

# **Patriarchal and Governmental Violent Discourse: A Suppression of Women's Reproductive Rights in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale***

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## **Abstract:**

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* unfolds a violent dystopian narrative that targets women in general and more precisely a category of fertile women who are assigned by the tyrannical Gilead government to bear children for elite sterile couples. Offred, the protagonist, recounts her life in Gilead, a theocratic and totalitarian state, forced to undergo a ritualized sex with a governmental commander, while her hands are tightly gripped by Selena, in order to bear a child for the commander and his wife. The physical and psychological trauma inflicted upon Offred, the Handmaid, as well as her friends, are transmitted through the nonlinear and introspective style of narration and stand as proofs of the suppression of women's reproductive rights and female subjectivity as a whole. Offred's physical and psychological freedom, as a human being, are usurped due to political and religious strict pretexts. The Governmental perpetual violent discourse against Offred will be studied as a case in point of futuristic patriarchal assault towards women, unless fairer legal and social laws will be established across the globe to protect women's reproductive rights and status within society. Though the novel is dystopian, it still bears a cautionary orientation for feminist trends and groups to move from theories to more practical actions towards ensuring women's rights and gender equality.

**Keywords:** Discourse of Violence- Dystopian narrative -Female Subjectivity- Patriarchal authority- Political tyranny - Women's rights.

## **Introduction**

In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the patriarchal violent discourse is conveyed through the political and religious rhetoric. These narratives intertwine to restrict female freedom and reappropriate women's reproductive rights. The governmental control of the female body is imposed through the patriarchal and religious violent oppressive laws and rules. Deprived of rights, handmaids are reduced to sexual passivity, compared with the agent commanders who control the events and cripple the female body by confining women to a limited and controlled reproductive sphere. Through a discourse of political and religious violence, patriarchy in Gilead works to stigmatize females as sexual bodies without rational minds. This dualism between the body and the mind has

always entailed the superiority of the rational male over the irrational female who has been treated as a body without a mind. The patriarchal rational discourse, though violent is equated to law and sacred religion. Political and religious discourses create a tyranny that curtails women's fundamental freedoms. With the rise of the feminist consciousness, various feminist writers such as Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, and Marina Warner have started to voice the female body by re-appropriating their own narrative, whereby deconstructing the patriarchal violent discourse. Voicing the female body presupposes the deconstruction of the patriarchal order and the revision of the phallogocentric literary discourses that have been dedicated to enhance the dehumanizing female image as irrational body. In this context French feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous advocate women's need to acquire their own "feminine Writing" that is distinct from the patriarchal one, and in which women are free to write their own bodies as a counter male discourse.

When woman writes- self-consciously from her muted position as a woman and not as a [...] man- about female desire, female sexuality, female sensuous experience generally, her performance has the effect of giving voice to pure corporeality, of turning a product of the dominant meaning-system into a producer of meanings. (Cixous 1976, 875)

In this case, women become active members by engaging in self-narrating their own experiences within the patriarchal setting mainly following their ultimate liberation. It is no longer a dominating patriarchal narration since it is dominated by women. Female writers or orators engage in narrating and telling their personal life stories, as well as other women's freely in the absence of patriarchal and governmental censorship. The Narration, in this context, serves as a female liberating way, similarly to writing. In "The Laugh of The Medusa," Cixous maintains that "Women must write through their bodies, [...] they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve- discourse" (34). The relationship between writing, narrating and the female body bears emancipatory level and empowers women to recuperate their lost bodies and to voice their silenced minds. Likewise, Irigaray appeals for "contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand" (5). As such, the female discourse stands as a unique and different speech from its male counterpart. Women must write and speak their own stories through their bodies and even about their exploited bodies that have been violated by male violence and justified by the political and religious discourses. In *The Handmaid's tale*, The Gilead language "reflects male interests and words have a male-bias" (Talbot 2010, 43). The symbolic jargon imposed by the government works to limit women's linguistic skills to a set of vocabulary words enhancing patriarchal obedience. Violence, in this article, is an inherent characteristic of the Gilead governmental discourse, taking into consideration its hidden misogynist purposes. Using Michael Foucault's concept of "the docile body", the analysis will concentrate on the female sexual passivity vis a vis the patriarchal oppressive rhetoric. "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (Foucault 1995, 180). The handmaids' bodies are to

