline produces "subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (Foucault 1975, 138). The intended aim of the Red Center run by Aunt Lydia in *The Handmaid's Tale* is to reduce the fertile women into docility through the application and enforcement of disciplinary power that embodies threat, fear, torture, extreme physical and psychological violence, public disgrace, and humiliation. As underlined by Foucault, the goal of such institutions is to produce willfully obedient people who carry out the assigned task of maintaining the status quo by normalizing and internalizing discipline, control and surveillance.

In this eco-dystopia, thus, the rights of women are severely restricted with the imposition of discipline and biopower. Women have lost their bodies, their past, their freedom, their own name, basically they have lost everything that makes them human. They are named Fred's, Glen's after the commanders they are given as breeders and they are forbidden to use their own names at all. Their right to own anything has been completely taken away. However, Aunt Lydia, emphasizing her realization of the extreme hardship to submit unconditionally to this coerced reproduction tries to convince the handmaids that it would get easier in time: "You are a transitional generation. It is the hardest for you. We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make. For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts" (Atwood, 1985, p. 151). She also underlines that establishing control over the handmaids would also get much easier for the government, since information from previous periods will not be coded in future generations: "Because they will have no memory of any other way [...] Because they won't want the things they can't have" (Atwood, 1985, p. 151).

The babies born by the handmaids belong to the commander's wives, who will thus reach "the holy motherhood level." Handmaids breastfeed their babies until they are weaned, after when the handmaids are completely weaned from their babies. The handmaids suffer gravely and in some cases, respond harshly when their babies are taken away from them. When it's expedient, Aunt Lydia uses the Bible as an enforcer of an excessively religious patriarchy, quoting verses like "Blessed are the meek" (Atwood, 1985, p. 80) from the book of Matthew. However, she retains the remainder of the sentence, "for they shall inherit the earth," (Atwood, 1985, p. 80) while distorting the original meaning. Additionally, in an effort to make the Handmaids feel privileged and valued, the Aunts strive to persuade them that leading religiously-guided lifestyles will restore morals and traditional values and serve the greater good. Offred remarks sarcastically, "I am too important, too scarce, for that. I am national resource" (Atwood, 1985, p. 61). The goal

of the persistently enforced notions that their prior lives were built on chaos and anarchy is to alienate them from themselves in order to exert control over their bodies and minds.

What is apparent is that sexuality is no longer an act based on pleasure in this speculative horrifying reality, instead, it has become a mandatory duty to be experienced only with persons appointed by the male administration and a mechanical phenomenon solely for childbearing. Nonetheless, it is restricted for everyone, not just for handmaids; a society is fully devoid of sexual freedom regardless of the gender and rank. According to the monthly fertility cycles of the handmaids, they are tasked with having sexual intercourse with their commanders, with or without their consent in a ceremonial atmosphere on their most fertile days. The sovereignty of the state over the female body and its unity with it is realized with this sexual intercourse ceremony. The monthly intercourse gives men complete control over how women behave in their bodies. It is their body where power relations take place and biopower is exerted mainly since for Foucault "the body is a 'political field,' inscribed and constituted by power relations" (Deveaux, 1994, p. 223). Nonetheless, all forms of connections and private communication during the exertion of biopower over their bodies are strictly forbidden aside from this ceremony. They are merely "two-legged wombs," with no identity as Offred depicts:

We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the flowering of secret lusts; no special favors are to be wheedled, by them or us, there are to be no footholds of love. We are two-legged wombs, that's all; sacred vessels, ambulatory-chalices. (Atwood, 1985, p. 146)

These women, who are reduced to mere wombs, are then sent to serve other commanders, as can be understood from the metaphor of "ambulatory chalices". During the ceremony, the commander's wife also plays a role in creating the perception of this forced sexual intercourse as a normal and legal act by placing the handmaid between her legs and holding her hands. Even without the consent of the handmaid, this act is not rape, as the commander Fred describes, it is a "biological destiny", that is, the duty that God expects from the woman. But having sex with someone other than the commander is ironically considered rape:

