The Ideology of the Republic of Gilead in M. Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale"

Balenović, Aleksandra

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer

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Ljubica Matek, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

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Abstract

This paper explores the ideology of the fictive Republic of Gilead in Margaret Atwood's seminal novel *The Handmaid's Tale.* The Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian theocracy, used violence to take over the United States of America, replaced their ideology with an ideology based on Gilead's version of Christianity and misogyny, and then proceeded to use fear tactics to keep that ideology in place. This paper also explores the real life origins of Gileadean Christianity like the American Puritans who came to the New World to practice their religion and established a violent theocracy that did not tolerate anyone else practicing a religion of their own, and the American New Rights movement of the 1980s that advocated for a return to more traditional values which meant that women should be subjugated to men. The paper also explores Gilead's misogyny that includes chapters on Gilead returning women to their homes, control of reproduction, and subjugation of women by taking away their rights and assigning them specific roles to play in a man's life. The paper also includes a chapter on Gilead's ideological implementation and control that includes indoctrination, public execution and punishment, and isolation achieved by creating uniformity and a feeling of suspicion, restricting the citizens' movement, and controlling the language. The last chapter of the paper deals with the echoes of Gilead's ideology in the world of the future in which Gilead no longer exists.

Keywords: *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood, ideology, totalitarianism, theocracy, misogyny.

Introduction

The Handmaid's Tale, written by Margaret Atwood, is a dystopian novel published in 1985. The novel, written in the first person narrative, tells a story of a woman named Offred who is a Handmaid. The Handmaids are women who are enslaved and forced to reproduce in the fictive land of Gilead. They are given to Gilead's most powerful citizens – the Commanders and their Wives to reproduce for them as they cannot have children of their own. The novel tells Offred's personal and emotional story but it also functions as a study of ideology and ideological control.

The Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian theocracy, used violence to take over the United States of America, replaced their ideology with an ideology based on Gilead's version of Christianity and misogyny, and then proceeded to use fear tactics to keep that ideology in place. This paper will explore Gilead's ideology in theory and practice. The first chapter is concerned with the founding of Gilead and the Republic's political system while the following chapters deal with the ideology itself. The second chapter discusses the various definitions of ideology and analyses the two tenets of Gilead's ideology – religion and misogyny. The third chapter deals with Gilead's ideology in practice, more specifically with Gilead's ideological implementation and control, while the last chapter deals with the echoes of Gilead's ideology in the novel's epilogue in which a scholar, professor Pieixoto, discusses Offred's story along with the history of a country once known as Gilead.

1. The Republic of Gilead

The Handmaid's Tale takes place in the fictional Republic of Gilead, often referred to simply as Gilead. On the surface Gilead seems like a picture-perfect, almost idyllic place. Offred, the narrator, describes clean sidewalks, tidy lawns, and gracious façades of the houses that make the streets of Gilead look "like the beautiful pictures they used to print in the magazines about homes and gardens and interior decoration" (*Tale* 33). But Gilead is anything but idyllic. The clean sidewalks, tidy lawns and streets that look like they belong "in a model town constructed to show the way people used to live" (*Tale* 33) are just a façade for a place of great violence that controls every aspect of its citizens lives, "from economics and politics to each individual's ideas and beliefs" ("Sexual Oppression" 132).

1.1. The Founding of Gilead

It makes perfect sense for Gilead to be a place of great violence because violence is in its foundations. The Republic of Gilead was founded by the members of a Christian fundamentalist group that call themselves the Sons of Jacob. The Sons of Jacob used "an obscure 'C. I. A.' pamphlet on the destabilization of foreign governments as a strategic handbook" to "dr[a]w up the early hit-lists of prominent 'Americans' of the time" (*Tale* 319) and then proceeded to kill the President of the United States of America, machine-gun the US Congress and suspend the US Constitution (*Tale* 182-183). After that the Sons of Jacob were free to establish their own form of government.

1.2. Gilead's Political System

Margaret Atwood describes *The Handmaid's Tale* as "a speculative fiction about an American theocracy" (*Moving Targets* 266). According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, theocracy is "a government that is controlled by religious leaders" ("Theocracy"). In Gilead, "named for a region in ancient Palestine" (Wilson 66), those religious leaders are the Sons of Jacob who are in return named after a "Hebrew patriarch" whose sons "were founders of the tribes of Israel" that "after the death of Moses, took possession of the Promised Land of Canaan" ("Jacob"). The Sons of Jacob later rebranded themselves as the Commanders of the Faithful and established a theology that is based on "Christian principles" in theory and "yet in practice miserably lacks spirituality and benevolence" (Malak 4). For example, the Commanders turn an Old Testament story, in which Jacob's wife Rachel is so heartbroken over the fact that she cannot have children that she is willing to have them through her maid Bilhah, into an excuse for government sanctioned enslavement and rape of a group of women known as the Handmaids (Stein 131). This is just one example of the

Commanders using the Bible "to institute and enforce harsh political control" and "to shape a political reality for its citizens" (Stein 131). This makes Gilead not only a theocracy but also a totalitarian state.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, totalitarianism is a "form of government that theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of individual life to the authority of the state" ("Totalitarianism"). Gilead fits this category perfectly because it restricts its citizens' movements by installing checkpoints all around the country, takes away their means of self-expression by regulating language into biblical dialogue, divides its citizens into different groups or fractions with a strict social hierarchy and robs them of their identity in the process. Gilead also turns women into second class citizens, takes control over their reproductive rights, forces its citizens into arranged marriages, and uses public executions to install fear into anyone who would even think to oppose its policies. All of this makes the Republic of Gilead a totalitarian theocracy in which "ideological lies are supposed to be believed like sacred untouchable truths" (Arendt 384) because, as Atwood herself puts it, "political disagreement is political disagreement; but political disagreement with a theocracy is heresy" (*Moving Targets* 124).

According to Cassinelli "one of the most problematic features of totalitarian regimes" is "the comprehensive and detailed control of all ideas, beliefs, and statements" (68) and that is the reason "totalitarian leaders pay notoriously scrupulous attention to details, particularly details of "ideology" (83).

2. Ideology

David McLellan states that ideology is "the most elusive concept in the whole of social science" (1). Perhaps this is why there are so many definitions of the term. Michael Ryan defines ideology as "a body of ideas that license, enable, and direct social action" (40) and a "mistaken cognition that prevents us from seeing reality as it is" (40). In his article "On ideology" George A. Huaco brings several definitions of ideology composed by prominent sociologists of his time. Huaco states that for Lewis Feuer "an ideology is a world-system based on one's political and social feelings . . . It entangles emotions, actions, and ideas and "gives to the cruelty-dominated man the approval of a cosmic conscience" (245). Huaco also states that "for Daniel Bell an ideology is an illusion" and that Bell believes that ideologies are "organized systems of belief with ready formulas for the manipulation of the masses" (245). Huaco also quotes Joseph Lapalombara

who finds that "an ideology is something that may be" (246) "used as a weapon or instrument of control" (246). But perhaps the most comprehensive definition of ideology comes from Hannah Arendt, a philosopher, who states that:

> An ideology is quite literally what its name indicates: it is the logic of an idea. Its subject matter is history, to which the "idea" is applied; the result of this application is not a body of statements about something that is, but the unfolding of a process which is in constant change. The ideology treats the course of events as though it followed the same "law" as the logical exposition of its "idea." Ideologies pretend to know the mysteries of the whole historical process—the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future—because of the logic inherent in their respective ideas. (469)

To sum up, an ideology has to start with an idea that then turns into values and beliefs which are used to implement one's control over the masses and change the way people perceive reality. According to Michael Ryan "religion is probably the most obvious example of an ideology" and is "defined as a group of ideas that seem coherent but that foster misperceptions and misrepresentations of the world" (45) while Abdol Hossein Joodaki and Yaser Jafari reiterate Lois W. Banner's observations about religion being an "effective ideological tool veiled in scripture, sacraments, and other dogmatic devices that divert people's point of view into believing in and adhering to a religious creed that, in reality, actually reinforces the political creed of the dominant power group" (10).

2.1. Gileadean Christianity

On her way to a religious ritual called Prayvaganza, upon entering a building that leads to a court yard where the ritual is taking place, Offred sees a banner that states "GOD IS A NATIONAL RESOURCE" (*Tale* 225) and right under that banner she notices two young Guardians, men in charge of keeping order on the streets of Gilead, who "each has a submachine gun slung ready'' (*Tale* 225). This startling image is the perfect example of Gilead's perception of Christianity. In the world of Gilead God and the Bible are the beginning and the ending of all things, but also "a tool of political authority and oppression" (Heil 49). Using religion for political authority is nothing new when it comes to Gilead's predecessor, the United States of America; actually one of the first governments in its history followed the same principles and that government is the government of the Puritan theocracy of Massachusetts.

2.1.1. Real Life Origins of Gileadean Christianity: the American Puritans

Margaret Atwood dedicated *The Handmaid's Tale* to two people: Mary Webster and Perry Miller. Mary Webster was one of Atwood's Puritan ancestors who was tried for witchcraft and sentenced to be hanged, but according to Atwood "it was before they had invented the drop, which breaks your neck — they merely strung her up and let her dangle, and when they came to cut her down the next morning she was still alive" (*Moving Targets* 123). Mary Webster went on to live "for another fourteen years" because a person could not be executed "twice for the same crime" (*Moving Targets* 123). Perry Miller was Margaret Atwood's professor at Harvard Graduate School who is "almost single-handedly (...) responsible for resurrecting the American Puritans as a field for literary investigation" (*Moving Targets* 123). In her article "Not Fading into Another Landscape: Spectres of American Empire in Margaret Atwood's Fiction" Lauren A. Rule points out the following statement Atwood made about the American Puritans and their influence on the society depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale*:

> The society in *The Handmaid's Tale* is a throwback to the early Puritans whom I studied extensively at Harvard under Perry Miller, to whom the book is dedicated. The early Puritans came to America not for religious freedom, as we were taught in grade school, but to set up a society that would be a theocracy (like Iran) ruled by religious leaders, and monolithic, that is, a society that would not tolerate dissent within itself. They were being persecuted in England for being Puritans, but then they went to the United States and promptly began persecuting anyone who wasn't a Puritan. My book reflects the form and style of early Puritan society and addresses the dynamics that bring about such a situation. (631)

Citizens of Gilead see themselves as descendants of the Puritans which is evident in the history they choose to preserve. During a walk with a fellow Handmaid, Offred comes across a church and observes:

> The church is a small one, one of the first erected here, hundreds of years ago. It isn't used any more, except as a museum. Inside it you can see paintings, of women in long sombre dresses, their hair covered by white caps, and of upright men, darkly clothed and unsmiling. Our ancestors. Admission is free. (*Tale* 41)

Offred does not explicitly say that the church was built by the Puritans or that the men and the women in the paintings inside the church are Puritans themselves but that can be construed from their dark clothes and the white caps worn by the women. The church Offred describes is also one

of the first churches to be built there and 'there' is Massachusetts, where the Puritans formed a settlement after their migration from England. According to Avihu Zakai, the Puritans left England because they believed that the new millennium will bring the Second Coming of Christ which will in turn destroy the Old World (1). Zakai proceeds to explain that for the Puritans that meant they will have to establish Christ's Kingdom in the New World which will then transform the entire world into the Kingdom of God while their establishment in New England will be transformed into New Jerusalem that is described in the Book of Revelation (1). It is evident that the Puritans believed the world was coming to an end and that they will be saved if they followed the Word of God. The leaders of Gilead saw that the world is at peril in their own time because:

> this was the age of the R-strain syphilis and also the infamous AIDS epidemic, which, once they spread to the population at large, eliminated many young sexually active people from the reproductive pool? Stillbirths, miscarriages, and genetic deformities were widespread and on the increase, and this trend has been linked to the various nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage that characterized the period, as well as leakages from chemical and biological warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites, of which there were many thousands, both legal and illegal – in some instances these materials were simply dumped into the sewage system – and to the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays. (*Tale* 316-317)

The founders of the Republic of Gilead took advantage of this situation to establish their totalitarian theocracy because as Atwood states "true dictatorships do not come in in good times. They come in in bad times, when people are ready to give up some of their freedoms to someone — anyone — who can take control and promise them better times" (*Moving Targets* 125) and Gilead had a solution for those environmental crises – all the society needs to do is to return to simpler times, times of their ancestors who followed the Word of God. This is why the admission to the museum that celebrates the Puritans is free and why art depicting the Puritans can be found in the homes of the prominent citizens of Gilead. In describing the sitting room of Serena Joy, the wife of the Commander in whose household she serves, Offred notices the following:

> Some things in this room are authentic, some are not. For instance, two paintings, both of women, one on the either side of the fireplace. Both wear dark dresses, like the ones in the old church, though of a later date. The paintings are possibly authentic. I suspect that when Serena Joy acquired them, after it became obvious to her that she'd have to redirect her energies into something convincingly domestic, she had the intention of passing them off

> as ancestors. Or maybe they were in the house when the Commander bought it. There's no way of knowing such things. In any case, there they hang, their backs and mouths stiff, their breasts constricted, their faces pinched, their caps stretched, their skin greyish-white, guarding the room with their narrow eyes. (*Tale* 89-90)

Eric Hoffer, an American philosopher, states that "this preoccupation with the past stems (…) from a desire to demonstrate the legitimacy of the movement" (72). This legitimacy of the movement convinces "the inhabitants to submit to the power of one (moral) law and one true religion" (Staels 115) and also gives the permission to dispose of those who do not.

2.1.1.1. Religion Based Wars

Danita J. Dodson states that after the settlement of the New World colony that accommodated "the righteous and chosen people of God" the Puritans proceeded to dispose eradicate and/or incarcerate those they did not consider to be the chosen ones and had replaced their "missionary spirit" with a military one (70).

