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ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION METHODS AS RESISTANCE IN
MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

M.A. Thesis

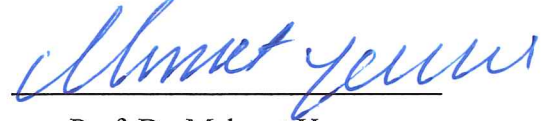
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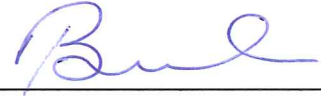
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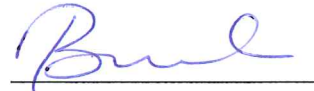
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ABSTRACT

ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION METHODS AS RESISTANCE IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

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English Literature and Cultural Studies Department

M.A. Thesis

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Berkem Sağlam

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The purpose of this thesis is to understand the effects of alternative methods of communication on the power dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Within this framework, it analyses the ways the narrator tries to maintain individuality against the regime's silencing methods, and it explores the underground organization's strategies for active resistance. Although in the Red Centers, the Handmaids are indoctrinated through the regime's "mythologies" which sets regulations on their reproductive capacity, body movements, and daily language, this study tries to show that the resistance against oppression is alive in "trivial discourses" such as rumours, gossip and body language which may have a role in social change. The underground organization also maintains active resistance through "networking" and "grapevine", which can be interpreted as a "silent" rebellion that extends beyond the borders of Gilead, and to the next generation. This study also touches upon the possibility of the overthrowing of the regime through discussions of the concept of "utopian hope". The muted group's alternative methods of communication and solidarity become useful for both individual and collective resistance and increase the hope for liberation from the darkness of the patriarchal and religiously dogmatic Gilead regime.

Key words: Margaret Atwood, Critical Dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Oppression, Communication, Resistance

ÖZET

MARGARET ATWOOD'UN *DAMIZLIK KIZIN ÖYKÜSÜ* ADLI ROMANINDA ALTERNATİF İLETİŞİM YÖNTEMLERİNİN DİRENİŞE ETKİSİ

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Bu tezin amacı Margaret Atwood'un *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü* adlı romanında baskıcı rejim ve baskıya uğrayanlar arasındaki güç dinamiklerine alternatif iletişim yöntemlerinin etkilerini anlamaya çalışmaktır. Bu çerçevede, bu tez rejimin sessizleştirme yöntemlerine rağmen anlatıcının bireyselliğini koruma yollarını analiz eder, yeraltı örgütlenmesinin aktif direniş taktiklerini inceler. “Red Center”larda, üreme kapasitelerine, bedensel hareketlerine ve günlük olarak kullandıkları dile kurallar getiren, rejimin ürettiği mitolojilerle “Handmaid”lerin beyinleri yıkansa da bu çalışma baskıya karşı direnişin, söylenti, dedikodu ve vücut dili gibi sosyal değişimde bir rolü olabilecek “önemsiz söylem”lerde canlı tutulduğunu gösterir. Yeraltı örgütlenmesi ise Gilead'ın sınırları dışına taşan ve bir sonraki nesile ulaşan sessiz bir isyan olarak yorumlanabilecek “networking” ve “grapevine” gibi yöntemlerle etkin bir direniş sürdürmektedir. Bu çalışma, “ütopik umut” kavramı üzerine yürüttüğü tartışmayla, rejimin devrilme ihtimaline de değinir. “Susturulan grup”un alternatif iletişim yöntemleri ve sürdürdüğü dayanışma hem bireysel hem kolektif direniş için önemlidir ve dini açıdan dogmatik, ataerkil Gilead yönetiminin karanlığından kurtulma umudunu artırmaktadır.

Key words: Margaret Atwood, Eleştirel Distopya, *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*, Baskı, İletişim, Direniş

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INTRODUCTION

*Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate,
no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.*

—Virginia Woolf—

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) by Margaret Atwood is a feminist dystopian novel. The novel presents the Gilead Republic, which has replaced the modern and liberal United States of America some time in the future. In this regime, the elite men called Sons of Jacob have become authority through coercion. Their ideology is based on “turning back” to a specific mixture of patriarchal Christian traditions. By enforcing their ideology as natural facts, the regime aims to solve the population decrease, and they promise to create a better future for the next generations. With this vision, they stratify the society. The regime creates new identities and a division of labour for Gilead’s citizens. In Gilead, men are ranked as: the Commanders (ruling class men, the highest in status), the Angels (soldiers in the army, high status), the Guardians (servants of the elites or security in public places, lower status) and the Eyes (detects anyone who disobeys the regime, spy). Women, on the other hand, are ranked as: the Wives (elite women, highest in status but still oppressed), the Aunts (older women, authority for the Handmaids), the Handmaids (fertile and the most oppressed women who serve for giving birth), the Marthas (domestic servants of the elites), the Econowives (poor and low ranking men’s wives) and the Unwomen (who reject being in the servitude of the regime). The female protagonist Offred, who is a Handmaid in the Gilead regime, narrates both her and other oppressed women’s stories in the process of dehumanization by exposing the regime’s hypocrisy and violence through her narrative. The female narrator’s experiences show that the totalitarian Gilead regime’s promise of a peaceful, secure and utopian atmosphere is not an issue, on the contrary; injustice, inequality and oppression force the women to survive in the otherwise intolerable conditions of a dystopian world.