be studied as “docile” ones and used as “Political puppets” (180). In *The handmaids’s Tale* “the [female] body had become the object of such imperious and pressing investments; in every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on its constraints, prohibitions, or obligations” (180). In this context, as a first section, the under hands paper will deal with the violent patriarchal, political and religious discourses in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The second part will study the female counter discourse, embodied through the rise of the anti-political feminist movement labelled as “Mayday movement”. The final section will analyse Offred’s dominance of narration through her recording of the events in a cassette, which is considered as an insurrectionary act and a female counter discourse.

### **1. The Violence of Patriarchal, Political and Religious Discourses**

The patriarchal, governmental and religious structures in Gilead “use language as a means of exercising control” (Murkett 2021, 1) over the handmaids, typically over Offred, as a case in point, to be studied in this paper. The appropriation of the handmaid’s body for national service faces female resistance through the act of narrating and writing the female body. Offred, the handmaid who is the narrator also, resists her sexual exploitation through dominating the narrative and the act of narration. She writes her own life story and voices her female body seeking its reappropriation. Offred, as a female character, stands as a case in point for the posthumous genetic engineering<sup>1</sup> in which females are playing the roles of machines, denying thus their minds and rationality. She is destined to play the role of a surrogate mother for the commander’s child. Due to a decrease in birth rate, the government justified by religious discourse, forbids abortion and controls women’s reproductive rights. The handmaids’ bodies are treated as national property, exploited like machines. To do so, the system of language is controlled and limited to the point of erasing women’s history and previous language acquisition. As such, “language is a vital prerequisite for the achievement of power, both public and private” (Gulick 1). The handmaids “docile bodies” are being tamed by the spell of religious and political language which work to solidify the embedded patriarchal discourse. This latter discourse is a violent one, and aims to limit the female reproductive freedom under the tight religious and governmental control. Even the handmaids’ names are changed on purpose to erase the female identity. This governmental decision is meant to wipe out the female selfhood while keeping the objectified body. These secret political measures are transmitted to the reader through Offred’s memorial reminiscences and inner monologues. Nonetheless, women in Gilead still remember their glorious and liberated past identities before the rise of the religious government known as “the sons of Jacobs” (Atwood 2017, 65). The handmaids are not allowed to voice their souvenirs or talk about their past life publicly, since it is considered as a political crime against “the sons of Jacob” (65). Literally, the latter label refers to a group of patriarchal members who found the totalitarian political regime of Gilead. Studying it from a religious perspective, “the sons of Jacobs” (65) metaphorically denotes a religious biblical connotation to the patriarchal figure who has twelve sons, the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Similarly, we find the highly ranked commanders and officials in Gilead, the

representatives of the sons of Jacobs, who tighten their grip over the handmaids by sexually exploiting them.

Hence, we understand the deeply ingrained patriarchal orientation within the Gilead government and the huge role played by religious discourse to back up the political government. For the Gilead government, language is a double-edged weapon since it is open to interpretation and analysis which stir and strengthen the mental skills, whereby it represents a real hazard. By controlling language, the government, on behalf of the patriarchal order, exercises control over women and classifies them into fertile, infertile women and even unwomen. The fertile females are handmaids who are forced by law to have sexual intercourse with their commanders, seeking to bear children for the national service, whereas the infertile ones are exiled or sent to brothels like “jezebel” (90). Binarism<sup>2</sup> is at the heart of the patriarchal discourse and even dissects females into fertile and infertile ones. Binarism is deployed to set boundaries for the handmaids’ freedoms by spotlighting the forbidden linguistic items. What’s more, the government’s division of women into uneven categories reinforces the debasement of the handmaids and the usurpation of their human rights. Women are impelled to use specific jargon delineated by the religious and political laws to maintain the patriarchal reign. Throughout the narrative, Offred, the handmaid surrenders to her commander’s sexual exploitation, though her restless mind refuses the newly imposed prison and the usurpation of her liberation, since it is still dominated by her childhood memories, with her maternal image as the dominant one. Amongst few other handmaids, Offred resists language restriction and shuns its psychological impact. The suffocating linguistic control extends to forbidding reading, writing, listening and even playing games such as scrabble. These activities are considered as rebellious acts leading to fatal punishment. When the commander invites Offred to play scrabble, she feels powerful and autonomous, though always sceptical about her commander’s kind demeanour towards her.