Dodson also states that "the Puritans defined their relationship to the New World in terms of violence and warfare" and quotes Donald Pease who noted that in their quest to create a second Eden, the Puritans committed the genocide of the New World's first occupants, the Native Americans, who were notably different from the Europeans (70). Just like the Puritans, the Republic of Gilead relies heavily on the Old Testament and uses the Word of God to subdue anyone who does not agree with their ideology even though, as Erin C Heil notes, "religion by its very nature is not coercive (...) rather, it is how text and teachings are interpreted that can be coercive" (49). For example, Gilead uses an Old Testament story about Biblical patriarch Noah and his son Ham to justify their racist tendencies and the disposal of African-Americans. In the Bible, Noah plants a vineyard, gets drunk on the wine and falls asleep in his tent. His son Ham, who is the father of Canaan, sees his father's nakedness and informs his brothers Shem and Japheth of what he saw. Ham's brothers go into their father's tent, walk backwards and cover their father's nakedness without actually seeing it. When Noah wakes up he curses Ham's son Canaan to become a servant of servants to his brethren (*King James Bible* Genesis 9:20-27). According to Edith R. Sanders, this story then appeared in "The Babylonian Talmud, a collection of oral traditions of the Jewish people "in which it states that "the descendants of Ham are cursed by being black" because Ham has seen his father's nakedness "in blackness of night" (522). Noah's curse of Canaan's children being servants of servants was changed into "Canaan's children shall be borne ugly and black" and "banded together in hatred of their masters" (Sanders 522). But Sanders warns that

many Hebrew scholars find this story to be used simply as a justification for the Israelites' "subjugation of Canaan" (Sanders 522). Gilead's Sons of Jacob, as previously stated, have named themselves after the Biblical patriarch Jacob who later became known as Israel ("Twelve Tribes of Israel") which would, by their perverse logic, make the Sons of Jacob in charge of the so-called Children of Ham. On the rare occasion that Offred is allowed to watch television she hears and sees the following news report: "Resettlement of the Children of Ham is continuing on schedule," says the reassuring pink face, back on the screen. "Three thousand have arrived this week in National Homeland One, with another two thousand in transit" (*Tale* 93-94). This is the only allusion to African-Americans in the entire *The Handmaid's Tale* apart from professor Pieixoto mentioning Gilead's "racist policies" in his speech in the novel's "Historical Notes" (*Tale* 317). What happens to African-Americans once they arrive in National Homeland One is never revealed.

There were also the others who were members of different fractions of Christianity and were seen as the enemies of Gilead on the basis of their religion.. In the beginning of the Republic of Gilead all that mattered was that people were Christian. Moira, Offred's friend, recalls those early days by saying:

> It was before the sectarian roundups began in earnest. As long as you said you were some sort of a Christian and you were married, for the first time that is, they were still leaving you pretty much alone. They were concentrating first on the others. They got them more or less under control before they started in on everybody else. (*Tale* 259)

Moira's remark about "the sectarian roundups" (*Tale* 259) implies that, after a while, being a Christian was not enough, suggesting that for the Republic of Gilead you had to be the right kind of Christian as all other forms of Christianity were branded as sects. Moira's statement is corroborated by Offred, who upon seeing three hanged bodies left by the soldiers of Gilead for all to see, notices that one of them "is a priest, still wearing the black cassock. That's been put on him, for the trial, even though they gave up wearing those years ago, when the sect wars first began; cassocks made them too conspicuous" (*Tale* 53). Offred also mentions the sect wars and gives insights into Gilead's policies regarding other religions. The priest's clothes are described as a "cassock" which, according to the dictionary, is "a close-fitting ankle-length garment worn especially in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches by the Clergy" ("Cassock"). The clothes were put on him specifically for the trial for all to see that he was once one of the leaders of an alternative religious group which shows that being a member of a different fraction of Christianity was not only punishable by law but is also a reason enough to be executed. The fact that the priest was put

to death solely for not being the right kind of Christian is evident by the cassock being *put on him* because, as Offred states, the priests gave up their attires out of fear of religious persecution. Those fears were founded in reality which is evident from another set of bodies left out to be seen that Offred notices on one of her later walks with a fellow Handmaid Ofglen. Offred describes the bodies like this:

> Only two hanging (…) today: one Catholic, not a priest though, placarded with an upside-down cross, and some other sect I don't recognize. The body is marked only with a J, in red. It doesn't mean Jewish, those would be yellow stars. Anyway there haven't been many of them. Because they were declared Sons of Jacob and therefore special, they were given a choice. They could convert, or emigrate to Israel. A lot of them emigrated, if you can believe the news. I saw a boatload of them, on the TV, leaning over the railings in their black coats and hats and their long beards, trying to look as Jewish as possible, in costumes fished up from the past, the women with shawls over their heads, smiling and waving, a little stiffly it's true, as if they were posing; and another shot, of the richer ones, lining up for the planes. Ofglen says some other people got out that way, by pretending to be Jewish, but it wasn't easy because of the tests they gave you and they've tightened up on that now. You don't get hanged only for being a Jew though. You get hanged for being a noisy Jew who won't make the choice. Or for pretending to convert. That's been on the TV too: raids at night, secret hoards of Jewish things dragged out from under beds, Torahs, talliths, Mogen Davids. And the owners of them, sullen-faced, unrepentant, pushed (…) against the walls of their bedrooms, while the sorrowful voice of the announcer tells us voice-over about their perfidy and ungratefulness. So the J isn't for Jew. What could it be? Jehovah's Witness? Jesuit? Whatever it meant, he's just as dead. (*Tale* 210-211)

From Offred's comments on the first body she sees and the fact that it is not the body of a priest, it can be construed that the body of the priest in cassock that she saw earlier was a body of a Catholic priest. Being Catholic is against the law which is evident from the positioning of the cross on the body of the ordinary Catholic hanging on display; the cross is turned upside down. The cross represents Jesus Christ and the New Testament while the Republic of Gilead relies heavily on the Old Testament, something they have in common with the members of the Jewish faith. In a manner reminiscent to Nazi Germany, the Jewish are branded with a yellow star, but Offred also states that not many bodies belonging to people of the Jewish faith have been seen hanging in public, because they were considered to be sons of Jacob themselves, and therefore allowed to

emigrate to Israel; those of a lower economic status being transported there by boats and those of a higher economic status being transported by planes. But in "Historical Notes" professor Pieixoto reveals that many of those who were transported by boats never arrived in Israel because one of the Commanders found it more profitable to simply dump them into the Atlantic (*Tale* 320). This shows that Gilead's regime was ruthless to everyone and that human life mattered very little. The fate of those who stayed in Gilead and pretended to convert to Gilead's religion speaks to Gilead's practices of making sure their religion is the one true religion. Raids were conducted in order to prevent the existence of any other religion and any other kind of worship that did not coincide with Gilead's form of worship. Offred's speculation about the meaning of the letter J on the other body displayed, whether he is a Jehovah's Witness or a Jesuit, confirms Gilead's resolution to wipe out all other forms of religion because it does not matter to which so-called sect that person belongs; the punishment for their crime was the same – death. A similar fate awaited the Baptists who organized themselves enough to be referred to as "the rebels" and who "had a stronghold in the Blue Hills", but according to Ofglen the forces of Gilead "smoked them out" (*Tale* 29) as well as the Quakers who are referred to as a "heretical sect" and who Offred sees being arrested on the news (*Tale* 93).

To sum up, in the totalitarian theocracy of the Republic of Gilead it is important to be Christian but it is also important to be the right kind of Christian. Gilead has their own religion that they hold to be the one and only true religion while the members of any other religious groups are hunted down, arrested, put on trial and ultimately executed. In this manner the Republic of Gilead remains true to their real-life Puritan heritage because according to Margaret Atwood " the American Puritans did not come to North America in search of religious toleration (...) They wanted the freedom to practice *their* religion, but they were not particularly keen on anyone else practicing his" (*Moving Targets* 123).

2.1.2. Real Life Origins of Gileadean Christianity: The New Right Movement of the 1980s

Margaret Atwood began writing *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1984 (*Moving Targets* 17). According to Lisa Jadwin, by that time "the North American cultural climate had become markedly more conservative" (25). Atwood's homeland of Canada had elected its first conservative prime minister since 1968, Brian Mulroney, while in the United States of America Ronald Reagan, a Republican, defeated Democratic President Jimmy Carter in 1980 US presidential election (Jadwin 26). Shirley Neuman states that "during Ronald Reagan's presidency (...) the gains women had achieved during the previous decade had come under attack" (859). Neuman proceeds to list a

number of policies and events that affected women negatively during Reagan's presidency: "one-third of all federal budget cuts (...) came from programs that served mainly women," "murders related to sexual assault and domestic violence increased by 160 per cent while the overall murder rate declined" and "several states passed laws restricting not only legal abortion but even the provision of information about abortion" and so on (860). Reagan's presidency also saw a rise of what is known as New Rights movement (Bouson 41) that according to Shirley Neuman, by the year 1984, morphed into an organization called the Moral Majority (860). Lisa Jadwin states that the Moral Majority was an organization founded in 1979 by Jerry Falwell, an evangelical preacher (28) who once claimed that "feminists had begun a satanic attack on the home" (Bouson 41). Falwell's Moral Majority also "promoted an agenda that included outlawing abortion, opposition to state recognition and acceptance of homosexuality, opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)" and "enforcement of a 'traditional' (that is, patriarchal) vision of family life" (Jadwin 28). Jadwin also notes that "at the beginning of the 1980s, women's rights (...) were now perceived by some in the United States as a threat to 'traditional' cultural values and especially to the 'Christian' family, which was pictured as comprising a breadwinner father, a stay-at-home mother, and several children" (29) while J. Brooks Bouson states that "these so-called 'profamily' activists called for the restoration of women's traditional roles and for the return of women to the home" (41). The Republic of Gilead employs the same principles as the New Right movement of the 1980s of reducing women's rights and advocating for their return to the home which is the basis for the next staple of Gilead's ideology – misogyny.

2.2. Misogyny

Margaret Atwood states that in the Republic of Gilead a "woman's place is strictly at home" and that in order to achieve that women had to be deprived of their right to vote, to "own property, or hold jobs" as well as to be prohibited of practicing public prostitution so they would not be "hanging out on street corners" which would all put them "back in the home" (*Moving Targets* 127). And that is exactly what the Sons of Jacob did after executing the entire US government; they made sure that women were back in their homes.

2.2.1. Returning Women to Their Homes

In a pre-Gilead world Offred worked in a library where she transferred books to computer discs. Every day before work she would stop by a corner store to buy cigarettes. One day, after the President Day's Massacre, instead of an older woman who usually worked at the store register, there was a young man:

She sick? I said as I handed him my card.

Who? he said aggressively I thought.

The woman who's usually here, I said.

How would I know, he said. He was punching my number in, studying each number, punching with one finger. He obviously hadn't done it before. I drummed my fingers on the counter, impatient for a cigarette, wondering if anyone had ever told him something could be done about those pimples on his neck. I remember quite clearly what he looked like: tall, slightly stooped, dark hair cut short, brown eyes that seemed to focus two inches behind the bridge of my nose, and that acne. I suppose I remember him so clearly because of what he said next.

Sorry, he said. This number's not valid. (*Tale* 184)

Offred remembers this moment so vividly because, when she later reflects on it, this is the moment she lost all of her rights. Pre-Gilead era was a time of Compubanks, a computer system that had replaced paper money. Money was stored on Compucounts while all payments were done by a Compucard and Offred's Compucard was not working even though she knew she had sufficient funds on her Compucount. After making sure that the young man had not made a mistake, Offred went to the library. Sometime after lunch, the library director came into the room where Offred and her colleagues were working and informed them that they had all lost their jobs because that was the law. This is also the reason why there was a man at the corner store register and not a woman. In a corridor outside the director's office there were "two men, in uniforms with machine guns" making sure that the new law was being obeyed (*Tale* 186). At first Offred thought that these men were with the army, but later remembered that they had different uniforms. Offred and her co-workers left the premises and she returned home to her husband Luke and their daughter. Later that day Moira informed her of what had happened:

Tried getting anything on your Compucard today?

Yes, I said. I told her about that too.

They've frozen them, she said. Mine too. The collective's too. Any account with an F on it instead of an M. All they needed to do is push a few buttons. We're cut off. (...)

Women can't hold property any more, she said. It's a new law. Turned on the TV today?

> No, I said.
>
> It's on there, she said. All over the place. (...) Luke can use your Compucount for you, she said. They'll transfer your number to him, or that's what they say. Husband or male next of kin. (*Tale* 187-188)

It took one day for the women of the United States of America to lose their rights and depend on the men in their lives, just like they did in the nineteenth century (*Moving Targets* 127). Offred states that there were protest marches against this law but not too many of them because "the police, or the army, or whoever they were, would open fire as almost as soon as any of the marches even started" (*Tale* 189). Because of such violence there were less and less women on the streets as they retreated into their homes. The violence as well as taking away women's money, jobs and property was all orchestrated by the Sons of Jacob who had bigger plans for the women of their country. Moira was right when she said: "They had to do it that way, the Compucounts and the jobs both at once. Can you picture the airports, otherwise? They don't want us going anywhere, you can bet on that" (*Tale* 188). Gilead needed women to stay in the country and needed them to be obedient and helpless in order to control their reproduction.

2.2.2. Control of Reproduction

Pre-Gilead times, as stated by professor Pieixoto, were the times of "plummeting Caucasian birth rates" (*Tale* 316). The professor also states that there are no clear reasons for this phenomenon but considers "the widespread availability of birth control of various kinds, including abortion, in the immediate pre-Gilead period" to be a partial cause of "the differing statistics among Caucasians and non-Caucasians" (*Tale* 316) but most of it can be attributed to a "widespread environmental catastrophe" (*Moving Targets* 125). This environmental catastrophe "has several results: a higher infertility and sterility rate due to chemical and radiation damage (...) and a higher birth-defect rate" (*Moving Targets* 125-126). Gilead decided to tackle these low birth rates by reorganizing its society in order to maximize reproduction, especially, as Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson point out, "white, Christian, misogynist, stratified reproduction" (71). In order to do this, the Sons of Jacob reached for the Bible one more time.

Jacob, the Biblical patriarch whose life is a great inspiration in the foundation of the Republic of Gilead, had two wives – Rachel and Leah. Jacob wanted to marry Rachel but her father Laban tricked him into marrying Rachel's older sister Leah because it was unheard of for a younger sister to be married before the older one. Jacob remained married to Leah but married Rachel as well. God saw that Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved her sister and decided to make Rachel barren.

Leah bore Jacob four sons while Rachel remained childless (Genesis 29-30:16-35). Rachel was jealous of her sister and said to Jacob:

> Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. (Genesis 30:1-3)

Bilhah gave birth to two sons but both of them were claimed by Rachel. Leah wanted more children but could not have any so she gave Jacob her handmaid Zilpah. Zilpah gave birth to two sons as well and they were claimed by Leah. After that Leah gave birth to two more sons and a daughter and Rachel gave birth to Joseph (Genesis 30:5-24). These sons went on to form the twelve tribes of Israel.