A “dystopia” is an imaginary place where life is extremely difficult for the oppressed groups, where the sense of justice or morality has disappeared. It is the

antonym of “utopia” which is an imaginary, perfect world where everyone is happy. In his discussion of utopian subgenres, Lyman Tower Sargent defines dystopia as a “non-existent society and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (9). Dystopian writers reflect a social anxiety in changing the utopian tradition into anti-utopia since the utopian idea is shaken through catastrophic events in history, such as world wars, genocides and totalitarian projects. Dystopian literature projects a history in which totalitarian dictators lead people to war, famine, plagues, and economic crises. Thus, in dystopias, historical facts and fiction are interwoven. For example, *1984* (1948) by George Orwell includes echoes of the Stalinist period in Russia and in a broader sense it is a criticism of totalitarian regimes that turn individuals into properties through thought control. *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) by Ray Bradbury uses elements like the burning of books, which is a standard totalitarian project as seen in Nazi Germany. To guarantee ultimate faith in authority, totalitarian regimes use the method of effacing the past, thus creating new identities for their people. Communication restrictions beside violence and oppression abound. In *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and Dystopian Imagination*, Moylan and Baccolini explain the silencing of the citizens via control of language in dystopian tradition this way:

Throughout the history of dystopian fiction, the conflict of the text turns on the control of language. To be sure, the official, hegemonic order of most dystopias (from Forster’s machine society to Piercy’s corporate order) rests, as Antonio Gramsci put it, on both coercion and consent. The material force of the economy and the state apparatus controls the social order and keeps it running; but the discursive power, exercised in the reproduction of meaning and the interpellation of subjects, is a complementary and necessary force. Language is a key weapon for the reigning dystopian power structure. Therefore, the dystopian protagonist’s resistance often begins with a verbal confrontation and re-appropriation of language, since s/he is generally prohibited from using language. (6)

The weaker the citizens become in terms of language, the easier it becomes for hedonistic and manipulative authorities to maintain control over them. Although Atwood’s Gilead regime fits in the genre of classical dystopia in terms of state control and silencing via ideological apparatuses, there is a resistance of the oppressed coming from solidarity and communication. Baccolini says:

In classical dystopia, memory remains too often trapped in an individual and regressive nostalgia, but critical dystopias show that a culture of memory, one that moves from the individual to the collective is part of a social project of hope. But the presence of Utopian hope does not necessarily mean a happy ending. Rather, awareness and responsibility are the conditions of the critical dystopia's citizens. (521)

In classical dystopias like *1984* and *Fahrenheit 451*, “utopian hope” is not an issue since the protagonists’ resistance ends and they accept the ultimate power of the regime in the end. Critical dystopias like Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, Ursula Le Guin’s *The Telling*, and Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, however, include elements of utopian hope for a better future with their open-endings. In *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature*, Chris Fern asserts that:

Far more exclusively than any other dystopian author, Atwood chooses to focus on the private consciousness of her protagonist—on the one realm that the State cannot successfully invade. For all the elaboration of the State’s surveillance mechanisms, it cannot prevent her from committing treason in her own mind, from thoughtcrime, to use Orwell’s terminology. (131-132)

The Handmaid’s Tale differs from the classical examples of the genre in this way. It is possible to construct a narrative also for the oppressed as their future is not certain. The novel includes feminist echoes, especially emphasizing the necessity of feminist consciousness and use of language. The female protagonist in Atwood’s novel narrates her fragmented story which mostly includes the theme of silencing and oppression of women in patriarchy, and also their resistance against the “discursive power” of authority by breaking her silence. Different from classical dystopias, the female protagonist/narrator decides to survive and gains feminist consciousness and political awareness before finally carrying the culture of memory from the individual to a collective level through controlling language in her tale.

Against this background, in my thesis, I try to see how the oppressed groups in the novel search for ways of finding hope for resistance and how “maintaining identity” becomes a means of that. Remembering the past, trying to interact with other oppressed groups via alternative means of communication, having a personal narrative and affective ties, all become ways of maintaining individuality, thus resistance against the regime’s politics. These processes involve self-awareness and lead to a consciousness against the authoritative power. In the darkness of the dystopian atmosphere, each information that reveals the regime’s hidden agenda and weak

points, or any interaction that reminds the individuals of their potential power against the regime becomes a beacon of hope for a better future. Thus, communication and memory as they provide consciousness, allow the individuals to preserve the “utopian hope” for the future.

The Handmaid's Tale has been analysed from various points of view including political, ecofeminist, religious and postmodernist approaches. As I intend to analyse the oppression of the regime and the Handmaids' resistance through alternative communication schemas in the novel, I specifically focus on the research about these points. I read the narrator's attempts at maintaining her identity through her memory as resistance to the regime's attempts at turning women into means of population increase. Thus, language, remembering, narration and affective ties that suggest individuality such as friendships in the novel, all become instances of resistance, especially for the narrator. I also look at the novel in terms of how the oppressed groups, especially women, show resistance even when they are silenced in the patriarchal structure by alternative methods of solidarity and communication. Although, on the surface, the Gilead regime succeeds in turning women into mute objects by preventing communication among them, theirs cannot be considered a complete success since some of the Handmaids like Ofglen just pretend to obey them, but do not lose their individualities, they do not become dehumanized. Rather than showing obedience to and having faith in the authority like “true believers”, their silence is a camouflage for their hostility to and resistance against the regime.