The power of language profoundly affects the female characters’ psychological states. The handmaids greet each other using biblical catchphrases such as “blessed be the fruit” (Atwood 2017, 5) and “may the lord open” (5). These greetings aim to reinforce the female submission under the pretext of religious sacredness. They are tools of control that convey the extent to which the state considers fertility as women’s weakest point. “The fruit” is symbolically used to connote children since the handmaids are expected to bear children for the ruling classes. Similarly to the expression “Blessed be the fruit”, the second expression “May the Lord open” bears deep significance in relation to Gilead’s atrocious patriarchal society. Thus, relegating women to an inferior subordinate position compared with the sexually oppressive commanders. The use of religious references is very ironic, taking into consideration the governmental misuse of religion. The sacred discourse is put in the governmental service and serves the commanders sexual exploitation of women. As such, the handmaids are forced to abide by the laws in order to escape being punished. Most of their vocabulary words are derived from religious discourse, seeking to justify the handmaids’ sexual docility. Language becomes automatic ritual, meant to be internalized and used by the handmaids. As Aunt Lydia avers: “This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary” (63). At this point, the role habit plays in helping the handmaids internalize the governmental language is

conspicuously highlighted by the writer. Hence, the language imposed by the Gilead government is meant to be accepted and absorbed without being questioned or interpreted. Within this tyrannical and suffocating atmosphere, Offred keeps repeating her “former name ‘to remind [herself] of what [she]once could do, how others saw [her]” (92). Her original name symbolizes her lost history and sense of womanhood. Memory, in this vein, plays a crucial role in resisting the patriarchal/political tyranny. Offred clings to her memory as a defence mechanism to resist Gilead’s linguistic restriction. Hence, despite the tight external governmental dominance, her inner internal monologue is still struggling to come to the surface. Remembering her name empowers her to resist the imposed external verbal language. As such, she compares her inner linguistic attempts to “the power of a dog bone: passive, but still there” (58). Though acknowledging her weak female position, Offred attempts to resist by all available psychological means. Even though, there are only some clinging memories which she cherishes deep inside her inner world, still they succeed to help her to attach herself to her roots. As Linda Thomas avers: “Language can be said to provide a framework for our thoughts, and it becomes very difficult to think outside of that framework” (1994, 507). Thus, Offred’s memories serve as tools of resistance of a whole patriarchal, political and religious system, established purposefully to limit women’s freedom and appropriate their reproductive rights.

The indoctrination of the limited linguistic system is the government’s prior goal to rigidify its laws, as a general rule, and objectify women in particular. Most handmaids end by internalizing the Gilead linguistic codes and prohibitions to the point of self-accusation, as it is the case with Janine’s rape. Confessing her sexual victimization, Jennine is accused by her fellow handmaids. The latter put the blame on her, instead of supporting her case. What’s remarkable is the way the government succeeds to tighten its control over the aunts and handmaids who strictly blame Janine for being raped by chanting “her fault, her fault, her fault, she did, she did, she did” (Atwood 2017, 57). As such, the power of the patriarchal linguistic jargon is demonstrated through its transmission to the female characters’ inner consciousness to the point of prosecuting each other. The power of linguistic repetition is clearly conveyed through the handmaids’ acceptance of guilt and shame which are, in reality, beyond their responsibilities. Even Offred who secretly resists the whole system tends to blame Jennine by expressing her disgust for her: “She looked disgusting... even though we knew what was being done to her, we despised her... We meant it, which was the bad part” (Atwood 2017, 137). Offred’s consciousness of being manipulated and ideologically programmed by the governmental and patriarchal control incites her to question her forcibly- inquired beliefs and doctrines. Though she deploys Gilead’s misogynist linguistic system, Offred is aware of her contradictory internalized ideologies. Despite her awareness of the usurpation of her freedom, she unconsciously internalizes the patriarchal hatred and sexual exploitation of women and acts accordingly, while behaving with her fellow handmaids. What is noticeable as far as the character of Offred is concerned is the linguistic division and dilemmas she bears within her inner psyche. The external patriarchal restricted and coded jargon is trespassing her inner submerged cherished memories which struggle to come to the surface. Offred’s female identity oscillates between erasure and re-emergence, being strictly controlled by the