Based on this Biblical story, Gilead "like many human societies before it" decided to give "more than one woman to its favoured male members" in order to increase birth rates and because in a social order where "the ability to conceive and bear a healthy child" is "rare, and thus valued (...) we all know who gets most – in any society – of the things that are rare and valued. Those at the top" (*Moving Targets* 127). In the Republic of Gilead there is only one group that fits that description – the Commanders of the Faithful.

2.2.2.1. The Commanders of the Faithful

The Commanders of the Faithful are the highest ranking members of the Gileadean society. Most of them were the original members of the Sons of Jacob as well as the participants "in the first of the top-secret Sons of Jacob Think Thanks, at which the philosophy and social structure of Gilead were hammered out" (*Tale* 318). From Offred's conversation with her Commander it can be construed that they do not have specific titles so it is not clear exactly which position they hold in the government of the Republic of Gilead (*Tale* 195). But some of them do outrank the others. While visiting another Handmaid, Ofwarren, Offred says the following: "I'm going up the steps, wide steps with a stone urn on either side, Ofwarren's Commander must be higher status than ours..." (*Tale* 124-125). But regardless of the status among themselves, the Commanders still outrank every other citizen of Gilead because they are the only ones that have access to the Bible and the Bible dictates state policies. A Commander has to read the Bible to his household once a month and Offred describes that reading as follows:

> He crosses to the large leather chair reserved for him, takes the key out of his pocket, fumbles with the ornate brass-bound leather-covered box that stands on the table beside the chair. He inserts the key, opens the box, lifts out the Bible, an ordinary copy, with a black cover and gold-edged pages. The Bible is kept locked up, the way people once kept tea locked up, so the servants wouldn't steal it. It is an incendiary device: who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it? We can be read to from it, by him, but we cannot read. (*Tale* 97-98)

The Commanders are the only ones allowed to read the Bible because they do not want anyone else to interpret it for themselves or to read the sections that do not coincide with Gilead's state policies. When her Commander begins with the reading, Offred notes that people of Gilead always listen to the same parts of the Bible as she says: "It's the usual story, the usual stories. God to Adam, God to Noah. *Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*. Then comes the mouldy old Rachel and Leah stuff" (*Tale* 99). It is noticeable that the Commanders read only the Old Testament and the stories that reaffirm a man's position as a patriarch of the family. This is why when Offred thinks about her Commander, she states: "The Commander is the head of the household. This house is what he holds" (*Tale* 91) and "if he were to falter, fail or die, what would become of us" (*Tale* 99). Not only is a Commander in charge of his household, everybody in it is entirely dependent on him and his position in the society.

The stories the Commanders choose to read also deal with matters of reproduction. They read about Rachel and Leah and their struggles to conceive a child as well as about *multiplying and replenishing the earth* (*Tale* 99). As previously stated, the Commanders were given more than one woman in order to better their chances of having a child. All of them have a wife and if she is not able to get pregnant, a Commander is issued a young and fertile woman known as a Handmaid. Once a month, a Commander has intercourse with the Handmaid in the presence of his wife because the purpose of their copulation is reproduction and not sexual desire. But those measures are futile because many of the Commanders are actually sterile, even though in the Republic of Gilead only women are said to be infertile. In the "Historical Notes", professor Pieixoto when speculating about the identity of Offred's Commander says the following about the two possible candidates:

> both – like many of the Commanders – had come in contact with a sterility-causing virus that was developed by secret pre-Gilead genesplicing experiments with mumps, and which was intended for insertion into the supply of caviar used by top officials in Moscow. (The

> experiment was abandoned (...) because the virus was considered too uncontrollable and therefore too dangerous by many, although some wished to sprinkle it over India.) (*Tale* 321)

Not only are the Commanders incapable of creating life, they also wanted to bring death to two different nations, so it makes sense that the Commanders wear black uniforms. In Gilead every social group has a colour designated to them to point out the role they play in the society and for the Commanders that colour is black. Murad and Hajo quote Twohig stating that "black, like white, is not a colour (colourless) and the 'intelligent' along with the 'educated' people have an inclination to detest colours and turn to either black or white" (90) while Michael Ferber in his "A Dictionary of Literary Symbols" has a more sinister interpretation of the colour black. According to Ferber, "The colour does not occur frequently in the Bible, but when it does (with one notable exception) it is (...) negative", for example "famine rides a black horse in the Book of Revelation" (27). Ferber also points out that "black often means simply 'bad' or 'evil'" and that "as the colour of death and mourning, black has been adopted by Christians as a sign of death to this world..." (28-29). The Commanders did bring death of the United States of America and in the end, of Gilead itself. The "Historical Notes" at the end of the novel describe "the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies as a part of the International Historical Association Convention" in which Gilead is referred to as a significant period in time as it was important "for redrawing the map of the world, especially in this hemisphere" (*Tale* 311). These words spoken by the symposium's chair Maryann Crescent Moon, professor at the "Department of Caucasian Anthropology" (*Tale* 311), imply that the Republic of Gilead was just a specific period in time and that that period has ended. That is also evident in the participants of the symposium having an "Outdoor Period-Costume Sing-Song" as well as that all of the Gilead related activities are sponsored by "Gileadean Research Association" (*Tale* 311). Gilead is obviously a thing of the past. Maryann Crescent Moon's position at her university also shows that the Commanders of the Faithful did not succeed in the preservation of the Caucasian race. Crescent Moon is, as previously stated, a professor at the "Department of Caucasian Anthropology" (*Tale* 311) which, according to Sharon Rose Wilson, means that "the Caucasian race is now marginalized, an interesting subject for academic study" (77).

To sum up, the Commanders of the Faithful are at the top of Gilead's social structure because they are the creators of the Republic of Gilead. They have power over every other person in Gilead and that power comes from using the Bible as a means of political control. The Commanders are particularly interested in reproduction and have taken severe measures to

increase their chances of having a child. A lot of those measures are, as pointed out by Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson, "specifically aimed against women, their individuality, and their identity" (73).

2.2.3. Subjugation of Women in the Republic of Gilead

Although children are one of the most coveted things in the Republic of Gilead, when a baby girl is born, Offred is happy that the child is healthy, but still muses: "a girl, poor thing" (*Tale* 136). This is because Offred knows what it means to be female in the Republic of Gilead. Amin Malak states that "Gilead is openly misogynistic, in both its theocracy and practice" (6). The Commanders of the Faithful forced women back into their homes and after a while into the homes of the Commanders themselves. They accomplished that by dividing the women of Gilead into groups and assigned each group a role to play in a man's life. The women are divided into eight groups: the Wives, the Daughters, the Handmaids, the Marthas, the Aunts, the Jezebels, the Econowives, and the Unwomen. Kristen M. Billy states that "each woman is allowed to do only one thing: Marthas perform housework; Handmaids reproduce; Wives raise children and provide pleasant company; Jezebels have non-reproductive sex; Aunts train Handmaids" (3) while Econowives, who are assigned to poor men, have to do everything, and Unwomen are sent to the Colonies to dig toxic waste. Offred's Commander explains this division of women into different groups like this:

> "Nature demands variety, for men. It stands to reason, it's part of the procreational strategy. It's Nature's plan." I don't say anything, so he goes on. "Women know that instinctively. Why did they buy so many different clothes, in the old days? To trick the men into thinking they were several different women. A new one each day." (…)
>
> "So now (…) you merely have different women." This is irony, but he doesn't acknowledge it.
>
> "It solves a lot of problems," he says, without a twitch. (*Tale* 249)

Offred's Commander was a member of the original Sons of Jacob Think Tanks that shaped Gilead's ideology so it can be presumed that his words mirror the sentiments of all of the Commanders and their reasons for dividing women into groups. The Commander's sexist view of women prevents him from seeing any other reason for a woman to buy and wear different clothes except to trick men into being attracted to her; it does not even cross his mind that perhaps women

see their cloths as means of self-expression or that they dress for themselves and not for men. The Commander also sees women as a collective and does not take into an account their individuality as well as saying that *variety* is only required for men thus perpetuating double standards regarding female and male sexuality. This is not the only time Offred's Commander expresses this kind of sentiments. In a different occasion he explains why the Sons of Jacob rearranged the society in this way:

> The problem wasn't only with the women, he says. The main problem was with the men. There was nothing for them anymore. Nothing? I say. But they had… There was nothing for them to do, he says. They could make money, I say, a little nastily. (…) It's not enough, he says. It's too abstract. I mean there was nothing for them to do with women. What do you mean? I say. What about all the Pornycorners, it was all over the place, they even had it motorized. I'm not talking about sex, he says. That was part of it, the sex was too easy. Anyone could just buy it. There was nothing to work for, nothing to fight for. We have the stats from that time. You know what they were complaining about the most? Inability to feel. Men were turning off on sex, even. They were turning off on marriage. Do they feel now? I say. Yes, he says, looking at me. (*Tale* 221)

According to the Commander, in a pre-Gilead era, men were feeling useless and the only way to make them feel powerful once again was to make them in charge of women. For that reason the Commanders made women into male possessions and in the process, as J. Brooks Bouson states, robbed them "of their individual identities" and made them consent to the Commanders' idea of femininity (43).

2.2.3.1. The Wives

The Wives are the highest ranking female members of the Gileadean society because of their marriage to the Commanders of the Faithful. Their husbands assigned them the colour blue which, according to Michael Farber, by being the colour of the sky "is traditionally the colour of heaven, of hope, of constancy, of purity, of truth, of the ideal" and "in Christian colour-symbolism (…) belongs to the Virgin" (31). The colour of the Wives' clothes shows that the Commanders hold their wives in the highest regard, but a highest regard for a woman. Just like any other woman in Gilead, the Wives are not allowed to read or write, hold a job, own property or participate in the public sphere of life in Gilead. They spend their time in their sitting rooms, bedrooms or gardens and if they have to go somewhere they do not walk there but are taken by a car. Their sitting rooms and bedrooms are their own and they do not share them with their husbands. On one occasion,

Offred remarks that the Commander has to knock before entering the sitting room because "the sitting room is supposed to be Serena Joy's territory, he's supposed to ask permission to enter it" (*Tale* 97) and Serena once says that the Commander is "in his bedroom" (*Tale* 272). This shows that there is no real intimacy between the Commanders and their Wives, their marriages are designed solely for keeping up appearances and nothing more.

Serena Joy is the most important Wife in *The Handmaid's Tale* because she is the Wife of Offred's current Commander and therefore provides insight into the life of a Gileadean Wife. Serena Joy occupies her time by sewing, knitting, and working in the garden. Offred notes that "Many of the Wives have such gardens" (*Tale* 22). They also knit scarves for the Angels, Gilead's army, but Offred suspects that the army has no need for those scarves and that they "aren't sent to the Angels at all, but unravelled and turned back into balls of yarn, to be knitted again in their turn. Maybe it's just something to keep the Wives busy, to give them a sense of purpose" (*Tale* 23). Nilsen Gökçen states that "Serena's act of knitting endlessly has unmistakable allusions to Penelope's trick of endlessly weaving and unravelling in *The Odyssey* to keep her suitors busy. But unlike Penelope, who plays a trick on the suitors, the person on whom the trick is played is Serena Joy" (150-151). In fact, the trick is played on all the Wives because besides sewing, knitting and tending to their gardens, there is not much for them to do. They are so desperate for something to occupy their time that they pretend to be sick. Offred states that they get sick a lot because "it adds interest to their lives" so much that "they take turns. There is some sort of a list, invisible, unspoken" but "each is careful not to hog more than her share of attention" (*Tale* 162-163). When one of the Wives is sick the others go to visit her and bring her food prepared by their Marthas. Their sickness is just an excuse to spend time together which implies that they do not have many opportunities to leave their homes or meet somewhere else. Offred also notes that "Serena herself sometimes takes a few days off, tucked up in bed" (*Tale* 163).

According to Sherley Neuman, the character of Serena Joy could be based on a real life person named Phyllis Schlafly, a right wing wife, who "made a handsome income telling other women to return home, to let their husbands provide, and to use their femininity and feminine wiles as the core of their success and fulfilment as women" (860). This parallel between Phyllis Schlafly and Serena Joy is the most evident in Offred's recognition of Serena Joy from her pre-Gilead life. Offred says:

> Serena Joy was never her real name, not even then. Her real name was Pam. I read that in a profile on her, in a news magazine (…) she was making speeches. She was good at it.

> Her speeches were about the sanctity of the home, about how women should stay home. Serena Joy didn't do this herself, she made speeches instead, but she presented this failure of hers as a sacrifice she was making for the good of all (...) She doesn't make speeches any more. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word. (*Tale* 55-56)

Serena Joy's old occupation and beliefs imply that the Wives of Gilead are true believers in Gilead's ideology and their husbands' actions. The notion of a woman submitting to her husband comes from the Bible as well. As R. Claire Snyder-Hall points out, it can be found in Genesis 3:16, Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, I Peter 3:1–6 (565). For example, Genesis states that the husband has to rule over his wife (Genesis 3:16) while Ephesians state that wives should submit to their husbands like they submit to the Lord because the husband is the head of the wife and that the wives have to subject "to their own husbands in every thing" (Ephesians 5:22-24). The Wives of Gilead do subject to their husbands in everything as that gives them the right to rule over all other women in Gilead. Offred notes that if Serena Joy decided to punish her over anything, the Commander would not be able to help her as "the transgressions of women in the household, whether Martha or Handmaid, are supposed to be under the jurisdiction of the Wives alone" (*Tale* 170). Offred also states that the Wives are even allowed to hit them, "there's Scriptural precedent. But not with any implement. Only with their hands" (*Tale* 26). But the greatest power the Wives have is giving their Daughters into marriage. Offred notes that "it's the mothers, not fathers, who give away daughters these days and help with the arrangement of the marriages" (*Tale* 230-231). Lindsey Steuber finds that this arrangement of marriages is a form of the Wives' "participation in the trafficking on women" and that "is partly what gives the Wives some of their power in society" (21). Not all Wives can have daughters, or sons for that matter, on their own as most of them are infertile and Gilead is focused on reproduction. This is why the Wives are given a young, fertile woman to reproduce for them.