Considering my thesis within the scope of communication dynamics in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the “Muted group theory”¹ which was first proposed by the two anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener, is very useful in understanding the problems of oppressed groups and how language can demonstrate dominant/suppressed dynamics. In understanding the alternative modes of communication women have in the novel, I will be referring to this theory. In explaining the importance of such emphasis on alternative communication schemas, Edwin Ardener discusses in “The ‘Problem’ Revisited” that:

¹ In “Belief and the Problem of Women”, Edwin Ardener mentions the difficulties ethnographers and social anthropologists have in understanding women's expressions because of the “political dominance of men” or “inarticulateness of women”. Therefore he tries to give voice to the muted (mostly women) by giving direct reference to women's rites and female culture via “observation” and symbolic interpretation of rites which is related to wildness and female power (72-73).

If we look at those classes which are usually considered to be the exploiting or dominant classes, and then we consider those others which are supposedly exploited or suppressed classes, there is the dimension that hasn't been mentioned yet: which is [that] of relative articulateness. One of the problems that women presented was that they were rendered "inarticulate" by the male structure; that the dominant structure was articulated in terms of a male world-position. Those who were not in the male world-position, were, as it were, 'muted'. . . . There are many kinds of muted groups. We would then go on to ask: 'What is it that makes a group muted?' We then become aware that it is muted simply because it does not form part of the dominant communicative system of the society — expressed as it must be through the dominant ideology, and that 'mode of production' if you wish, which is articulated with it. (129-130)

I think it is important to emphasize the "alternative voices" of the muted group that are not heard within the dominant structure of Gilead society. While it is easy for the reader to see the story of oppression on the surface, the silenced communication beneath, which is, as I will try to demonstrate, a form of resistance, also merits scholarly attention. To understand how muted groups in each rank maintain their struggle, I will try to show how "networking" takes place in the Gilead regime. Besides Offred's acquiring information and creating resistance against the system to escape, I analyse how the oppressed groups from the Marthas to the Handmaids take part in resistance, through organizations such as "Mayday" and "the underground" with communication being the main means of resistance.

In "Feminism in the Wilderness", by referring to Ardener's theory, Elaine Showalter discusses the importance of evaluating women's writing by considering women's culture and experience:

In the past, female experience which could not be accommodated by androcentric models was treated as deviant or simply ignored. Observation from an exterior point of view could never be the same as comprehension from within. Ardener's model also has many connections to and implications for current feminist literary theory, since the concepts of perception, silence, and silencing are so central to discussions of women's participation in literary culture. (199)

As the muted group mostly includes women and silencing and resistance as themes as narrated through the female experience and point of view, in my thesis I will go parallel with feminist theory. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Historical Notes section shows how

the narrator's tape recordings are found in a city which is "a prominent way-station on . . . 'The Underground Female road'" (Atwood 313) and is discussed as an historical "item" by the Professors of Gileadian studies in the future year 2195. In this section, it is seen that the communication dynamics that mostly embody female experiences are ignored by the patriarchal canon. Professor Pieixoto, who is interested in official documents about Gilead regime gets "information" through some Commanders' diaries as their use of language and the structure of their texts are appropriate for patriarchal canon. On the other hand, the Professor regards the Handmaid's female narration as an "item" (Atwood 313) because of its obscurity, and as lacking authenticity as the text is not definite. As the implicit, indirect and fragmented information about the regime and the oppressed group is not understood by this male point of view, the muted group's voice may be unheard in the future, too. Although her narration is not considered as an informative document by some historians because of patriarchal fallacy, it is clear that her text takes a place in historical studies and is important as she gives voice to women and their experiences in the patriarchal structure from the female point of view. The hidden resistance story beneath the text indicates how the liberation of the next generations depends on the narrations of the Handmaids. Handed down to the next generations as a story of oppression and resistance, it carries the collective memory of the lost generation.

While considering the role of the narrator in social change and freedom, it is helpful to connect the writing and narrating experiences of women with *écriture féminine*² as well. In "The Laugh of the Medusa", Helene Cixous asserts that:

As subject for history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places. Woman un-thinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield. In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history. As a militant, she is an integral part of all liberations. (882)

² "L'écriture féminine, translated as 'feminine writing' or 'women's writing,' is a concept and textual practice that emerged in France around the early 1970s (first appearing in print in 1975 in 'Le rire de la Meduse'). Encompassing the work of Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julie Kristeva, it sought to challenge phallogentrism and open up alternative spaces in order to articulate sexual difference" (Taylor 41).

Although the narrator's story seems autobiographical since she mostly refers to her memories and experiences, she tells how oppression and dominance takes place in the Gilead regime and gives lots of details about the oppressive structure and culture of Gilead. Beside the dominant plot of the oppression story, the female narrator mentions in which ways silenced groups fight for freedom. Her multi-layered texts give voice to the collective experiences of the muted group's resistance against silencing. As the Handmaid's story is retold, both she and women who have stories take place in history with their identities and open ways to reject the patriarchal values and ideas that define women as other. By narrating her story of her self and other women who need to be rescued from the inferior and objectified positions within dominant group (patriarchy)'s texts; she becomes a militant as a literary woman; by using language to articulate their own identity and culture, she uses her best weapon in order to fight for freedom.