power of language. Being aware of the danger caused by verbal spoken language, Offred clings to her inner unspoken monologue which keeps reminding her of her previous past when she used to have a female voice. Hence, Offred's past stands as a source of survival for her female identity. She seems to be torn between her real life which is controlled by Gilead's patriarchal political and religious discourses, and her past life cherished through her internal thoughts. The linguistic division she goes through impacts her identity and yields her schizophrenic female identity. The fact of living within two contradictory worlds, guided by an audible external authoritarian language and a submerging past monologue, leads Offred to question her usurped freedom.

Through language, a whole category of women is defined in terms of its reproductive functions and forced to bear children as a national duty. The role language plays in *The Handmaid's Tale* is reminiscent of the linguistic tyrannical use in George Orwell's *1984*, though the former aims only fertile women, rather than all members of society. The targeted novel explores the ways in which women are controlled and oppressed through physical and verbal violence, psychological manipulation, and institutionalized sexism (Ruddick 1989, 82). What's remarkable is the religious debate surrounding women's forced reproduction in Gilead. "The society in the novel is based on a twisted interpretation of Christianity, which justifies the subjugation of women. The novel critiques the ways in which religion has been used to justify patriarchal structures and limit women's rights and freedoms" (Alwan 2023, 3). The three discourses: the patriarchal, the political and religious ones conspire to usurp women's reproductive rights and freedom of expression. Offred's monologue stands as a counter discourse to the governmental one and stems heavily from Offred's memories and past life. Every single detail is politicized and regulated in Gilead. The fact that they are obliged to gather and read the bible at the Commander's house is a violent linguistic discourse, used to remind the handmaids of the necessity to follow the governmental laws which stem, by their turns, from the religious text. Her ritualistic sexual intercourse with the commander is presented as a national duty too. Offred's description of the scene is very neutral and pragmatic; free from any emotional involvement. She is placed, by force, between the legs of the commander's wife, meanwhile the former performs his national and religious duty towards the Gilead government and God.

The commander is fucking. What he is fucking 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. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose. (Atwood 2017, 104-05)

Sexuality has become a problematic issue within the Gilead Government since it is restricted to child birth and undergoes rigid rules. The absence of feelings and sensations make it an unnatural automatic act, dictated by governmental rules. Even sexuality is ruled by a discourse inflicted by the government which stems its hegemony from religion. As part of their national duties, the handmaids succumb to the sexual brutality of the commanders who exploit their "docile bodies" (Foucault 1995, 135). This leads us to refer to Holst Petersen and Rutherford's concept of the "double colonization" (1986, 85).

Eventually, the handmaids are mentally colonized by the political discourses of Gilead government and physically conquered by the sexual exploitation of the commanders.