My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fu*king. What he is fu*king is the lower part of my body. 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, 1985, p. 116)

The fact that this rape of the woman's body takes place in the form of a ceremony is due to the desire to justify this act by basing it on religious teachings and disguises. With religious teachings, women and society are managed and biopolitically controlled more easily, and the female body is dominated by oppressive force of biopower:

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection." Here he [commander] looks us over. "All," he [commander] repeats. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the

transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (Atwood, 1985, p. 286)

As can be understood from the commander's words, the handmaids are tried to make believe that they would be purified from their sins by obeying and giving birth to children like Eve. Apart from this, there are many references to the Bible in their daily lives. Like Fred's, the affirmed greeting, "blessed be the fruit," (Atwood, 1985, p.19) is the affirmed response, may God make his way clear. But Rachel and Lae, which is also at the center of the novel, is a narrative from the Old Testament. This referent also forms the center of the novel. Childless Rahel tells her husband Jacob to sleep with his slave Bilha so that they can have children. Deprivation of breeders' sexual services, control over their bodies and reproductive rights was thus institutionalized using the Old Testament. Marthas who work as servants are also inspired by the fact that the assistants of the Biblical Mary are Marthas. Likewise, there are religious references in the brothel, which was established under the name of Jezebel's Place. In the Bible, Jezebel is a prostitute disguised as a prophet. Aware that religious information is being distorted and lies are being told to keep them under control, Offred says in desperation and fear: "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, 1985, p. 76). Bodies that cannot be tamed by the system, those who try to escape, those who have sexual intercourse outside of the bodies allocated to them, in short, those who cannot be educated, are executed, and their dead bodies are exhibited in order to create an element of fear and perpetuate this. In this established order, domestication leads to the alienation of handmaids from their own bodies. Taming causes them to cut off their connection with their bodies, detached from their previous identities, and become the property of the state as Offred declares:

I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, push buttons of one sort or another, make things happen. There were limits, but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me. Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. (Atwood, 1985, p. 76)

This demonstrates how, in a Foucauldian sense, biopower is forced onto their bodies as a controlling force to manage and command their sexualities. As Catherine Chaput writes: "The regulation of sexuality functions as one technology of bio power or the embodiment of power on populations" (2009, p. 98). In order to employ women as an agent of "biopower," which is essential in the subjection and control of their "consumable" bodies, this government-controlled ceremonial intercourse deliberately removes women's agency to act and choose on their own. As Joni Seager observes,

population control, no matter how euphemistically couched, is essentially a vehicle for the control of women; intervening in fertility always means in intervening in women's lives, in female reproductive organs, and in the exercise of reproductive freedom. Population control always implies the exercise of centralized authority—a government, typically in concert with international development agencies—in imposing restrictions on women's reproductive activities. (2003, pp. 967-68)

Thus, the intent in population increase through stigmatizing fertile women as handmaids is justification and a pretext of exercising centralized authority on women's bodies, which are considered to be the property of government. This invasive ceremony serves as a legitimate patriarchal biopower tool that can be used to exert pressure on women's bodies to manipulate their biological and natural reproduction in an effort to reverse the population decline and make them docile, subservient bio-subjects.

Natalia Gerodetti and Veronique Mottier in their article, "Feminism(s) and the Politics of Reproduction," discuss how the novel is a "satirical account of the imaginary 'Republic of Gilead' [which] offers a portrayal of what the future would look like in a fundamentalist state where women's only reproductive 'choice' is between pregnancy or death, where foetal personhood is sanctified, and reproduction governed by the states" (2009, p. 150). They also emphasize that the only options available to them are to reproduce or perish. As a result, when Offred participates in the ceremony, she is aware of the expectations placed on her. She decides to choose life over death.