Benefiting from Ardener's study, in "Speaking from Silence: Methods of Silencing and of Resistance", Houston and Kramarae list methods of silencing women and men's control over language change (390) as censorship, racism, homophobia (392), and terrorism and men's violence and wars (393) among others. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead's ideology includes almost every one of the methods listed above. Especially, control over language and the goal of creating an illiterate generation of women serves ultimately for silencing women. As the article lists silencing methods of patriarchy, it discusses the ways of "speaking out" for "the muted group". As a solution to the problem of women's silencing, under the subtitle of reclaiming, elevating and celebrating 'trivial' discourse, Houston and Kramarae state, "One way that women are breaking silence is by reclaiming the forms of women's discourse that men have labelled trivial" (394). They list the elements of these trivial discourses as graffiti, oral histories, diaries and journals, sewing, weaving and embroidering, some of which are among the main elements that make up *The Handmaid's Tale*. Offred's tale, which is essentially a sound record, is an example of how a silenced woman speaks out. Also, the journals and diaries that are found in the "Underground Femaleroad", a group of active resistance for helping the Handmaids escape from Gilead, can be considered as a kind of resistance against patriarchy. Serena Joy who is another oppressed woman breaks out of the silence with her act of knitting in the novel. Beside these, Houston and Kramarae's article lists how the muted group creates resistance by taking control of language with creative code switching,

renaming old concepts, changing definitions. The oppressed women who are being silenced in the education centers seem to use these methods by calling Rachel and Leah Center, “the Red Center”. Thus, they reduce the chain of signifiers carefully woven by the government into a single warning sign. According to Kathleen Wheeler:

Throughout her explorations of language and discourse, [Atwood] suggests that language is available either to entrap us or to liberate us, whether men or women . . . She has shown that deception is inherent in language, that figures are fundamental to it and are not merely ornaments, and then has insisted that language is available as either a release and a transformative power or as a trap and force of subjugation. (268)

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, although it is seen that women are deprived of using language and are captives, the muted group's fight for freedom by maintaining power on language and knowledge is also shown.

In my thesis, firstly I will clarify how the regime attempts at turning women who act in accordance with their free-will into Handmaids who are not supposed to be different from robots. I will also try to show how the muted groups cope with the regime's dehumanization process with the help of friendship, solidarity and communication. Thus, my thesis will include an explanatory part of a section under the title of “Red Center” in which I analyse Gilead's myth-creating process by pointing to Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*. Secondly, in the section “Household”, I point to the narrator's relationships with people in the Commander's house and evaluate her position as a Handmaid from others' perspective. I aim to show how Offred finds a way to escape from her captivated body via her communication with others, which directly or indirectly gives her hope in terms of freedom. With the communication dynamics of women, I intend to show the possibility of direct/indirect solidarity among oppressed women. In the section “Nolite te Bastardes Carborundorum,” while analysing the communication of the Commander and the narrator, I specifically focus on how the narrator regains her identity through the use of language and the pen, and while analysing Offred's writing experience, I will refer to Cixous's “The Laugh of the Medusa”. In this section, I will also explain the communication of the muted and the dominant group circles in parallel with “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” by Elaine Showalter. In the second chapter, my focus is collective and active resistance of the muted group, I aim to show how a silent rebellion takes place in the midst of the totalitarian Gilead regime that controls almost each act of its citizens, by analysing the

relationship between the narrator and her shopping partner Ofglen, who is a member of the Mayday underground organisation. I also aim to explain how the muted group takes part in resistance from almost each rank and works for the underground via serving to “networking” directly or indirectly. In that part, I try to explain “the grapevine” which is implied as a part of networking and relate this word with the “grapevine telegraph”³ whose historical background points to slavery in America. In my analysis, I hope to show that in *The Handmaid’s Tale* the oppressed group (mostly composed of women) resist against “silencing methods” and “myths” of Gilead by maintaining their identities through memory and language, while reaching for information with the help of solidarity.



³ I have mentioned Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a critical dystopia as I focus on utopian hope in the novel. Furthermore, the narration has similarities with slave narratives since it is also a tale of liberation. Especially in terms of “The Grapevine Telegraph” as a communication system of slavery as a historical fact, the novel can be considered as “Concrete Dystopia”, too.

CHAPTER I

THE NARRATOR'S INDIVIDUAL RESISTANCE

1.1. "Red Center"

In "The Problem of Dominance", Ardener asserts that "The charisma of dominance comes from a particular power — that of ultimately defining the world in which non-dominants live. Nothing could be more practical and 'action based' therefore than a theory of dominance" (187). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, dehumanization via "dominance" starts at the Rachel and Leah Center as previously liberal women in pre-Gilead are gathered there to be the Handmaids. They are indoctrinated (for their future mission) according to Gilead's patriarchal and religious ideology. The Aunts who are responsible for educating the Handmaids can punish them in this process, and possible attempts at escape are prevented by the Angels who are waiting outside as security guards. The narrator hints at this situation with these words: "Aunt Sarah and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts. No guns though, even they could not be trusted with guns" (Atwood 14). Even though the Aunts are given authority by the Gilead regime, because of their gender they are still seen as potentially dangerous for the regime. Their power is only adequate for maintaining authority over the Handmaids. Although they are not given guns by the rulers, they are permitted to use force upon the Handmaids through other methods, such as testifying, which will be explained later. Women who are gathered to be the Handmaids are under oppression in that they are being brainwashed. Under the dominance of the Aunts, they are considered in a process of losing their identities and becoming servants to the authority. The Rachel and Leah Center, often mentioned as the Red Center in the text, is a re-education center which accommodates true believers and some women who are gathered because of their fertility, with or without their consent. In the narration, it is

understood that some women are caught while they were escaping from the regime like Offred, or like her rebellious friend Moira. The narrator describes how Moira and herself come together in the Red Center:

I must have been there three weeks when Moira came. She was brought into the gymnasium by two of the Aunts in the usual way...she still had her clothes on.... There was a bruise on her left cheek, turning purple. The Aunts took her to a vacant bed, she undressed, began to dress again, in silence. (Atwood 80-81)

It is understood that, after the regime changed, some women were gathered through coercion and violence at different times. Although they know each other, they must pretend they do not because friendship is forbidden. When Moira's rebellious personality is taken into consideration, the bruises on her face show that any rebellious act, statement or resistance to the authority is immediately controlled by force and the Handmaids are policed so that they learn to be silent and cautious.