Females suffer from the overlapping of political, religious and patriarchal subjugation. The violence of discourse is transmitted implicitly through the political laws and explicitly through sexual abuse. In *Handmaid's Tale*, the governmental discourse and the patriarchal one are two facets of the same coin. They work in parallel to subjugate women and reappropriate their reproductive rights. In this vein Sadeghi and Mizrapour aver that "the novel depicts the subjugation of handmaids, their marginalization as well as their struggle to survive and resist the imperial/patriarchal discourses" (2020, 22). The patriarchal, political and religious control is equated to colonization, mainly taking into consideration the coup d'état witnessed by the American government followed by the rise of a theocratic, patriarchal society of Gilead government. Thus, the political and religious discourses, align with the patriarchal ideology and scheme to undermine the position of women by subdividing them into fertile and infertile female categories, whereby degrading the female status by defining it strictly in terms of fertility and procreation. Fertile women lose their total freedom and are compelled to play the role of surrogate mothers for the commanders. "The double colonization" of the handmaids 'is demonstrated through the commanders' sexual exploitation of their "docile bodies" and the governmental colonization of their psychological worlds through the inflicted political and religious discourses.

## **II- The female anti-discourse: Offred's monologue and revolutionary oral narration**

Although, the violent patriarchal and governmental discourse is omnipresent in *The Handmaid's Tale*, it does not conceal the female characters' attempts to challenge it by creating a feminist movement that functions underground and prepares a political upheaval. The female revolutionary movement, known as 'Mayday,' symbolizes hope and the potential for liberation. The label is very symbolic, connoting the possibility of achieving the female freedom one day. To study it from a historiographical perspective, the name of the feminist movement "Mayday" is an explicit reference to the French word "m'aidez" which means help me and deployed as an international distress signal. To trace back the historical origin of the concept "Mayday"<sup>3</sup>, the latter is used in emergency cases to ask for help. Hence, the feminist secret movement asks for help and urges to save the exploited handmaids. When Ofglen divulges the secret existence of Mayday to Offred and invites her to join the members, Offred indulges in answering her without hesitation: "There is an *us* then, there's a *we*. I knew it" (Atwood 2017, 177). For the first time, Offred senses a feeling of belonging to a female revolutionary and anti-patriarchal movement that allows her to freely impose her own discourse. Immediately, Offred transforms from a passive, objectified figure to an insurrectionary voice of dissent. Her sense of belonging empowers her to exteriorize her internal monologue which preserves her survival all along her life in the commander's house. The movement strengthens her will to recuperate her reproductive rights and female identity. "The Mayday" movement stands as a feminist counter discourse to the previously inflicted patriarchal one. Offred gains her anti-narrative as a counterpart to the violent

male discourse. Her affiliation with “Maday Movement” enables her to articulate her monologue into audible words. Offred’s insurrection against the male coercive dystopia comes through her writing of her own womanhood and her reappropriation of female narration.

The feminist writers project of writing the female selfhood is conveyed through the female characters’ telling of their own life stories. “In reconstructing the language, women restructure their relation to society” (Firestone 1970, 22) and overturn the gender hierarchies. The danger of the female writing and narration lies at the level of deconstructing the male predominating narratives. *The Handmaid’s Tale* is narrated by Offred herself who is “traded by the commanders of Gilead, passes from house to house in a form of contract pregnancy that determines her role as a “good” mother, one who gives up her child and subserves her gestational rights to the male genetic claim to his property” (Myrsiades 1999, 220). She is valued only in terms of her reproductive power which is considered as a national property. “Offred is one of a class of fertile women acting as designated breeders for the state of Gilead” (Atwood 2017, 227). Narrating her own story allows her to reclaim her agency and identity. Her commander treats her “reproductive body as a mere container, isolated from the rest of herself and serving merely as walls for the central presence of the embryo” (Myrsiades 1999, 220). As a mother, she has no biological rights over her infant as it will be raised by her commander and his wife. In this context, women are regarded as replaceable machines, undertaking surrogacy roles for the national service. “The handmaid writes herself into existence by telling her own tale and thereby taking possession of it” (220). Her womb is a national property serving the government through giving birth to babies, on whom she has no rights. Offred is depicted as an object of exchange, imprisoned within her commander’s house with no human rights. Bearing in mind the date of its publication, the book bears various aspects of realism, mainly the rise of the international feminist movement during the cold war period. The historical events are implicitly mirrored in the plot. The book was written in Berlin, notably during a historical period characterized by a political upheaval which is more or less transmitted within the folds of the narrative. “The mayday movement” stands for the rise of international feminist movements appealing for female rights, notably that of abortion. Subsequently, the book’s posthumous female reproductive image comes as a feminist warning against the denial of the human emotions and the relegation of women to a debased status limited to an automatic birth giving. “Because her reproductive organs formed the center of her being, [offred] was to be constrained from using her brain” (221). For the Gilead Government, women should not be allowed to use their brains seeing the repercussions on their reproductive potentials. “The brain and ovary could not develop at the same time” (Rosenberg 1975, 288). What is critical is that the female body is deployed to empower the dominant males. The objectification of the female body is at stake; hence the Handmaid’s tale comes as a cautionary futuristic tale, envisioning a risky future for female generations unless serious measures will be taken by the activist feminist movements.