2.2.3.2. The Handmaids

In Genesis 30:1-3 Rachel says to Jacob to give her children or she will die, but, as Sharon Rose Wilson points out, it is actually Bilhah and not Rachel "who must produce children or die" (66) as Bilhah is placed upon her mistress' knees to have children for her (Genesis 30:3). The Commanders of the Faithful used this story to enslave all younger and fertile women in Gilead, named them Handmaids and brought them into their households in order to impregnate them. According to professor Pieixoto:

> the regime created an instant pool of such women by the simple tactic of declaring all second marriages and non-marital liaisons adulterous, arresting the female partners, and, on the grounds that they were morally unfit, confiscating the children they already had, who were adopted by childless couples of the upper echelons who were eager for progeny by any means. (...) Men highly placed in the regime were thus able to pick and choose among women who had demonstrated their reproductive fitness by having produced one or more healthy children... (*Tale* 316)

Those fertile women were then taken to the Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre where, under constant threat of violence, they were trained into being Handmaids. After that, a Handmaid was sent to a home of a Commander and his infertile Wife and was given two years to get pregnant. After those two years or after having a child, a Handmaid would be sent to another posting. All Handmaids have only three opportunities (postings), to have a child and if they fail to do so, they are declared an Unwoman and sent to the Colonies to dig toxic waste. Handmaids are used for reproduction purposes only, so this practice is a great indicator of Gilead's view of women - if a woman is of no use to a man and she cannot produce a child, she is no longer worthy to be seen as a woman at all and there is no place for her in a civilized society. If a Handmaid does have a child, she is not allowed to keep that child and is sent to another posting, but as a reward she will never become an Unwoman or be sent to the Colonies. According to Angela Laflen "the purpose of this structure is to combat falling population rates and to ensure that people who raise children are morally fit to do so" (87), and a woman that has sex with a married man, even if she cannot refuse to do so, is not fit to raise a child. Other women in Gilead despise the Handmaids. The Wives are often jealous of them and are even known to stab them in the belly with a knitting needle (*Tale* 21), the Econowives spit when they see them walking by (*Tale* 54) and Rita, a Martha in Offred's current posting, says that she "wouldn't debase herself like that" because she thinks that Handmaids have a choice in becoming a Handmaid as they could choose to go to the Colonies instead (*Tale* 20). The Handmaids are the only women in Gilead publicly known to have sex and just for that they are seen as immoral, although, as Offred points out, the Handmaids are not the Commanders' mistresses and there is nothing sensual in their relationship as it is required by law:

> It's forbidden for us to be alone with the Commanders. 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 favours are to be

> wheedled, by them or us, there are to be no toeholds for love. We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices. (*Tale* 146)

As Offred says, the Handmaids are there for *breeding purposes* only and their entire existence is orchestrated as such. Everything in their lives is proscribed by the government, from their clothes to the length of their hair. Their hair has to be long, but always covered because St. Paul said in The Epistle to the Corinthians that women should cover their heads because unlike men they were not created in God's image and that a covered head is a sign that a woman belongs to a man (I Corinthians 11:3-10). Therefore, a Handmaid is a possession, along with the Wife and a Martha because they have to cover their hair as well. All three groups of women wear veils, but when a Handmaid goes outside she has to put on the so-called white wings on her head. The wings are a head ornament or as Margaret Atwood states, a "face-hiding bonnet" she based on mid-Victorian costumes, the nuns and an "Old Dutch Cleanser package of the 1940s" ("Age of Trump"). Offred states that the wings prevent the Handmaids from looking up and make it hard "to get the full view, of the sky, of anything" (*Tale* 40). This makes the Handmaids keep their heads down and limits their communication with the world as well as with each other thus insuring their isolation from the world. Offred also says that "the white wings (…) are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen" (*Tale* 18). But the wings are not the only sign of modesty on them. As Daniel Barkass-Willamson points out, the clothes the Handmaids wear are also designed to repress "any presentation of identity or sexuality to Gilead's male population" (164). The narrator is a Handmaid herself so the readers are given a detailed description of their government issued clothes. They have to wear a "loose cotton pantaloons," stockings, a white shift and petticoat, an overdress (*Tale* 72) that is ankle-length and "gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts" with full sleeves (*Tale* 18) and flat-heeled shoes. When going outside they also have wear a long cloak as well as gloves during the winter. Offred says that everything on her, except the wings, is "red: the colour of blood, which defines us" (*Tale* 18). Atwood herself states that the blood in question is "the blood of parturition" ("Age of Trump") so it makes sense for the Handmaids to be defined by it since reproduction is their only purpose. But according to Michael Ferber red is also "the colour of faces when they show embarrassment, anger, or the flush of health or passion" (169). Red is used as a colour of shame twice in the novel – the letter J on a corpse left out for everybody to see is red (*Tale* 210) and the second time on people who sold, imported or manufactured women's clothing in the pre-Gilead era and who had to repent for their "sins" while wearing a conical paper hat with the word SHAME written in red colour on it (*Tale* 242). This implies that the Handmaids should be embarrassed by their position in the society and that what

they are doing is shameful although it is required by law, which reveals the hypocrisy of the system. The red also signifies health or passion (Ferber 169) which could also be applied to the Handmaids as they are fertile, therefore health and passion can be connected to their sexual services even though there is nothing passionate about it.

In further argument, Farber also states that in the Bible, red is the colour associated with Esau (169). Esau was one of the two sons of the Biblical patriarch Isaac and when he was born, he "came out red, all over like a hairy garment" and behind him, holding him by the heel, came out his brother - Jacob (Genesis 26:25-26). Esau was the firstborn and was to inherit his father as the head of the family but Jacob tricked Esau into selling him his birthright for "bread and pottage of lentils" as Esau was starving (Genesis 26:31-34). But in order to be the patriarch of the family, Jacob had to get his father's blessing and Isaac preferred Esau, so Jacob took advantage of his dying father's poor eyesight, pretended to be Esau and in the end got his father's blessing. Just like Jacob himself, the Sons of Jacob took away the rights of a person in red and profited from their deception. The deceitful Jacob became the forefather of the land of Israel and the Sons of Jacob became the most powerful people of Gilead.

To continue, the use of the colour red can also be explained in more political terms. According to professor Pieixoto, red was borrowed "from the uniforms of German prisoners of war in Canadian 'P. O. W.' camps of the Second World War era" (*Tale* 319). But this also gives insight into the position of a Handmaid in Gilead as they are prisoners of a system that uses their bodies for its own purposes and limits their freedom in return as "one even could not choose death for herself" (Wang 12). Offred is given a room in the Commander's house and while describing the room she notes that there is a chandelier conspicuously missing from the ceiling because "they've removed anything you could tie a rope to" (*Tale* 17). The painting of irises in her room has a frame but the glass is removed, the window in her room "only partly opens" and "the glass is shatterproof" not because they are afraid of the Handmaids running away because, as Offred says, they "wouldn't get far. It's those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge" (*Tale* 17-18) that they are worried about. For the same reason there are no mirrors in Offred's bathroom and there are no razors because, as Offred notes, "there were incidents in bathroom at first; there were cuttings, drownings" (*Tale* 72). This lack of mirrors also prevents the Handmaids from seeing their own faces which in return prevents them from seeing themselves "as a whole subject" (Joodaki et al. 38). Without a mirror, a Handmaid can see only her body which is usually hidden beneath red clothes and makes her look like any other Handmaid in Gilead, something that Offred herself notices when she goes shopping. Shopping, or more precisely

exchanging tokens for food, is the only remotely productive thing a Handmaid is allowed to do. On those instances, a Martha gives her tokens that have pictures of food on it and a Handmaid goes to the shops to procure them, but she is not allowed to go there alone or stay there for too long. Offred's shopping partner is another Handmaid named Ofglen and Offred states that, even though Ofglen has a different body frame, she looks like her own reflection (*Tale* 54). This loss of identity is amplified by the fact that the Handmaids do not have names, they get their names from a Commander they serve to indicate his possession of her. For example, Offred serves a Commander named Fred and therefore she is of-Fred while Ofglen serves a Commander named Glen so her name is of-Glen. Barbara Micelli states that this "patronymic" parallels, and here she quotes Abigail Rine, "the name Adam gives to Eve: wo-man (of man), denoting man as origin and woman as different from, yet belonging to a man" (97). Moreover, her lack of personal identity and her status as an object (possession) is further indicated by the fact that as she is moved to another post, she gets a new "name" - the patronymic of that Commander. One day, Offred goes shopping again and waits for Ofglen to arrive, but when Ofglen finally arrives, Offred notices that she is a different woman and asks her whether Ofglen has been transferred, to which the new Handmaid answers: "I am Ofglen". Her answer makes Offred think to herself: "Word perfect. And of course she is, the new one, and Ofglen, wherever she is, is no longer Ofglen. I never knew her real name" (*Tale* 295). Atwood never reveals Offred's real name throughout the entire novel which only emphasises a Handmaid's loss of identity[1].

Offred often uses the word "child" when describing herself, for example when she asks Rita about the previous Offred she says: "I am like a child here, there are some things I must not be told" (*Tale* 63), or when she wants to see the snow she says: "I fold back the sheet, get carefully up, on silent bare feet, in my nightgown, go to the window, like a child, I want to see" (*Tale* 108). Offred is treated like a child as well. She cannot eat what she wants, only the food the government finds good for her body, and if she does not finish her food she could be reported and punished; she is not allowed to drink alcohol, smoke or drink coffee, and when she needs to take a bath, a Martha has to prepare the bath for her and sit in front of the bathroom to make sure nobody else comes in. Her room is searched for forbidden items; she sleeps on a single bed; she is not allowed to hold a knife so the food is cut up for her and so on. She is also forced to go to the doctor and is

[1] Some scholars propose that Offred's real name is June, but in her 2017 essay "Margaret Atwood on what *The Handmaid's Tale* Means in the Age of Trump" written for *The New York Times*, Margaret Atwood states: "Some have deduced that Offred's real name is June, since, of all the names whispered among the Handmaids in the gymnasium/dormitory, "June" is the only one that never appears again. That was not my original thought but it fits, so readers are welcome to it if they wish."

taken there instead of going alone. There she is "poked and prodded" to make sure that she is healthy enough to have a child (*Tale* 70). The whole examination is very impersonal as a Handmaid has to be naked and stretched on a table with a sheet is covering her face because the doctor "deals with a torso only" (*Tale* 70). The examination takes place once a month right before the Ceremony.

2.2.3.2.1. The Ceremony

The Ceremony is a ritual in which a Handmaid is placed upon a Wife's lap and then the Commander penetrates her. Everything about the ritual is prescribed by the government because, as Joodaki et al. point out, the goal of the sexual act is not pleasure, but reproduction (37). On the day of the Ceremony, the Handmaid has to take a bath and eat a vitamin and mineral saturated meal in her room, while the Commander and the Wife eat and drink whatever they want during their supper in the dining room. The Handmaid is the only one that has to endure any restrictions in order to prepare for the Ceremony which once again shows her subordinated position in the society. After a while, a Martha comes and asks the Handmaid to go to the sitting room. The Handmaid then has to kneel next to the Wife's chair where she folds her hands in her lap, her thighs are together, "heels tucked underneath" her, "pressing up against" her body, "head lowered" (*Tale* 90-91). While in that position, the Handmaid has to wait for the other members of the household to appear. Those are the Marthas and then a Guardian assigned to serve the Commander. After that the Wife comes in the sitting room and sits in her chair, her husband comes last. The Commander has to knock and his Wife has to allow him to enter. The Commander then sits in his chair and unlocks the Bible and reads to his household. Once again, the Handmaid is subordinated as she is the only person in the room that has to kneel while the rest of the household stands or sits in their throne-like chairs. This scene looks almost as if the Handmaid is about to be executed and is at the mercy of everybody in the room.

The Commanders usually reads about Adam, Noah and then the story about Jacob, Rachel and Leah. The reading of this story is necessary as a moral and lawful justification of the act that is about to take place between the Commander, his Wife and the Handmaid. After the reading, the whole household says a silent prayer and the three of them retrieve into the Wife's bedroom. Offred describes the Ceremony like this:

> I lie on my back, fully clothed except for the healthy white cotton underdrawers. (...) Above me, towards the head of the bed, Serena Joy is arranged, outspread. Her legs are apart, I lie between them, my head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thighs on either side of me. She too is fully clothed. My arms are raised; she holds my

> hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product. (*Tale* 104)

The Commander is fully clothed as well and penetrating the Handmaid. Offred notes that there is no kissing between them nor anything remotely passionate and that the Commander is also simply "doing his duty" (*Tale* 104). After the Commander is done, he closes his zipper and leaves the bedroom. The Handmaid is supposed to rest for ten minutes with her feet on a pillow "to improve the chances" while the Wife silently meditates (*Tale* 104). As previously stated, this ritual is for reproductive purposes only and this is why everybody involved is fully clothed and there is no kissing involved. The Handmaid is just an object used by the Commander and his Wife in order to have a child. The Commander represents Jacob, the Wife Rachel and the Handmaid Bilhah who did not get to keep any of her children as they were all claimed by Rachel (Genesis 30:5-8). As Offred states, Rachel (the Wife) is in control of the product. This becomes even more evident when a child is actually born.