The Red Center often appears in the narrator's flashbacks as an indication of how the Gilead regime tries to create a new generation of women as handmaids; women who are not aware of their human rights, individuality or freedom, and voluntarily accept their roles as Handmaids. Aunt Lydia says:

You are a transitional generation. . . . It is the hardest for you. We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make. It is hard when men revile you. For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts. . . . Because they won't want things they can't have. (Atwood 127)

The quote clearly shows that the first generation of the Handmaids are expected to struggle against their inferiority and resist dehumanization as the regime's "structural dominance in defining of society, and of the cognitive experiences within it, would tend to favour males" (Ardener 190). Although the regime knows that it is hard for these women to believe in the lies that they invented, they control them with oppression and try to turn them into silent objects. The women who live in Gilead are not only liabilities because they may be rebellious; they also have the power of disrupting the whole system through their memories, remembering their former identities and communicating, because the Gilead regime tries to create a new

signifying chain, a second order semiological chain in Roland Barthes's sense. Barthes, in *Mythologies*, defines a "myth" in these words:

Myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second . . . Everything happens as if myth shifted the formal system of the first significations sideways. (113)

In this sense, the Gilead regime gets hold of the everyday language used by women and imposes their significations on this language, creating a second order semiological system, complete with clothes, expressions and a social and political system. The apparatuses create their own narratives so that they become an experienced reality for the next generation.

One of the reasons why the authority impedes their verbal communication is to prevent information transfer about their history to the new generation. For the new generation to be controlled with doctrines that are sold as "natural facts of life" in the Gilead regime, the women who are used as reproducing slaves are silenced and the ones who are not silenced are sent to the colonies and declared "Unwomen" and are left to die. In the narration, Offred's second wave feminist activist mother⁴ is declared as Unwoman because of the regime's anti-feminist ideology that accuses women's freedom of sexuality, fertility, rape and corruption problems. Via this method, the Aunts aim to destroy "a conscious humanistic feminism...dependent on a willingness to encourage the female to forego a particular freedom on the very threshold of adult life," their promises for creating a utopia for women's protection and security is based on creating a patriarchal society in which "the males become ideologically stronger and stronger, the females weaker and weaker" (Ardener 189). Another reason for barring any act of communication is to keep the women from creating their own narratives or remembering their old selves which indicate female power that will

⁴ Kolmar-Bartkowski states that, "the struggle for women's right to control their bodies underlies much of second-wave feminist activism in the movement for reproductive rights and choice, the women's health movement, and the lesbian rights movement. Second-wave feminists analysed the exploitation of women's bodies in advertising, pornography, film, art . . . and protested the violation of women's bodies through battering, rape, and forced sterilization" (43-44). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, through Offred's memories it is understood that her mother takes place in this movement and raises her daughter in accordance with feminist consciousness.

possibly create conflicts with the inferiority myths the new regime tries to create. The Gilead regime tries to control the communication between these women through the education given in Red Centers.

The relationships among the Handmaids shows that the regime introduces new language patterns based on religion for the Handmaids such as “Blessed be the fruit” and “May the Lord open” or “Praise be”, as ways of greeting and answering. The imposition of a language which is separated from individual expressions and which belongs to Gilead’s religious authority, shows that the Handmaids are women who are supposed to forget their own identity and keep up with their missions with re-created identities which is based on the regime’s ideology. Even the language that they use belongs to Gilead’s patriarchal, religious and conservative authority. This language becomes a signifier in the mythical order, which points to the fact that the regime has penetrated every aspect of these women’s lives. On the surface, they wear costumes according to their missions, use appropriate language patterns, behave according to the regime’s doctrines.

The Handmaids are supposed to obey the rules that do not allow any expression of their individualities. It has forbidden them to do anything by their own will, everything is designed for them, from clothing to communication. Their own body is not considered to belong to them but is in the servitude for the elites’ population increase. The tattoos on their bodies which signify that they belong to the Gilead regime, are reminiscent of the Jewish branding during the Holocaust⁵ and of cattle identification in agriculture. To emphasize her dehumanized position in Gilead, the narrator says ironically: “the small tattoo on my ankle. Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse I am too important, I am a national resource” (Atwood 75). The narrator’s comment on her tattoo indicates how the regime utilizes them by taking their individuality and creates a slave-like position for them by considering them as property.

⁵ “Tattooing was introduced at Auschwitz in the Autumn of 1941. As thousands of Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) arrived at the camp, and thousands rapidly died there, the SS authorities began to tattoo the prisoners for identification purposes. . . By this time, the majority of registered prisoners in the Auschwitz complex were Jews” (“Tattoos and Numbers: The System of Identifying Prisoners at Auschwitz”). In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, similar practice is applied in order to identify the women who are chosen for reproduction and are considered as a property of the Gilead regime. The tattoo which is defined as “a passport in reverse” (Atwood 75) by the narrator shows that it is a precaution for the Handmaids’ escape.