In the Gilead government, women gain social positions through their pregnancy, as one of the handmaids is depicted as “vastly pregnant; her belly, under her loose garment, swells triumphantly...

She is a magic presence to us, an object of envy and desire, we covet her. She's a flag on a hilltop, showing us what can still be done: we too can be saved" (Atwood 2017, 35). The question of pregnancy leads us to discuss the patriarchal view of women as reproductive machines regardless their cognitive abilities. The handmaids, though absented and denied any human rights, are compelled by the republic of Gilead to bear children. What's more, the undermined handmaid is aware of her degraded position. She admits: "I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely" (94). Her awareness of being objectified and treated like a machine works to liberate her potential. Women are defined in terms of their female bodies and ability to bear children. Offred's ability to distance herself from her body highlights the extent to which she succeeds to resist the patriarchal definition of womanhood. The handmaid's narration aims to resist the dominating system. Her oral narration and testimony are the sole refuge from the Gilead. Otherwise, she will receive the same destiny as her rebellious mother who revolts against the Gilead's treatment of women and ends by being casted, together with the Jews, into the wastelands. Telling her story she admits: "It hurts me to tell it over, over again. Once was enough...But I keep on going with this sad and hungry and sordid, this limping and mutilated story" (344). Narrating her own tale empowers her to regain her position. Believing in the power of repetition, Offred does not surrender to the overwhelming political system, rather she stands against it by narrating and orally telling her life story. "The Gileadean assignment of handmaids as ambulatory hatcheries for the commander's seed" (Myrsiades 1999, 222) is being resisted by the handmaid's narration of her own story, thus reappropriating her usurped body while dis-appropriating the patriarchal designed female body. The handmaid's protest is limited to narrating her secret attempts of leaving the Gilead government. Her counter discourse represents her control over the narration process. The fact that she joins the "Mayday" movement is in itself an insurrectionary act from her part. Thence, the secret feminist movement which challenges the governmental power stands as a counter patriarchal discourse. Though their evolution is secretly spread underground, still it attracts various psychologically restless handmaids who just pretend to surrender to governmental control.

The female resistance of the governmental and religious discourses initiates as a covert movement and ends as an overt female narration that controls the whole fictional plot. By the end of the novel, we come to discover that the narration is dominated by Offred who is silenced all along the narrative. Her resistance to male discourse is embodied through her narration of the events which comes as a counter-discourse. Hence, apart from the "Mayday movement" which stands as a revolutionary feminist attempt to overthrow the religious power of "the sons of Jacobs", Offred's oral narration of the events is a feminist triumph in itself over the patriarchal manipulation of women and the commanders' sexual exploitation of the handmaids. Offred's triumph is clear enough as she avers: "This is a recording. I'm telling you this story. I'm telling it to you because I am telling it to myself" (Atwood 2017, 57). The female counter discourse is embodied, also, through Offred's recording of the whole story, whereby conquering the Gilead authoritarian world. Offred