2.2.3.2.2. Birth Day

Birth Day is a ritual on which the Handmaid gives birth to a child and the Wife claims it as her own. There is only one Birth Day ritual throughout the entire novel and Offred participates in the ritual only as a spectator. The Birth Day is a special day in the Republic of Gilead because it is the culmination of their way of life. On that day, a special red van called the Birthmobile with a "blaring" red light and loud siren comes to pick up the Handmaids from their Commander's houses and takes them to a house where the birth is taking place (*Tale* 121). The Wives have a blue Birthmobile that fits their social status. Their Birthmobile has "real seats, upholstery. They face front and are not curtained off. They know where they are going" (*Tale* 125) unlike the Handmaids who sit on benches and have to guess who is giving birth that day. Birth Day is a special day on which the Handmaids are allowed to do some things they are usually not allowed to do like hugging, talking to each other, and even drinking a little bit of alcohol. The birth itself is entirely in the hands of women. There are some doctors waiting outside the house but most of the time they are not needed. The Handmaid giving birth is not allowed to take any medication as it is considered to be bad for the baby and also God told Eve that she will feel pain when bringing her children into the world as a punishment for convincing her husband to commit the Original sin (Genesis 3:16). There are also no ultrasounds in Gilead because it does not matter if the child is healthy or a shredder, a baby with some kind of deformity; it has to be carried for the full term. Instead of by a doctor, the birth is led by an Aunt, a woman in charge of training the Handmaids

in the Re-Education Centre, who gathers all of the Handmaids in the room with the Handmaid who is giving birth so they could chant "Breathe, breathe, (…) Hold, hold. Expel, expel, expel" (*Tale* 133). At the same time, the Wives are cheering on the Commander's Wife and massaging "her tiny belly, just as if she's really about to give birth herself" (*Tale* 126). When the time for the actual birth arrives, the Handmaid, who Offred knows from the Centre and is named Janine, is put on a Birthing Stool "where she sits on the lower of the two seats" while the Wife sits behind and above her and the Handmaids in the room continue to chant (*Tale* 135). After the baby comes out, the Aunt examines it while the Wife lies in her bed and the baby "is placed ceremoniously in her arms" and then the Wife gives the child its name (*Tale* 136). The birth itself really shows that the Handmaids have no rights to their child. After giving birth, Janine does not even get to see or hold her child as it is immediately placed in the Wife's arms and just like in the story of Rachel and Bilhah, the Wife gets to choose the name for the child. After the birth, the Handmaids have to leave the house while the Wives stay, have a banquet and shower the new mother with gifts while the Commander who has just become a father is nowhere to be seen as he is, as Offred states, preparing for the promotion he is about to get on account of the baby (*Tale* 126). The Handmaid that gives birth will be allowed to stay in order to nurse the child for a few months as "they believe in mother's milk. After that she'll be transferred, to see if she can do it again, with someone else who needs a turn" (*Tale* 137). Her only reward is that she will never be declared an Unwoman or sent to the Colonies, but she does not get to raise her child.

2.2.3.3. Daughters

Not much is known about the daughters since Commander Fred and Serena Joy do not have children, so Offred is not in contact with one. Offred mentions that they wear white dresses, the colour, as Angela Laflen points out, "most often associated with virginity in Western iconoclasm" (92). The colour suits them because those girls actually are virgins. Offred sees them on their wedding day, as they are married in groups, and observes that for years those girls were not allowed to be alone with a man and "some of them are no more than fourteen years old" (*Tale* 231). They are given to Angels, soldiers in Gilead's army, and if the couple are not able to reproduce, in time they will be given a Handmaid. Offred wonders if they remember the time before and "playing baseball, in jeans and sneakers, riding their bicycles (...) Reading books, all by themselves" and adds that in three to five years they no longer will and will "always have been in white, in groups of girls; they'll always have been silent" (*Tale* 231). The treatment of Daughters is just further evidence of Gilead's hypocrisy. Gilead is a country that claims that children are a gift from God, and yet they do not mind robbing their own daughters of their childhood.

2.2.3.4. Marthas

The Marthas are women who cook and clean in the houses of the Commanders and their Wives. They are named after a woman from the Bible who invited Jesus into her home. While Martha "was cumbered about much serving," her sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to his word (Luke 10:39-40). When asked if he minded that Mary was not doing any work, Jesus said that he actually preferred Mary listening to His word than Martha working (Luke 10:42). Considering their sexist attitudes, it is no wonder that the Commanders chose the silent and eager Martha to serve as a role model and not her sister Mary. The Marthas wear dull green "long and concealing dresses, but with a bib apron over it" (*Tale* 19). According to Ferber, green is "the colour of young vegetation and springtime" (89), but Marthas wear a dull green which suggests that their time has passed and they are no longer young or fertile. Cora, the other Martha in Commander Fred's house, mentions that she would not mind being a Handmaid if she were ten years younger (*Tale* 20). Marthas are not allowed to socialize with the Handmaids or leave the house very often.

2.2.3.5. The Econowives

The Econowives wear red, blue and green striped dresses as they have to perform all the functions of the household. They are married to poor men and are looked down on by the Aunts who hope that one day when the times are better "no one will have to be an Econowife" (*Tale* 54). Some Econowives can get pregnant, as Offred and the first Ofglen have witnessed some Econowives having a funeral for a foetus, but can rarely carry the pregnancy to term. Namely, according to the black jar in which the foetus is being carried, Offred and Ofglen assume it could not have been more than four months old. This is probably the reason they do not like Handmaids.

2.2.3.6. The Aunts

The Aunts are "childless or infertile or older women who were not married" (*Tale* 320) in a pre-Gilead world and who train and brainwash future Handmaids into accepting their role in the Gileadean society. They work at the Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre and are "a vicious élite of collaborators who conduct torture lectures" while being "the church-state's staunchest supporters" (Malak 6). The Aunts patrol around the compound with electric cattle prods and are known to use them if they are not obeyed. They are also known to beat women with "steel cables, frayed at the end" (*Tale* 102) if they try to escape. For the first attempt they would use the cable on the feet and for the second attempt on the hands because, as one of the Aunts says "for our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential" (*Tale* 102). The Aunts keep reminding the Handmaids that their purpose is reproduction, and besides using physical violence, they also verbally abuse the Handmaids. They hold lectures where they speak of women working together

for "a common end" (*Tale* 171) which is a euphemism for all women being complicit with Gilead's policies; they refer to women from the pre-Gilead era as sluts for not wanting to have children and show carefully edited documentaries and violent porn movies to convince the Handmaids that the old society did not respect women and that they are better off in Gilead. The Aunts participate in Gilead's subjugation of women and for that they are rewarded. The Aunts are the only women in the Republic of Gilead who are allowed to read and write. The Aunts are also free to go wherever they want which is evident when Offred's friend Moira escapes from the Centre in an Aunt khaki uniform. There are checkpoints all over the town and the rest of the women always have to provide an identity pass in order to be let through but Moira states that in the Aunt uniform she did not have to do such a thing. This also shows that the Aunts are respected members of the regime. But still they are not allowed to carry guns; as Offred notices, even they "could not be trusted with guns" (*Tale* 14). This shows that the Aunts are still considered to be inferior just because they are women. According professor Pieixoto, the Aunts were deliberately chosen to train the Handmaids because the Commander knew that:

> the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves. For this there were many historical precedents; in fact, no empire imposed by force or otherwise has ever been without this feature: control of the indigenous by members of their own group. In the case of Gilead, there were many women willing to serve as Aunts, either because of a genuine belief in what they called "traditional values," or for the benefits they might thereby acquire. When power is scarce, a little of it is tempting. (*Tale* 320)

By choosing to control other women, the Aunts bought themselves some power in Gilead and have proven themselves to be an important cog in Gilead's misogynist system.

2.2.3.7. The Jezebels

The Jezebels, named after a vilified Biblical queen who refused to be faithful to YHWH and who was for that reason accused of being a harlot (Jackson 239-247), are prostitutes placed in a hotel outside the city centre. Their job is to have non-reproductive sex with the Commanders and foreign delegations brought there to close trade deals. Once again female sexuality is turned into a commodity to satisfy powerful men (Moosavinia and Yousefi 169). The hotel is referred to as Jezebel's and according to Steuber "is a microcosm of the power and gender structure" (17). All the men visiting Jezebel's wear uniforms and suits while the women have to wear revealing outfits like baby-doll pyjamas, bikinis, cheerleader outfits, a cat and a devil costume and so on. Offred's

friend Moira, who was taken there after her escape from the Centre, has to wear an outfit reminiscent of a famous male magazine bunny. The costumes serve to dehumanize the women and pander to the Commanders' sexual fantasies. Deborah Hooker also notes that Moira's bunny outfit marks a "metamorphosis from human to animal" (286). All of the costumes for the women are government issued. Jezebels are allowed to drink and smoke as none of them serve for reproductive purposes, but are not allowed to put on weight as that would make them undesirable. Jezebel's is also a place where homosexuality, that is female homosexuality, is allowed and utilized for the Commanders' amusement while in the rest of Gilead it is called Gender Treachery and is punishable by death. According to Commander Fred, the women who work there used to be prostitutes in the pre-Gilead era but in fact some of them used to be sociologists, lawyers, business women and so on. Fred sees them as a collection (*Tale* 249) the Commanders acquired thus making it evident that they enjoy the idea of dominating and subduing smart and powerful women by objectifying them. Jezebel's is a place where men come to exercise their power over women which can be construed by the fact that, according to Moira, many of the Commanders like to sneak their Handmaids into the hotel because the Handmaids "are supposed to be (…) chaste vessels" and the Commanders enjoy dressing them into skimpy outfits and putting make-up on them (*Tale* 255). Nobody besides the men who come there and the Jezebels themselves knows that they exist and the only way a Jezebel can leave the hotel is if she is dead.

2.2.3.8. Unwomen

Unwomen, who wear grey dresses, are women who are sent to the Colonies to clean toxic waste. Unwomen are made up of old women, Handmaids who failed to reproduce during their three chances, women who refused to assimilate, and former Catholic nuns who refused to break their vows. Basically, all women the Commanders find useless because of their inability to reproduce as well as women they cannot control.

To sum up, the Republic of Gilead has its own version of Christianity that relies heavily on the Old Testament. The Commanders, the men with the highest political and social rank in Gilead, used that religion to subjugate women, strip them of their identity and put them under their authority as the basis of their ideology. But establishing an ideology is one thing whereas making sure that everybody abides by the rules of that ideology is another. This is done through the means of ideological implementation and control.

3. Ideological Implementation and Control

According to C. W. Cassinelli, all totalitarian regimes strive for complete control of their subjects which can be achieved in two possible ways. One of them includes "the complete destruction of the human personality" by creating insecurity regarding "authority, orthodoxy" and exclusion of "stable personal relationships" known as "ideological control," while the other way includes "complete disciplinary control" over all "beliefs and ideas" through "ordering and regimentation of society" with the help of a doctrine (90) known as indoctrination. Like any other totalitarian regime, the Republic of Gilead uses both of these ways to control its citizens and that control starts with the process of indoctrination.

3.1. Indoctrination

A doctrine is a "system of beliefs (…) which covers the most important aspects of human existence and which is completely accepted by those who control the totalitarian regime" (Cassinelli 69). It is comprised of "a conception of a final perfect state of human affairs based upon a complete ethical rejection of existing society and conceived as applicable to the entire world" (Cassinelli 69). The final perfect state of the Republic of Gilead is a class divided society in which everybody plays a government prescribed role. This includes the rejection and sometimes literal destruction of the ideology of Gilead's predecessor, the United States of America. Gilead closed down all American universities, burned magazines, books and even clothes, censured and then completely discontinued printing of all newspapers, conducted door to door searches to find and destroy any physical traces of American life and even abolished American holidays like Independence Day (*Tale* 209). According to Schweitzer, "exclusion of rival ideologies is usually followed by indoctrination of the own ideology" which "constitutes a form of mental violence" (52). According to the Cambridge dictionary, this form of mental violence includes frequently repeating "an idea or belief to someone in order to persuade them to accept it" ("Indoctrinate"). This is why Gilead establishes "educational institutions" to teach its' citizens the tenets of its new ideology (Moosavinia and Yousefi 163). One of them is the Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre.

3.1.1. The Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre

The Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre, also known as the Red Centre, is an institution in which the Aunts "disseminate" Gilead's "doctrine among women" (Somacerrera 53) in order to prepare them for their future as Handmaids in Gileadean society and to get them to accept that future. Offred was taken there after being hunted down while trying to escape Gilead with her husband Luke and their daughter. Based on Offred's descriptions of a gymnasium, a football field, bathrooms, desks, and the blackboard, it is clear that the Red Centre is a former high school which only emphasises the Centre's educational purposes. But she also describes the army cots for

sleeping in that same gymnasium, the barbed wire fence around the football field, locks that do not lock in the bathrooms, desks that were not to be used for writing and an Aunt standing in front of the blackboard while saying that the women of the past were sluts for not procreating (*Tale* 123), all of which indicate the Centre's coercive nature.

The Aunt's condemnation of the women of the past is a technique used in the Centre very often in order "to reinforce the state ideology" relating to women (Moosavinia and Yousefi 166). According to Schweitzer "the right to indoctrination is derived from the existence of the arch enemy" (52) while Eric Hoffer states that hatred is one of the most important elements of any mass movement, including totalitarianism and that in order for a mass movement to be successful there has to be a belief in "a devil" (91). The devil and the arch enemy of Gilead's ideology is the ideology of the United States of America, especially American ideology regarding women. One of the Aunts, Aunt Lydia often comments on the "wickedness" (*Tale* 123) of the women from the time before for not wanting to have children and for dressing immodestly. The Aunts also distort the past in order to correspond to Gilead's sexist policies. For example, the Handmaids are shown a movie once a week to demonstrate that said female wickedness or to see how women were treated in the time before. Offred states that sometimes they would show them:

> an old porno film from the seventies or eighties. Women kneeling, sucking penises or guns, women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed. Once we had to watch a woman being slowly cut into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out. (*Tale* 128)

After a movie Aunt Lydia would exclaim that this is what they thought of women before and how it used to be for them (*Tale* 128). These movies are presented as reality and are carefully selected to make it seem that women were being disrespected, humiliated and abused on a regular basis after which the alternative of being violated by a Commander once a month does not seem bad in comparison. The Handmaids are also shown movies about women working which the Aunts call "Unwoman documentary" and refer to them as movies about women "wasting their time" (*Tale* 128). In Gilead, Unwomen are women who do not reproduce or serve a man in any other way and therefore their lives are empty and meaningless just like the lives of childless women in the time before. Offred also notes that the Aunts do not play the soundtrack on the films like that while they do play them on the porno movies because they want them to hear "the screams and grunts and

shrieks" but do not want them "to hear what the Unwomen are saying" (*Tale* 129). The Handmaids are not supposed to hear that, for example, those women were happy, confident or had a purpose in life because that does not match Gilead's policies. The Handmaids are also shown a film that features a pregnant woman in the time before that is "wired up to a machine, electrodes coming out of her every which way so that she looked like a broken robot, an intravenous drip feeding into her arm" and are told that "they drugged women, induced labour, cut them open, sewed them up" (*Tale* 124) in order to justify the Handmaids not getting anaesthetics while giving birth because the pain of childbirth is the price women have to pay for Eve committing the Original sin.