After graduating from the Red Centers, the Handmaids are not supposed to be different from robots, they are expected to be silent, their speech and actions are programmed. They are not allowed to have friendships or love and they are forbidden from sharing anything that may reflect their thoughts and feelings. They are deprived of using language, which is important in terms of being a reminder of their humanity. The regime attempts to programme the Handmaids as illiterate, ignorant and isolated beings. In “Hymen, Lips and Masks in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*”, Coad suggests that:

It is easy to identify the phallogocentrism of this tradition with the republic of Gilead in Atwood’s novel. Similar to what has happened in western philosophy, woman in Gilead has been excluded from the logos. She is silenced and forced into a subaltern position of mute(d) Other. The Handmaids are sexual servants, depersonalized and dispossessed of their rights. (62)

The narrator’s memories about the Red Center show that Aunt Lydia’s religious teachings and sentences for training proper handmaids are given as natural facts but they are mythologies specifically created for these women. For example, one of the myths that the regime sells as reality is the justification of invisibility, that is the dehumanization of the Handmaids. The narrator hears the echo of Aunt Lydia’s voice when she refuses the demand of taking a picture with Japanese tourists: “Modesty is invisibility, said Aunt Lydia. Never forget it. To be seen - to be *seen* - is to be, her voice trembled - penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable” (Atwood 39). The doctrines aim at women’s being invisible. As Aunt Lydia teaches them, they should not demand any individual rights, they are supposed to be silent and obedient: “If you have a lot of things, you get too attached to this material world and you forget about spiritual values. You must cultivate poverty of spirit. Blessed are the meek” (74). Through such statements, Aunt Lydia draws a holy handmaid picture for them. By emphasizing any bodily pleasure as distasteful, shameful and evil, the teachings demand sacrifices from them. The Handmaids are programmed to serve to the regime’s wealth with their bodies and to forget anything else which reminds them of their freedom and their own identities. The Gilead regime bases its hegemony and power on the weakening of women by depriving them of communication, solidarity and friendship, and expecting them not to show any resistance to dehumanization.

In the Red Center, it is understood from the narration that there are women who are already in servitude of the regime who are called “true believers”. They obey the

rules and behave in accordance with the Aunts' teachings, and spy on any kind of unpermitted behaviour by other Handmaids. The Aunts are in servitude of the regime for creating proper Handmaids by using a theatrical voice for persuasion: "They [the liberal women before Gilead] made mistakes, says Aunt Lydia. We don't intend to repeat them. Her voice is pious, condescending, the voice of those whose duty it is to tell us unpleasant things for our own good" (Atwood 124). The narrator's flashback in the Red Centre shows how Aunt Lydia blemishes the ideology of pre-Gilead and creates a hostility towards liberals. In her teachings she makes a distinction through designating left wing as "they" and right wing as "we". She states that the Gilead regime, as "we", is here to change the situation for the people's good. Her insincere voice represents the ideology of Gilead which seemingly tries to create a peaceful environment for its citizens but aims to create hostility among women in order to utilize and silence them. Mistakes mean the freedom of individuality for women. The religious voice addresses the true believers and makes them proud of themselves. Other women (like the narrator) who are not true believers are oppressed and they do not oppose the unpleasant teachings that aim to eliminate their freedom of individuality. In that way these women are supposed to become voiceless and can be considered as a muted group who are under the control of the dominant group. Nevertheless, their muted situation does not mean that they are silent. In *Introduction: The Nature of Women in Society*, Shirley Ardener asserts that:

Muting stems from relationships between groups. It is concerned with their ideas of 'reality' and, how they expressed. The members of these groups do not have to be seen *actively* 'dominating' one another, nor is any one individual's structural position in a society constant. It depends upon the sub-system, or particular universe, of relevance at any one time, and its components . . . Members of muted group may thus come to an accommodation with the social structure in which they are placed, and find their own satisfactions in its interstices or outside its dominant structure. . . The triviality of the occupations and restrictions placed upon members of muted groups, as already noted, may play a part in ensuring their submission.(14-15)

In Gilead's patriarchal and religious system, oppressed group (muted) such as some of the Handmaids or the members of the Underground (active resistance organisations in Gilead) seem to find alternative ways of communication rather than obeying the existing communication rules. In the dominant structure of Gilead which deprives the

muted group from using their own language and limits conventional language patterns, these people show resistance by not losing control over language

When the narrator's flashbacks about the Red Center and Janine's situation are considered, it is seen that the process of becoming a handmaid includes both physical and psychological oppression and isolation. In that sense, Janine can be considered as an example⁶ of how Aunt Lydia succeeds in her dehumanization project in the Red Center. Janine, whose name is among those who "learned to whisper almost without sound" and is considered a friend by Offred in the Red Center on their first day, slowly turns into Aunt Lydia's "puppy" (Atwood 137), through "testifying". Testifying is a part of the curriculum during which the Handmaids are supposed to tell their stories including confessions. The narrator says, "At Testifying, it is safer to make things up than to say you have nothing to reveal" (Atwood 81). They are expected to confess anything which they experienced in the past and show repentance to prove that their thoughts have changed in accordance with the regime's teachings. Testifying is an exemplary rather than a simple confession to show one's repentance, since it is not an individual act but a public issue. The narrator's observations about Janine indicate that at the beginning of Testifying, some of the Handmaids show a kind of defiance by not taking it seriously. "She [Janine] told the same story last week. She seemed almost proud of it, while she was telling. It may not even be true" (Atwood 81). Janine's approach is not considered as appropriate by the Aunts. So, they agonize her by applying psychological violence: "Aunt Helena made her kneel at the front of the classroom, hands behind her back, where we could all see her [S]he looked disgusting: weak, squirmy, blotchy, pink None of us wanted to look like that, ever" (Atwood 82). At Testifying, an example seems enough to teach a lesson to the audience. The Aunts make Janine confess her "sin" publicly. She tells a story about how she was raped and had to go through an abortion. Then, the Aunts force the Handmaids to declare that this was Janine's own fault. Each handmaid is supposed to react in accordance with the Aunts' instructions. Testifying serves as a demolishing of