addresses her female self in order to be convinced of the necessity to revolt and overcome the delineated patriarchal world of Gilead. Her orality serves to liberate her womanhood as well as to raise the consciousness of her audience in general. Her recording implicitly conveys that “the vessels are upright; the vessels have acquired legs. The sacred vessels are on the move...They move slowly at first then faster and faster” (Wittig 1973, 32). Offred’s narration survives the spatial and temporal frames to become a memorial recording, as a witness to her tortured life, as well as that of the other handmaids during Gilead rule. “Orality was one issue that feminist literary aesthetics re-enlisted as a means to challenge patriarchal literary discourse. Capitalizing on the way that oral discourse has been associated with the feminine” (Klarer 1995, 140). Since the bygone ages, storytelling has always been linked to women agents who narrate fairytales to children and transmit them to future generations as a family heritage. Though it is considered as a maternal tradition, orality empowers Offred to trespass the political and patriarchal boundaries and voice her suffocated monologue. Taking into consideration the fact that orality flows more natural, bearing the different human emotional and psychological traits than does writing, Offred’s recording is viewed as an authentic, reliable and spontaneous feminist appeal to reconsider the female position, guarantee gender equality and recuperate women’s reproductive rights all over the world.

## **Conclusion**

To end with, this article has studied the female frail position within the Gilead government as an authoritarian religious regime. The first part has dealt with the violent patriarchal and governmental discourse which is designed to usurp women’s basic rights notably the reproductive ones, based on the sacred religious text as a justification for the patriarchal doctrine. A close text analysis has revealed the religious nature of the Gilead government which manipulates the sacred text to limit women’s liberty and exploit them sexually seeking to bear children for the infertile privileged classes. The governmental chosen jargon serves the patriarchal goal to increase the birth rate after an abrupt population decrease within the nation. Women are the targeted victims who have to submit to the sexual brutality of their commanders under the presence of their infertile wives. The threatening and violent male discourse colonizes women’s psychological worlds and invades even their inner monologues, aiming to restrict their linguistic tools and cognitive abilities. Hence, the language used is always limited, tending to reinforce the patriarchal regime, by empowering it over the handmaids. Relying on the religious biblical discourse, the commanders cripple the handmaids’ liberties and limit their existence to child birth. Women in Gilead are totally usurped from their history and female identities, including their original names. After erasing their essences, women are moulded by the political power, to serve their national duties as surrogate mothers. The violent governmental discourse deploys religion to maintain the patriarchal power and sexually exploit the handmaids. As for the second part, the work underhand has dealt with the female revolutionary counter discourse. The reappropriation of the female body whether through the rise of the feminist “Mayday” movement or the act of narration as we have already seen with Offred in *The Handmaids’ Tale* serve

as a female technique of patriarchal deconstruction and resistance to the phallogocentric violent discourse that have usurped the female body. By dominating their own narratives, women are controlling their own bodies and imposing their subjectivities. The “Mayday” movement provides a feminist private space where women dare to revolt against the Gilead religious government and bring forth their repressed souvenirs and inner monologues. Actually, it represents their revolutionary counter discourse that stands against the atrocious patriarchal discourse of Gilead. Offred’s orality and recording of the narrative illustrates her female insurrectionary discourse as well. The fact that she controls the narrative through her orality represents her triumph over the imposed patriarchal discourse. Her recording remains as an eternal witness to her seized female liberty and her sexual abuse by the commanders.

### Endnotes:

1. The term *genetic engineering* initially referred to various techniques used for the modification or manipulation of organisms through the processes of heredity and reproduction. As such, the term embraced both artificial selection and all the interventions of biomedical techniques, among them artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization (e.g., “test-tube” babies), cloning, and gene manipulation. (Britannica)
2. A mode of thought predicated on seemingly stable oppositions (such as good and evil or male and female) that is seen in post-structuralist analysis as an inadequate approach to areas of difference ( Meriem-Webster)
3. Mayday first came into English in 1923. In fact, it was first used by a British aviator, Frederick Stanley Mockford, who suggested it to the British authorities in 1923. It is an internationally recognized radio word to signal distress. There was a lot of air traffic between England and France in those days, and evidently there were enough international problems over the English Channel that both parties wanted to find a good distress signal that everyone would understand. (Sullivan 2020, 82-1)

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