In addition, the Aunts also read the Rachel, Bilhah and Jacob story every day during breakfast and play a recording of a man saying the Beatitudes during lunch. Offred lists several of them: "*Blessed be the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the silent*" and says "I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out too, but there was no way of checking" (*Tale* 100). Offred is right in her assumption that *Blessed are the silent* is not in the Bible while *Blessed are the meek* is continued with "for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). This makes it evident that Gilead is capable of distorting the Bible itself to fit and justify their policies. The movies and the recordings serve their purpose but Aunts themselves are the greatest instrument of the Red Centre's indoctrination.. Moosavinia and Yousefi state that "the Aunts are masters of rhetoric" (163) which can be seen in Aunt Lydia's emotional speeches in which she tries to convince Offred and the rest of the women to accept their position of a Handmaid. She often speaks in platitudes like: "Yours is the position of honour" (*Tale* 23), "think of yourselves as pearls" (*Tale* 124) or "you are the shock troops, you will march out in advance, into dangerous territory" (*Tale* 122). Offred also describes, at times, Aunt Lydia's voice trembling, being "wheedling, conspiratorial" (*Tale* 28), and notes that "she is rich in pauses, which she savours in her mouth" (*Tale* 124) and often uses gestures like "wringing her hands" (*Tale* 122). Aunt Lydia uses these speeches to convince the Handmaids to accept their new reality but also to justify Gilead's policies as she speaks about the pollution, dropping birth rates and Gilead's plans for the future. According to Eric Hoffer, "an effective doctrine: as well as being a source of power, it must also claim to be a key to the book of the future" (9). Aunt Lydia claims that one day the population level will be "up to scratch again" (*Tale* 171) because of the sacrifices women are making now and promises that:

> for the generations that come after (...) it will be so much better. The women will live in harmony together, all in one family (...) we'll no longer have to transfer you from one house to another because there will be enough to go round (...)Women united for a common end!

> Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task. Why expect one woman to carry out all the functions necessary to the serene running of a household? It isn't reasonable or humane. Your daughters will have greater freedom. (*Tale* 171-172)

The Aunts use this promise of female utopia to excuse the lives the Handmaids will live in Gilead and to rationalize Gilead's sexist political system. The Aunts also try to prepare the Handmaids for the people they will serve and ask them to sympathise with the Wives because this is difficult for them and tell them that the Commanders might try to make them their mistresses but they have to set the boundaries because "they can't help it (…) God made them that way but He did not make you that way. He made you different" (*Tale* 55). Just like the Commander Fred, the Aunts perpetuate double standards regarding male and female sexuality and also shift the blame on the women in case there is something between them and the Commanders, even though the Commanders have tremendous power over them and the Handmaids cannot say no to them without suffering the consequences of their rejection.

The Red Centre also prepares the Handmaids for the Ceremony as they have to practice in which position to hold their bodies and how to breathe during the ritual. They also prepare them for their long days of not doing anything by giving them time for naps each day. However, Offred suspects that the Aunts are drugging them in order to keep them calm and notes that perhaps most of them simply became lethargic after the initial shock of being trapped there. The Handmaids are also not allowed to talk to each other or to form friendships in order to be prepared for the isolation they will experience in the outside world.

The Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre is an educational institution in the sense that it teaches the Handmaids to accept the new social norms of the Republic of Gilead and prepares them for a life inside of that Republic. The Handmaids even get to graduate and as a sign of graduation they get their white wings and a Commander to serve. The Centre also has a coercive nature as it is guarded by armed military forces and the Aunts who have electric cattle prods and punish the Handmaids if they do not obey the rules set out by the them or if they try to run away. *The Handmaid's Tale* is told from the perspective of a Handmaid so she only describes the re-education centre for the Handmaids. Neither she nor professor Pieixoto discuss re-education centres for other members of the Gileadean society so it remains unknown how Gilead's doctrine was disseminated amongst them.

3.1.2. Television

Television is another way in which the Republic of Gilead gets to impose its doctrine onto its citizens. According to Michael Ryan, television provides "the filters and frames through which many people view the world" which makes it possible for those who control those filters "to be in charge of what will be seen or how reality will be perceived" (42). Gilead does just that, it controls the way the reality is perceived and that is through the prism of its doctrines.

Offred is not allowed to watch television very often, but when she does it is because the Commander and his Wife want her and the rest of the household to see the news. The news shows the war against other religions like the Baptists and the Quakers. Offred's description makes it obvious that the footage was carefully edited as she says: "we are shown two helicopters, black ones with silver wings painted on the sides. Below them, a clump of trees explodes. Now a close shot of a prisoner, with a stubbled and dirty face, flanked by two Angels in their neat black uniforms" (*Tale* 92). The shots are designed to show Gilead's military superiority and the defeat and unlawfulness of any other religion. The news also shows the resettlement of African-Americans, which is in tone with their racist ideology, and the anchorman speaks about the secret police cracking a secret underground ring that smuggled "precious national resources" to Canada (*Tale* 93). Offred once states that she is a national resource and is too important to "fade (…) into another landscape" and therefore, like the rest of the Handmaids, has a tattoo of four digits and an eye on her ankle (*Tale* 75). By watching the news, Offred and the rest of the Handmaids can see that there is no way for them to leave Gilead because they are too important for the country and their policies regarding reproduction. Besides the news, the television programme also features shows in which men sing religious hymns and nothing else. Offred also notes that Gilead blocks the signal of a Canadian television station which prevents the Gileadeans to be exposed to any other ideology. That is all Offred gets to see during her watching of television but she notices cameras during some of Gilead's rituals so it is implied that those rituals are televised. One of those rituals is called Prayvaganza. There are women's Prayvaganzas, which the Handmaids are obligated to attend while Marthas and Econowives are not, and men's Prayvaganzas. Men's Prayvaganzas are for military victories while women's are for the weddings of the Daughters or a former Catholic nun breaking her vows and agreeing to become a Handmaid. This way the Prayvaganzas serve to reiterate the status of Gileadean Christianity as one true religion and a woman's place in the society.

To sum up, Gilead used institutions like the Rachel and Leah Re-Education Centre to distribute its doctrine among the women they use as Handmaids and then continued to use the

medium of television to spread their doctrine among the rest of their citizens. According to Hannah Arendt, indoctrination means that totalitarian regimes possess absolute control over its subjects which then allows them to use violence to "realize constantly its ideological doctrines and its practical lies" (341). That violence is a part of the next component in Gilead's ideological control which is public execution and punishment.

3.2. Public Execution and Punishment

According to Eric Hoffer, once a regime is established "words, though still useful, cease to play a decisive role" and in order to maintain itself that same regime "has to order things so that when the people no longer believe, they can be made to believe by force" (122). The most effective way of making someone believe by force in a totalitarian regime is something Hannah Arendt refers to as "organized violence" (373). Organized violence causes a member of the regime to fear "leaving the movement more than he fears the consequences of his complicity in illegal actions" and it creates "protective walls which surround its fictitious world" and creates the regime's own reality (373). In the Republic of Gilead that organized violence takes form of public executions disguised as rituals as well as forced labour in a remote part of Gilead known as the Colonies.

3.2.1. Salvaging

Salvaging is the name given to public executions of people convicted of crimes in the Republic of Gilead. According to Michel Foucault public executions have "a juridical-political function" as they instantly restore "injured sovereignty" in a form of a ceremony (48) and Salvaging definitely functions as a ceremony. Offred describes only one Salvaging in the entire novel because as she says: "Women's Salvagings are not frequent. There is less need for them. These days we are so well behaved" (*Tale* 284-285). The men have their own Salvagings that are more frequent than the women's which can be construed from the number of the bodies left after the ritual for everyone to see. Both Men's and Women's Salvaging are televised. The ritual is announced only one day earlier so the women would not have enough time to get used to it (*Tale* 284). On the day of the ritual, a bell tolls as a signal for the women to head to the place of the execution. The Handmaids walk there in twos and take their place kneeling on red cushions right in front of the stage that has "three wooden posts that stand on it, with the loops of rope" (*Tale* 284) while the Wives and daughters sit on wooden chairs in the back, and Econowives and Marthas sit around the edges. Offred also describes "a long piece of rope which winds like a snake in front of the first row of cushions, along the second, and back through the lines of chairs (…) the front end of the rope runs up onto the stage" (*Tale* 285). On the stage there are three women that are about to be executed, two Handmaids and one Wife who look as if they had been drugged. Offred states that the

Handmaids can be executed for "unchastity" (*Tale* 287) or for trying to kill a Commander or a Wife, whereas the Wives can be executed for killing a Handmaid or for adultery (*Tale* 287). The ritual is conducted by the Aunts. Offred describes them as an "official procession" of "one Aunt in front, two Salvagers in their black hoods and cloaks a pace behind her. Behind them are the other Aunts" (*Tale* 285). The Aunt in the front is Aunt Lydia who addresses the women present at the Salvaging, greets them, says what Offred calls "a prologue" (*Tale* 286) and then informs the women that she will not disclose which crimes the prisoners have committed. Aunt Lydia calls out one of the prisoners and the two Salvagers tie her hands behind her back, place a white bag on her head, help her get on the high stool, put a noose around her neck and then kick the stool. The women in the audience then have to touch the rope in front of them and put their hand on their heart in order to show unity with the Salvagers but Offred notes that this also means consent and complicity in the death of these women.

According to Foucault the purpose of public execution is "to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign" as public executions do not re-establish justice but reactivate power (49). This is evident in this Salvaging as it is not even stated which crimes the prisoners supposedly committed; the public should just believe that they committed them. This was done under the pretext that the descriptions of the crimes during the previous Salvagings contributed to those crimes being committed more often, but Offred mentions that the last Salvaging before this one took place two years ago. There obviously were no crimes committed as they would require more public executions. It is important to note that the name Salvaging, according to professor Pieixoto, most likely originated from the Philippines where it was "a general term for the elimination of one's political enemies" (*Tale* 319). Perhaps this is the reason that the crimes of the prisoners were not read or simply because, in the end, the actual crime is not that important. As Foucault states, the real importance of a public execution is "to deploy its pomp in public" and to show that "nothing was to be hidden of this triumph of the law" (49) or in this case from the Republic of Gilead. But Salvaging is not over just because the ritual is over; later that same day the bodies of the three executed women are displayed for all to see on the Wall.

3.2.1.1. The Wall

The Wall is a wall where Gilead displays the bodies of the people they executed in order for everyone to see. Foucault states the reason "the corpses of the executed persons" are displayed in this way is "because not only must people know, they must see with their own eyes (…) because they must be made to be afraid; but also because they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment" (58).

Sandra Tomc states that Margaret Atwood confirmed that *The Handmaid's Tale* takes place in Cambridge, Massachusetts and that the Wall Offred describes in the novel is "the wall around Harvard yard" (87). This is confirmed by Offred's memory of the buildings inside the Wall that once belonged to a university. The first time Offred actually describes the Wall she states that there are six new bodies hanging on the Wall with their heads covered with white bags. She notes that they are there as a result of Men's Salvagings and says: "we (…) stand and look at the bodies. It doesn't matter if we look. We're supposed to look: this is what they are there for, hanging on the Wall. Sometimes they'll be there for days, until there's a new batch, so as many people as possible will have the chance to see them" (*Tale* 42). Offred notes that, this time, the men on the Wall wear white coats and have a placard with a drawing of a human foetus on it which means that they were doctors who performed abortions in the time before. On a different occasion she sees a body of a man in black cassock, which means the he was a priest of a different religion, and the bodies of two men with purple placards around their necks which is a sign for so-called Gender Treachery (*Tale* 53) which is Gilead's name for homosexuality. On a different occasion, Offred sees a body of man that has an upside-down cross on his placard and concludes that he was a Catholic, and a body of a man that has only the letter J on him but Offred is not sure for which religion the J stands for. Just by looking at the placards on the bodies displayed Offred knows the reason why they were executed and in this way becomes Foucault's witness and a guarantor of the punishment. The bodies send a clear message to those who see them of what will not be tolerated in the Republic of Gilead and what will happen to those who do not obey the rules of the Republic.

3.2.1.2. The Particicution

Salvaging is not the only form of public execution in Gilead. After the hangings of the three women, Aunt Lydia informs the women that Salvaging is not finished. She tells the Handmaids to stand up and form a circle while some of the Wives and daughters leave and some stay to watch what is about to take place. Only the Handmaids are the part of the circle and Offred notes that they are all pushing each other to get to the front or the middle of the circle because "it's a mistake to hang back too obviously in any group like this; it stamps you as lukewarm, lacking in zeal" (*Tale* 289). With this observation Offred notes that the Handmaids know that this is a performance and that they are being watched and assessed based on their behaviour during this part of the ritual. As the Handmaids are forming the circle the Guardians pick up the cushions and the rope. Aunt Lydia then informs them that a Particicution is about to take place and repeats the rules of this ritual: "You will wait until I blow the whistle. After that, what you do is up to you, until I blow the whistle again" (*Tale* 290). In this way Gilead assigns the blame for what is about to happen on the

Handmaids themselves. After that, two Guardians "half-drag" a man also dressed in a Guardians uniform but his "uniform is dirty and torn" and he is covered in bruises and cuts. Offred notes that his face is so deformed that he does not look like a human anymore and that he looks drunk (*Tale* 290). Aunt Lydia then tells them that he is guilty of rape of two Handmaids and that one of them was pregnant and the baby died. Aunt Lydia then blows her whistle and at first the women are just looking at him but when he tries to say that he did not rape any one, Offred describes a change in the women's behaviour:

> There's a surge forward, like a crowd at a rock concert in the former time, when the doors opened, that urgency coming like a wave through us. The air is bright with adrenalin, we are permitted anything and this is freedom, in my body also, I'm reeling, red spreads everywhere, but before that tide of cloth and bodies hits him Ofglen is shoving through the women in front of us, propelling herself with her elbows, left, right, and running towards him. She pushes him down, sideways, then kicks his head viciously, one, two, three times, sharp painful jabs with the foot, well-aimed. Now there are sounds, gasps, a low noise like growling, yells, and the redbodies tumble forward and I can no longer see, he's obscured by arms, fists, feet. A high scream comes from somewhere, like a horse in terror. (*Tale* 291-292)