⁶ She is an example of success of some techniques such as "Gaslighting" which means "deception and psychological manipulation, usually practiced by a single deceiver, or 'gaslighter', on a single victim over an extended period. Its effect is to gradually undermine the victim's confidence in his own ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong, or reality from appearance, thereby rendering him pathologically dependent on the gaslighter in his thinking or feelings" (Duignan). In the novel, Janine is an isolated victim and becomes a source of pride for "gaslighter" Aunt Lydia.

the solidarity among them: “But whose fault was it? Aunt Helena says, holding up one plump finger. *Her fault, her fault, her fault*, we chant in unison. *Who* led them on? Aunt Helena beams pleased with us. *She did. She did. She did* [the Handmaids say all together]” (Atwood 82). Besides silencing women, these methods aim at controlling their minds by silencing their inner voice. After becoming isolated completely, Janine who is fragile and not strong enough to resist, accepts that it was her fault. Janine becomes an example of how the Aunts practice psychological oppression on the women to turn them into true believers. Her conscience is clear, and she does not blame herself in the beginning, but after the moral teachings she has a troubled conscience. The forced confession process, and the manipulation of the story in a way that will make Janine the guilty one may be an example of the myth-making the Aunts pursue in the Gilead regime. The fact that Janine was raped becomes a signifier in the mythological order the Aunts try to create; and its signification is that, in the regime, women are responsible for men’s predatory behaviour, even when they are the victim of this behaviour. The brainwashing process serves to solidify their narratives and it is an attempt at turning this “mythologized” narrative into a reality for the next generation.

According to the narrator, Janine is not a true believer, she is only forced to be like that to gain social acceptance. Since none of them could defend her in the time of Testifying, she turns into Aunt Lydia’s spy and ally: “Janine was like a puppy that’s been kicked too often, by too many people, at random: she’d roll over for anyone, she’d tell anything, just for a moment of approbation” (Atwood 139). This quote shows the effects of exclusion or acceptance by a social group, and how it affects human psychology. Aunt Lydia’s statement, “Very good Janine. . . You are an example” (Atwood 82) is in the tone of saying “good job”, it is a reward mechanism. The methods of silencing successfully work on the women who are not strong enough to resist their psychological oppression, such as Janine or the ones who do not figure out the regime’s divide and destroy strategies, like true believers. During trainings it is hard to cope with this kind of repression which aims at making one feel ostracized by the society and creates a feeling of isolation for those who cannot resist. Instead, they adopt any role which is accepted by their society. Hence, friendship is an obstacle for this kind of isolation and serves as a means of resistance to losing identity.

In their new position as the Handmaids, after graduating from the Red Center, their circumstances of communication change, they are separated from one another

completely, and their social life is limited to the members of the house to which they are assigned: The Commander, The Wife, the Marthas, the Guardian and their shopping partner. Seeing an old friend can only happen by chance in times of special gatherings or in shopping places. Even if that happens, they are not officially allowed to socialize. The Guards and the Eyes are almost everywhere, they are under the regime's control. The level of flexibility in rules applied to their communication also creates segregation among women, like their social statuses. The Wives can communicate with each other more freely, and the Marthas are not under control so they gossip freely among themselves. However, the Handmaids are not allowed to have conversations with those women. They devise alternative ways of expressing themselves, but even these are shaped by the authority to some extent. For example, the Handmaids are forbidden from dealing with gardening and weaving unlike the Wives, nor can they gossip or bake like the Marthas. In terms of communication, the Handmaids are the most handicapped. They stay in the Commander's house for their mission. This mission is to become pregnant, give birth and then in a short time, depart for another house for a new mission. In the period of being at the Commander's house, they go shopping with their partners as they are given lists beforehand. They do not have a say in deciding what to buy. There is nothing left for a them to reflect their individuality. A successful Handmaid is not different from a robot that can do only programmed missions. Janine, again, can be an example of such success on the regime's part. When Offred is at the Birth Day, she realizes that Janine has become a Handmaid named Ofwarren. As Offred observes, Janine seems to have lost her thinking capacity: "And Janine, up in her room, what does she do? Sits with the taste of sugar still in her mouth, licking her lips. Stares out the window. Breathes in and out. Caressees her swollen breasts. Thinks of nothing" (Atwood 125). She does not show any resistance, she is not different from a robot. She has no emotions or thinking ability. Janine adopts the role created by the regime for her; her lack of resistance leads to the loss of her individuality.

However, some of the Handmaids seem to have learnt how to maintain their identity while pretending to be meek, silent and obedient citizens. Some of the members of the muted group succeed in resisting against dehumanization like Offred and Ofglen. These oppressed women who develop consciousness and perspectives over time either show individual resistance like Offred or act against the regime as a member of the underground, like Ofglen. For example, Ofglen is an activist under the

veil of an obedient Handmaid: she tries to gather important information about the elites by using a network, she serves the Mayday organisation which fights for the oppressed groups. Offred's method of maintaining her consciousness in remembering the past and her individual identity also is a way of resistance, for the regime tries to write a new history for the Handmaids in accordance with their patriarchal ideology.