The biological life is governed by the use of biopower that is in line with political interest. According to Rosalyn Diprose, "[t]echnical devices, medication, and human bodies are always already entangled with political priorities, knowledges, practices, and measuring regimes" (2009, p.10). What emerges is the connection between compelled reproduction and the "medical normalization and subjection of bodies," which Foucault would refer to as "political technology of the body" (Diprose, 2009, p. 10). Through the use of biopower, reproduction has evolved into a tool for political control and rule. As Mies and Shiva note, "women strove originally for liberation from exploitative and oppressive male-female relations, we now deal with the question of 'emancipation' from the uncontrolled reproductive potential of the female body, of 'emancipation' from our female nature" (2014, p. 221). *The Handmaid's Tale* is a good example of how biopower is still used today, especially in fertility control, and domination of women's sexuality and agency under the guise of eradicating environmental issues and other related contaminations, as biopower is fundamentally "dependent on the domination, exploitation, expropriation, and, in some cases, elimination of the vital existence of some or all subjects over whom it is exercised" (Rabinow and Rose, 2006, p. 198). Lastly, as Joni Seager ably summarizes,

populationism is a deeply patriarchal obsession: in the patriarchal worldview, women's bodies are seen to be malleable objects of public policy intervention. In the global environmental arena, it is presumed to be easier, cheaper, and faster to interfere in women's fertility than to challenge large masculinist structures such as militarism and global capital formation; and, indeed, in a patriarchal global culture it is easier, cheaper, and faster to do so. (2003, p. 969)

In conclusion, *The Handmaid's Tale*, a masterpiece by Margaret Atwood, beautifully demonstrates the complex interrelationship between power relations, reproductive and environmental justice. She expresses her grave concern about the effects of unchecked toxic contamination and ubiquitous environmental degradation, which causes infertility and other forms of eco-sicknesses, and forces many women to be sacrificed through legally required ritual rapes to address the population and environmental crises. As a result, women becoming the target and "savior" of ecological crises and eco-catastrophic scenarios are exposed to environmental and reproductive injustices by being the only

accountable group. The novel clearly shows us how, as a result of environmental breakdown, women become the most marginalized group, suffer and pay a heavy price, and are subjected to docility, exploitation, and other abhorrent acts. Women are required to sacrifice their bodies for an ironic higher good in the guise of protecting the Earth and purported future generations.

In her eco-dystopic novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood draws our attention to the probability that in the event of global environmental destruction, under the pretext and justification of saving the Earth and humanity from extinction, women's bodies are exerted power, control, surveillance, and domination. She succinctly forewarns us against the likelihood that environmental deterioration and the ecological catastrophe that will impede reproductive justice and freedom as there is an intertwined relationship and entanglement between the growing climate calamity, infertility, and reproductive justice. In Foucault's theorizing, power is practiced as a discipline through methods like surveillance, population control acting as the "eye of power" in the disciplinary gaze, which ultimately reduce people to docile, passive bodies. In *The Handmaid's Tale* the use of "disciplinary power" is intended to dominate women's bodies and discipline populations. As Foucault argues, in today's mechanized world, biopower "signif[ies] a transition" (Kümbet, 2022, p.84) from what Foucault calls "sovereign power" – domination through the use of force– to "disciplinary power" – domination through incessant control, surveillance, and discipline of populations (1975). However, this novel helps us understand how women's bodies are abused, threatened, and made into sacrifices that could be used to further some sort of "greater good" that is to prolong the life of human species. These types of incidents ought to provoke thoughtful reflection on both current inequity and how women are valued as Mies and Shiva mordantly concedes that "the rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked – both metaphorically in shaping the world view and materially, in shaping women's everyday lives (2014, p. 23). In a similar tendency, Greta Gaard puts forward the fact that today, the prevalent ideologies "which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (1993, p.1). Within this perspective, environmental justice and reproductive justice are interrelated and interdependent to one another, hence, one is not possible without the other. Environmental healing and reproductive justice "can be achieved only through the sterilization of toxic minds that justify the exploitation of nature and women to gain profit, power, and sovereignty (Kümbet, 2022, p. 106).

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