After a while, Aunt Lydia blows the whistle for the second time but not all of the Handmaids stop at once and have to be dragged away from what is left of the man. After that, they are free to go. Offred states that all of the Handmaids seem dazed and describes Janine as walking "like she's feeling her way with her feet, in the dark" and that she looks like she is "in free fall, she's in withdrawal" (*Tale* 292). Heidi Slettedahl MacPherson states that Particicution is a way for the Handmaids to "vent (…) their frustration and enforced passivity" (54) which is corroborated by professor Pieixoto in the "Historical Notes". Pieixoto notes that this ritual was devised by a Commander named Fredrick Judd who, when presenting the form of the ritual, argued that Particicution would not only function as a "way of ridding yourself of subversive elements, but that it would also act as a steam valve for the female elements in Gilead" (*Tale* 320). Pieixoto also states that Particicution became so popular in the later stages of Gilead that it "took place four times a year, on solstices and equinoxes" (*Tale* 320). In comparison, Offred has only heard about this ritual and never participated in it, and she has been a Handmaid for at least four years since her current posting is her last chance for having a child and not going to the Colonies. Pieixoto finds that this practice was so "popular and effective" because "it must have been most gratifying for these Handmaids, so rigidly controlled at other times, to be able to tear a man apart with their

bare hands every once in a while" (*Tale* 320). Slettedahl MacPherson also states that Particicution is "a way of reinforcing the behaviour of a crowd" (54). According to Eric Hoffer when people "renounce the self and become part of a compact whole" not only do they "renounce personal advantage but are also rid of personal responsibility" and "there is no telling to what extremes of cruelty and ruthlessness a man will go when he is freed from the fears, hesitations, doubts and the vague stirrings of decency that go with individual judgment" (100). When Offred witnesses the execution of the three women her thoughts make it clear that she is still an individual as she gives snide comments on Aunts Lydia's speech and later feels ill when the first woman is executed and says: "I don't want to see it anymore. I look at the grass instead" (*Tale* 288). Even when the Handmaids begin to form a circle she remains an individual and does not want to participate in what she suspects is coming next as she says to herself: "they wouldn't go that far" (*Tale* 290). But when she hears the accusations against the man they are about to kill, Offred becomes a part of a We and notices a change inside of her as she says: "the baby too, after what we go through. It's true, there is a bloodlust; I want to tear, gouge, rend" (*Tale* 291). Offred continues to be a part of the crowd as she says: "We jostle forward, our heads turn from side to side, our nostrils flare, sniffing death, we look at one another, seeing the hatred" (*Tale* 291). Offred sees the humanity in the man at the last moment but the other Handmaids do not as they jump on the man and tear him apart. At the end of all of it, Offred notes that she feels disgusted by what just happened but also notes that she feels hungry, specifically that death makes her hungry and then she thinks of the word "*relish*" (*Tale* 293). This is Offred's first Particicution and this time she is able to free herself of the mob mentality, but the question remains whether she will be able to ease her hunger when the next Particicution comes along. As previously stated, Commander Judd saw Particicution as a way of ridding Gilead of subversive elements and Ofglen confirms that this Particicution had the same purpose. Namely, she reveals that, just like her, the man the Handmaids killed was a part of the resistance known as Mayday and she kicked him in the head to knock him out and "put him out of his misery" (*Tale* 292). His face was deformed because he was tortured before the ritual. Gilead used the Handmaids' pent up anger and misery to kill a man that was actually trying to help them.

According to Eric Hoffer "dying and killing seem easy when they are part of a ritual, ceremonial, dramatic performance or game" because it gives people "the illusion that they are participating in a grandiose spectacle, a solemn or light-hearted dramatic performance" (86). Gilead's public executions do look like a grandiose spectacle with their processions, ropes, audience of Wives, Daughters, Marthas, and Econowives, red pillows and a stage. But in reality

they are just an extremely cruel way to kill those who oppose Gilead's laws and who are seen as subversive, thus once again revealing Gilead's true sadistic nature.

3.2.2. The Colonies

The Colonies are mentioned throughout the novel as a form of punishment every woman is afraid of even though most of them do not know exactly what is there to be afraid of. The only thing known for sure about the Colonies is that Unwomen live there and Cora once mentions that people starve there (*Tale* 20). The only two people who know something more about them and speak about it are Moira and professor Pieixoto. Pieixoto says that the Colonies "were composed of portable populations used mainly as expendable toxic cleanup squads" even though some of the lucky ones were "assigned to less hazardous tasks, such as cotton picking and fruit harvesting" (*Tale* 321). Professor Pieixoto has only read about the Colonies while Moira has seen a movie about them. After escaping the Red Centre, Moira was captured, tortured and then give a choice to go to the Colonies or to work at Jezebel's. This is when she was shown the movie and she describes what she saw as follows:

> In the Colonies, they spend their time cleaning up (…) Sometimes it's just bodies, after a battle. The ones in city ghettoes are the worst, they're left around longer, they get rottener. This bunch doesn't like dead bodies lying around, they're afraid of a plague or something. So the women in the Colonies there do the burning. The other Colonies are worse, though, the toxic dumps and the radiation spills. They figure you've got three years maximum, at those, before your nose falls off and your skin pulls away like rubber gloves. They don't bother to feed you much, or give you protective clothing or anything, it's cheaper not to. Anyway they're mostly people they want to get rid of. They say there's other Colonies, not so bad, where they do agriculture: cotton and tomatoes and all that. But those weren't the ones they showed me the movie about. (*Tale* 260)

Moira's description of the Colonies corresponds with Hannah Arendt's description of the concentration and extermination camps. According to Arendt, there are three types of concentration camps: Hades, Purgatory, and Hell. The Hades is the name for camps that house "refugees, stateless persons, the asocial and the unemployed" and are "relatively mild" because their purpose is to get "persons who have become superfluous and bothersome" out of the way. Purgatory is the name for camps that combine "neglect with chaotic forced labour" while Hell is the name for camps "in which the whole of life was thoroughly and systematically organized with a view to the greatest possible torment" (445). The Colonies that have been shown to Moira match

the description of the Purgatory as people in the Colonies are forced to burn dead bodies or clean toxic spills and are barely fed or given protective clothes. According to Arendt, all three types of camps "have one thing in common: the human masses sealed off in them are treated as if they no longer existed, as if what happened to them were no longer of any interest to anybody, as if they were already dead and some evil spirit gone mad" and stopped "them for a while between life and death before admitting them to eternal peace" (445). The Colonies fit this description as well because, as Moira says, people have about three years before they start decomposing and the only way someone leaves the Colonies if they are dead, and at the same time nobody goes there unless they are convicted of a crime and they stay there until their death. Moira says that the Colonies are inhabited by old women, "Handmaids who've screwed up their three chances, and incorrigibles like" her as well as "about a quarter men" who are convicted of Gender Treachery (*Tale* 260-261). She also informs Offred that she saw her mother there and that she should not be happy that her mother is still alive because even death is better than life in the Colonies.

The rituals of public executions and the Colonies are designed to keep people of Gilead in a state of constant fear and therefore easier to control. But they are not the only elements of ideological control in the Republic of Gilead. The next important element is isolation.

3.3.Isolation

According to Hannah Arendt "totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals" that "demand total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member" (323). Arendt also notes that "such loyalty can be expected only from the completely isolated human being" who does not have "any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even mere acquaintances" which makes it possible for him to belong only to the movement itself (323-324). The Republic of Gilead isolates its citizens by restricting their movement, their means of communication and by assigning each of them to a social group resulting in individualism being "replaced by uniformity" (Shi 755).

3.3.1. Uniformity

According to Eric Hoffer in order to fully emerge himself into a mass movement, a person has to be "stripped of his individual identity and distinctness" and the most radical way to do this is "by the complete assimilation of the individual into a collective body" (62). Gilead accomplished that by dividing the society into distinct groups and assigning each group a role to play in Gileadean society. Women are divided into Wives, Handmaids, Daughters, Marthas, Aunts, Econowives, Jezebels, and Unwomen. Each of those groups has a clearly defined role to play and

is allowed to play only that one role apart from the Econowives who are forced to play three roles but that is thought of as degrading. Each of them also has one colour assigned to them which only increases their immersion into the role.

However, women are not the only ones who are divided into groups, but the men are, too. The Commanders of the Faithful are the highest ranking group in Gileadean society and they govern Gilead. The rest of the men are divided into the Eyes, Angels, Guardians, and poor men. The Eyes of God are Gilead's secret police and have the power to simply pick up people on the street and make them disappear (*Tale* 178-179). The Eyes are the only ones who are allowed to go through checkpoints without having to stop or present an ID. Offred mentions a few times that there are Eyes in disguise all over Gilead and that they must know everything that happens in Gilead because "they'll have squeezed it, crushed it, twisted it out of enough bodies, enough mouths by now" (*Tale* 306). The Angels are Gilead's army and sometimes police who guard the Handmaids while they are in the Red Centre and participating in Salvaging, and they fight in the war against other religions. There are different divisions of Angels as Offred mentions the Angels of the Apocalypse, Fourth Division and Twenty-first Battalion of the Angels of Light who are shown on the news fighting against Baptist guerrillas (*Tale* 92). The Angels never look at the Handmaids and are taught to turn their backs when in their presence. If they serve their country well, they are rewarded by getting a Wife, who used to be a Daughter, and later can qualify for getting a Handmaid if their Wife cannot reproduce.

To continue, Guardians of the Faith are "used for routine policing and other menial functions" and are, according to Offred, "either stupid or older or disabled or very young, apart from the ones that are Eyes incognito" (*Tale* 30). Each Commander has several Guardians assigned to his household and they do all kinds of work, from mowing the lawn, digging a Wife's garden, driving the Commanders, to cleaning a Commander's office. Not all Guardians are assigned to a household as some of them take the Handmaids to the doctor, work in the shops, guard the checkpoints, and are dispatched all over the city to prevent anything unlawful. The Guardians are not allowed to touch a woman or to get married, but they can get promoted into Angels and then qualify for a Wife. Poor men are not discussed in the novel apart from the fact that an Econowife is assigned to them. Each group of men also has a colour assigned to them to represent their status. The Commanders wear black uniforms with insignia and decorations on them, the Eyes wear grey suits, Angels wear black uniforms just like the Commanders but with different decorations, Guardians wear green uniforms with "the crests on their shoulders and berets: two swords, crossed, above a white triangle" (*Tale* 30).

Gilead stripped its citizens of their individuality by dividing them into strictly defined roles because, as Hannah Arendt states, individuality is a threat as it does not permit a totalitarian regime to dominate all men "in every aspect of their life" (456-457). And Gilead truly dominates every aspect of its citizens' lives, from what they eat, who they talk to, where they go, what they do, where they live, in what and who they believe and who they marry. Gilead took individuality of its citizens and replaced it with uniformity thus contributing to their isolation.

3.3.2. Restricted Movement

Besides installing uniformity, Gilead also assures the isolation of its citizens by restricting their movement. Restricting people's movement was one of the first measures Gilead instated after taking over the United States of America. Offred notes that right after declaring the state of emergency and censoring the newspapers, "the roadblocks began to appear" along with "Identipasses" (*Tale* 183). Identipasses are, just like the name suggests, passes each citizen has to present in order to prove their identity when passing through roadblocks scattered all around the country. This was just a beginning of the roadblocks which in time became one of the staples in Gilead's control of its citizens.

According to Michel Foucault, based on a seventeenth-century published order regarding which measures to take when a plague appears in a city, establishing surveillance and "a strict spatial partitioning" signifies "the utopia of the perfectly governed city" (195-198). In order for this utopia to be accomplished, the space has to be segmented, "observed at every point", even the slightest movement has to be supervised, all events recorded, and "each- individual (…) constantly located" and "examined" (197). Offred describes the checkpoints around the city many times as she has to pass through them every time she goes shopping. The first time she describes one she says:

> We reached the first barrier, which is like the barriers blocking off roadworks, or dug-up sewers: a wooden crisscross painted in yellow and black stripes, a red hexagon which means Stop. (…) Above us, I know, there are floodlights, attached to the telephone poles, for use in emergencies, and there are men with machine guns in the pillboxes on either side of the road. I don't see the floodlights and the pillboxes, because of the wings around my face. I just know they are there. (*Tale* 30)

Offred refers to this as the first barrier which means that there has to be more than one; this is confirmed when she goes shopping with the second Ofglen and states that they passed the first and after a while the last checkpoint. In order to go through checkpoints, a pass has to be provided.

Offred describes giving one to the Guardian at the first barrier who inspects and stamps it and then takes it into the right-hand pillbox to punch the numbers on the pass into a Compuchek. The passes are very important as Offred states that a Martha was shot for taking too long to present one and her identity could not be confirmed. This is why Offred does not need to see the pillboxes to know that they are there; they are a constant warning for those who pass through the checkpoints. The only two groups of people who do not have to present passes are the Eyes and the Aunts. Offred once notes that the Guardians do not dare to stop the Eyes in their black vans or to look inside those vans, while Moira states that she could go through every checkpoint she wanted when she was dressed as an Aunt and no one asked to see her pass. Even the Commanders and the Wives have to present a pass. One night, Commander Fred decides to take Offred to Jezebel's and tells her not to worry about the pass because he got one for her. Fred also gives Offred a blue cloak with a hood so she could pass the checkpoints as a Wife. Offred is allowed to go through two checkpoints but has to hide before the third one as not even the Wives are allowed to go through that barrier which Fred refers to as "the gateway" (*Tale* 244). But even a Commander like Fred has to present a pass to go through that gateway so Gilead does, in Foucault's style, examine and locate each of its citizens, unless they are, of course, hidden by a very important Commander.

Checkpoints are not the only way Gilead restricts the movement of its citizens. Armed Guardians are visible all around the city and block places that certain citizens are not allowed to enter. For example, Handmaids are not allowed to go in the subway because they are not allowed to leave their part of the city. The Guardians watch people on the streets as well. When going shopping with Ofglen, the two women stop once in a while but Offred notes that they can never stand long in one place or they can be picked up for loitering (*Tale* 211). Guardians also stand in front of the houses of the Commanders and nobody is allowed outside at night, apart from the Commander, of course. Offred states that she has seen them through her window patrolling in twos. The movement at night is also limited by a searchlight that is outside. Movement is also limited inside the house as Offred notes that nobody is allowed to be outside of their prescribed accommodations during the night.

Foucault states that segmenting a place is a fantastic way to perfect the "exercise of power (…) because it can reduce the number of those who exercise it, while increasing the number of those on whom it is exercised" and makes it "possible to intervene at any moment and because the constant pressure acts even before the offences, mistakes or crimes have been committed" (206). Gilead confirms this statement as it normally employs only two Guardians on each position but still everybody is afraid of them. Offred does not even have to raise her head to sense their presence

or the danger they represent. This must be true for the rest of the citizens as well, because as Offred and Ofglen walk the streets of former Cambridge, there are no incidents or criminal activities on those streets but there is also no communication. Gilead has so much control over its citizens that they are even afraid of talking to each other. This only deepens their isolation and opens the door for the next element in Gilead's control which is the control of language.

3.3.3. Language

According to Moradi and AzizMohammadi, language is an important tool for imposing an ideology on others (79). Gilead used that tool to erase one ideology and replace it with an ideology of their own. For that reason, Gilead established their form of language, "a biblical discourse" that rejects and represses the language of the time before ("Disciplining the Body" 611). For example, the Handmaids greet each other with a prescribed greeting "Blessed be the fruit" and respond with a correspondingly prescribed response: "May the Lord open" (*Tale* 29). The opening greeting is based on the Bible, more specifically the words Elizabeth says to her cousin, the Virgin Mary: "Blessed *art* thou among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1:42) referring to the child inside her. The response for that greeting may come from the Bible as well. In the Rachel and Leah story the Bible states that "when the Lord saw that Leah *was* hated, he opened her womb" and she gave birth to six sons and one daughter (Genesis 29-30:31-21). So, even the greetings point to the Handmaids' role in the society.

Moreover, the Handmaids are not allowed to form friendships or to talk to each other freely. Their conversations are restricted to the prescribed greetings, the weather, where to walk and Gilead's war victories. Even then, they can only converse for a short amount of time and in prescribed phrases such as: "We've been sent good weather", with an appropriate response: "Which I receive with joy" (*Tale* 29) or "The war is going well, I hear" to which the appropriate response is "Praised be" (*Tale* 29). When visiting the shops, if the Handmaids begin talking to each other excessively, they are silenced by the Guardians who work there. Other than that, the Guardians are not allowed to speak to them, not even when they are passing through the checkpoints. On one occasion, Nick, a Guardian in Commander Fred's house and his personal chauffeur, asks Offred if she had a nice walk and Offred states that he took a big risk by speaking to her like that (*Tale* 55). Offred does not speak to many people, even inside the Commander's house. The Wives always keep to themselves and the Marthas are not allowed to socialize with them. Marthas are the only characters in the novel that have conversations resembling anything to those from the time before but they are reduced to gossip and talking about their duties. By restricting what and to whom a person can speak, Gilead creates "an atmosphere of fear (…) and

uses language as an instrument of control" ("Disciplining the Body" 610). This is evident when Gilead's prescribed discourse prevents Offred form speaking to her shopping partner Ofglen as she notes that she cannot decipher whether Ofglen is a real believer or not, and Offred cannot risk talking to her in an open manner.

So, in Gilead, language is used to isolate people from one another so they would be easier to control. But Gilead also uses language, as David Hogsette states, "to create a different reality and by controlling what its citizens see and hear" (268). For example, Gilead forbids religious songs like *Amazing Grace* because there is a word *free* in it. The word *sterile* is forbidden as it denotes that men are responsible for low birth rates and, according to Gilead's state policies, only women are infertile. Gilead also forbids women to read and write which shapes a reality in which there are no written signs on the stores the Handmaids visit because "they decided that even the names of shops were too much temptation for us" (*Tale* 35). Offred notes that each store has a sign that denotes its name so, for example, there is a lily on a wooden sign denoting a store called Lilies of the Field. All of the stores take their names from the Bible. The name Lilies of the Field is taken from Jesus Christ's sermon to his followers in which he tells them not to worry about food (Matthew 7:28-32), while All Flesh is named after a phrase that appears many times in the Bible, Milk and Honey denotes the promised land of Canaan, Loaves and Fishes are a nod to a story where Jesus fed many with a few loaves of bread and two fish, and Daily Bread is mentioned in the Lord's Prayer. This way Gilead used signs to surround its citizens with biblical symbols. Signs are also used to denote whether there is a particular item in the store as there is a picture of that item in the store's window. Offred herself notes that this is a form of sign language. This sign language is needed because, as stated earlier, the majority of women are not allowed to read. According to Kouhestani, the reason for this forced illiteracy is the fear of women having access to knowledge that "can empower them to resist against the rules" so in Gilead, a land that subjugates women, "those who have control over the words and language have dominant power" ("Sexual Oppression" 612). Offred points this out during the Bible reading before the Ceremony as she notes that:

> The Commander pauses, looking down, scanning the page. He takes his time, as if unconscious of us. He's like a man toying with a steak, behind a restaurant window, pretending not to see the eyes watching him from hungry darkness not three feet from his elbow (…) He has something we don't have, he has the word. (*Tale* 99)

Access to words is what gives people power in Gilead and the Commander knows it. By taking his time with the reading he is demonstrating his power over his household the same way all of the Commanders demonstrate their collective power over Gilead's inhabitants by deciding which words they hear and which words they can use. Out of fear of saying the wrong word, people of Gilead limit their communication to government prescribed discourse and in this way contribute to creation of a society in which they trust no one but themselves and their country.

3.3.4. Suspicion

According to Eric Hoffer suspicion is an important element in any mass movement as "prying and spying, tense watching and a tense awareness of being watched (…) leads not to dissension but to strict conformity" (124). This state of constant surveillance causes the members of a particular regime to adhere "zealously to prescribed behaviour and opinion" (138). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, this is most evident in Offred and the first Ofglen's relationship. Neither of the two women is a true believer in Gilead's ideology but they do not reveal that to each other as they are aware that the Republic appointed them to spy on one another. Offred notes that this is obvious since it is mandatory for them to always walk in twos and that that is supposed to be for their protection, but since there are so many Guardians on the streets they are already protected enough so they must be each other's spies (*Tale* 29). When they finally discover that neither of them is a true believer their conversation goes like this: "'I thought you were a true believer,' Ofglen says. 'I thought you were,' I say. 'You were always so stinking pious.' 'So were you,' I reply" (*Tale* 177). Ofglen then confesses that she is part of a resistance movement called Mayday and asks Ofrred to join them, but even then Offred thinks that there is still a chance that Ofglen is a spy and that she is setting her a trap because, as Offred states, "such is the soil in which we grow" (*Tale* 178). In the world of Gilead, there is always a possibility that there is a saboteur, spy or a traitor (Hoffer 125) nearby. Apart from the citizens spying on each other, the Republic is spying on them as well. Offred speaks of the doctors' offices being bugged as well as the ceilings in Jezebel's, and Ofglen mentions that it is safe to speak outdoors as there are no mikes there.

However, the greatest surveillance tools at Gilead's disposal are the Eyes. The Eyes of God function as Gilead's secret police and the task of a secret police, according to Hannah Arendt, "is not to discover crimes, but to be on hand when the government decides to arrest a certain category of the population" (426). Professor Pieixoto states that "all high-level Commanders were automatically directors of the Eyes" (*Tale* 322) and the Eyes do arrest certain categories of population that do not respect Gilead's ideology. Offred mentions that there were Eyes pushing people against the wall in a television footage of raids on the homes of people who pretended they

converted from Judaism to Gileadean Christianity. Offred also describes an incident in which a black van with a white-winged eye on the side, a van everybody knows belongs to the Eyes, simply stopped on the street, two Eyes went out and threw a man into the van and nobody dared to do anything about it. The Eyes have tremendous power in Gilead proven by the fact that when a few of them come to pick up Offred at the end of the novel, Commander Fred asks them to see a warrant and one of the Eyes replies that they do not need one. The Eyes can arrest anyone they want and not even a Commander can stop them. But not only is being a spy powerful, as Elisabeth Hansot points out, in the Republic of Gilead being a spy is even "honourable; "Under His Eye" is the prescribed farewell" (57). This farewell may simply refer to the eye of the Lord but it could also denote that women are under the eye of men, all of the Gilead under the eye of the Eyes or "that everyone is indeed under the eye of someone else" (Barbé Hammer 45) which is a situation clearly echoing Bentham's Panopticon as mentioned by Foucault (200-208). Suspicion is Gilead's natural state of being and one of the staples in Gilead's ideological control.

The Republic of Gilead implemented its ideology through the process of indoctrination and used public execution and punishment to control its citizens. Gilead also made sure that its ideology is being followed by isolating its citizens from one another. That isolation was achieved by creating uniformity, restricting movement, controlling language and creating a state of constant suspicion in Gilead's citizens.

4. The End of Gilead?

Despite constant surveillance, public executions, and all other fear tactics employed by the Republic, Gilead did come to an end. This is revealed in the "Historical Notes", a partial transcript of a symposium regarding Gilead, that appear at the end of the novel. The symposium takes place in 2195 and, by that time, Gilead is just a subject of interest for future historians. One of the subjects discussed at the symposium is "The Problem of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*". "Historical Notes" reveal that Offred's story is actually a transcript of 30 cassette tapes made by two historians, professors James Darcy Pieixoto and Knotly Wade. At the symposium professor Pieixoto gives a talk about their transcription and reveals a lot about Gilead along the way, but he does not actually state what exactly brought down the fall of Gilead. Gilead was facing resistance from the beginning; some of that resistance came from resistance movements like Mayday and the Underground Femaleroad while some came from the Gilead's elite themselves. Mayday was a form of "quasi-military" that is "known to have infiltrated the Gileadean power structure at the highest levels" as some of its members were also members of the

Eyes (*Tale* 322) while the Underground Femaleroad was a "rescue operation" that transferred Handmaids out of Gilead. The Commanders and their Wives disobeyed the rules of Gilead as well. The Wives are known to have arranged meetings between the Handmaids and the doctors or household Guardians so their Handmaid would get pregnant. For example, Serena Joy arranged a meeting between Offred and Nick, the Commander's chauffer who was also, as professor Pieixoto states in his talk, probably a member of the Eyes as well as Mayday, and in the end helped Offred escape. The Commanders are known for seeing the Handmaids in private, even though they were not supposed to, as well as going to Jezebel's to have non-reproductive sex. Offred's Commander did those things as well. He invited her into his office and at first just wanted to play Scrabble with her, a double transgression of Gilead's rules as Offred is not allowed to read or write. Offred's Commander even possessed a lot of items such as books, magazines, female clothes, and so on that were forbidden and were supposed to have been destroyed when Gilead took over the USA. He even let Offred read those books and magazines and wear the forbidden clothes. Professor Pieixoto suspects that Offred's Commander was a man named Fred Waterford and reveals that Waterford was later put on trial because of "liberal tendencies" and "harbouring a subversive," probably Nick (*Tale* 322). Pieixoto also reveals that Offred lived in the time known as the Early Gilead era and that Middle Gilead was much more austere than Early Gilead and did not allow such *liberal tendencies.*

As previously stated, by the time the symposium took place, Gilead was long gone but professor Pieixoto shows that Gilead's ideology has not been completely erased. Pieixoto is dismissive towards Offred's personal and emotional description of life in Gilead and wishes he had "even twenty pages or so of printout from Waterford's private computer" (*Tale* 322) instead. He also refers to Waterford as a brilliant "man of considerable ingenuity" (*Tale* 321) and states that people should not pass "moral judgment upon the Gileadeans" (*Tale* 314) but not passing judgment on a regime like Gilead's means to condone its abhorrent tendencies and policies. Pieixoto also refers to all of the Commanders as "gentlemen," and the Handmaids as "these women" and states that he and his partner have difficulties in establishing Offred's real name as "the woods were full" of women like her (*Tale* 318). Pieixoto's choice of words shows that he in some way admires the men of Gilead while he finds the lives of women they enslaved inconsequential. Pieixoto shows his sexist tendencies also when he refers to "The Underground Femaleroad" as "The Underground *Frailroad*" and suggests that his colleague named Offred's memoirs as "The Handmaid's *Tale*" because it sounded like the word *tail* (*Tale* 313), as both words, *frail* and *tail*, were once derogatory terms used to denote women. Pieixoto also compares

Maryann Crescent Moon, a Chair of the symposium, to a *char* they all enjoyed during the last night's dinner. Offred once notes that the word *char* means flesh in French (*Tale* 120) which means that even among these scholars a woman is still reduced to her body. Professor Pieixoto's attitudes towards Gilead, Offred and the Commanders, as well as his choice of words, especially whenever he is speaking about women, show that Gilead may be long gone, but its hateful ideology is present even in the year 2195, because, as Aunt Lydia once stated, "Gilead is within you" (*Tale* 33).

Conclusion

Margaret Atwood's seminal novel *The Handmaid's Tale* tells a story of Offred, a woman living in an oppressive regime that took over the United States of America and reduced her to nothing more than her body and ability to procreate. Offred's story is her own, it is a story of her life, but it is also a story about the Republic of Gilead and their ideology of repression. Gilead begins with violence and never abandons its roots. That violence can be found even in their religion, or more precisely, especially in their religion and religion is the most obvious form of ideology. Atwood based Gilead's form of Christianity on the American Puritans who came to the New World to practice their religion and established a violent theocracy that did not tolerate anyone else practicing a religion of their own. Atwood's Gileadean Christianity is also based on the American Right Movement of the 1980s that advocated for a return to more traditional values which meant that women should be subjugated to men. This belief opened the door for Gilead's misogyny and reduction of women to play only a single role in a man's life. This stripped women of their identities and turned them into collectives of companions, housekeepers, prostitutes and so on. But women are not the only ones reduced to a single role, so are the men, who, their single role notwithstanding, still have power over women. The most powerful group of men, the Commanders of the Faithful, are in charge of all life in Gilead and are determined to control every aspect of its citizens' lives. In order to achieve that they used various instruments of ideological implementation and control, beginning with indoctrination and proceeding with fear tactics like public executions and isolation because an isolated person living in a constant state of fear is easier to control.

Atwood concludes *The Handmaid's Tale,* a study of an ideology of a totalitarian theocracy, with an epilogue in which the Republic of Gilead is a thing of the past, but its ideology is not. Her professor Pieixoto transcribes Offred's story from cassette tapes which means he has heard her story of Gilead's violence and oppression directly from the source but still, he easily dismisses her story as overly sentimental and proceeds to make sexist jokes about women of Gilead and a fellow female scholar. Pieixoto proves that even after Gilead, women are still just objects for men to define and that Gilead's ideology lives on.

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