Depriving oppressed women from the means of communication is a tool for creating isolation and weakness. The authoritarian regime aims to control "human communication" of the Handmaids and creates artificial communication methods that are in accordance with their silencing ideology. In this artificial communication, it is forbidden to ask for help and express an opinion or share emotions as a way of bonding. In short, it is designed for preventing any collaboration among the target group. In order to remember their human nature and individual power, the Handmaids must go beyond Gilead's communication rules to create a solidarity. The authority aims to maintain its power by controlling communication; from media to the interaction of citizens, all are designed and apparently under the regime's control. Accessing any information especially for the Handmaids seems almost impossible, as reading and writing are also forbidden for the women in Gilead except for the Aunts. Although the regime silences the target group with ultimate control of communication in the dominant structure, the narration shows that the muted group breaks this communication ban. There are some factors that weaken the control mechanism of the regime such as the elites' illegal tendencies, religious gatherings, and the methods of the silenced group. The regime cannot maintain ultimate control of communication over the muted group as designed, thus in the long term that opens a way to the elimination of its power.

As the narrator tells of her memories of the Red Center, it is understood that the Handmaids are prominently deprived of overt means of communication with each other, except for certain patterns that are regulated by the government. Identity erasing is prominent in that it is forbidden for them to refer to one another using their real names. Nevertheless, they succeed in interacting with one another by developing different and novel strategies, and they try not to forget one another's names. Thus, the text emphasizes the value of communication for women to resist the brainwashing process and identity loss. In that sense, attempts at communication becomes attempts at solidarity and a kind of resistance against the dehumanization process sustained at the Red Center:

We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semi-darkness we could stretch our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking, and touch each other's hands across space. We learned to lip-read, our heads flat on the beds, turned sideways, watching each other's mouths. In this way, we exchanged names, from bed to bed: Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June. (Atwood 14)

When they become the Handmaids, they are given names such as Offred, Ofglen, Ofwarren which suggests that they belong to the men in whose house they serve as handmaids, (i.e., of-Fred, of-Glen, of-Warren) Using language, speaking through their new ways such as soundless whispers and lip reading, in that sense, means remembering and reminding one another of their identities.

As the rules of the regime actively try to make the Handmaids forget their former lives, their identities and one another's names, remembering itself becomes a process of resistance. This points to the idea that by remembering and by attempting communication, they develop a system of support which reminds them their individuality. That women exist only to the extent that they give birth for population increase is a myth that is constructed through certain signifying chains. For example, the Red Center where they become programmed requires the red cloak, which symbolizes someone who exists in order to serve and give birth, and this signifies submission to the authority. Any other narrative that co-exists with this one, any other narrative that stems from remembering one's identity and former life, is dangerous to the authority because it implies a different history than what Gilead tries to sell.

The narrator's statement about why she and her friend could not talk immediately when they saw each other in the Red Center implies that the regime regards friendship as a threat, "Friendships were suspicious, we knew it, we avoided each other during the mealtime line-ups in the cafeteria and in the halls between the classes" (Atwood 81). By defining friendship as suspicious, the narrator indicates that Aunts show cautious distrust of those who have friends and they have the idea that close relationships are dangerous and dishonest. This shows the regime's fear of losing authority by any act of solidarity and organisation among these women who are gathered without their will and are controlled via subjugation and violence. Gilead's precaution is based on depriving the victimized group from socializing in the Red Center, and on isolating them to prevent any cooperation. For this reason, the training places also act as the first steps in the regime's control over the possible danger from revolutionary women who are educated, activist, working or libertarians, in general

those who have the potential to actively rebel against them. Nevertheless, the narrator's flashbacks about the Red Center reveal that the Gilead authority fails to maintain a total control in terms of the Handmaids' friendship and solidarity.

Although the Handmaids are corporally passive with their bodies, they are mentally active which creates new ways of communication through their silenced bodies. Women who resist the regime's brainwashing process in keeping their minds free from the indoctrination are in hope of rescuing their body by "ex-cape-re", which means "getting away from [their]cloaks" in Latin. Therefore, they create some rituals and remember this communion even if they are not in communication with one another. The narrator's flashbacks about the Red Center indicate that they are taught to think that their bodies do not need care in terms of beautification and one's valuing one's body is not acceptable: "No worry about sunburn though, said Aunt Lydia. Spectacles women used to make of themselves. Oiling themselves like roast meat on a spit, and bare backs and shoulders, on the street, in public, and legs, not even stockings on them" (Atwood 65). Aunt Lydia's speech reflects the ideology of the regime. She uses language to create disgust for the women who care for themselves and are proud of their bodies. "Oiling" becomes a taboo for these women, it means both freedom of their bodies and female power. Therefore, "oiling" becomes a signifier of "identity" and resistance in this context. The voice of Gilead's patriarchy serves for eliminating the strong image of the woman who makes her own decisions about her body. They try to justify the cloaks, veils and wings of the Handmaids by creating a misconception as if the problems stem from the idea that women tempt men through their bodies. These teachings, which supposedly aim to create "the appropriate woman" in terms of Christianity, implicitly turn women into means of reproduction for the Gilead regime. Doctrines which are based on religious reasons are risky for them to forget their identity. Some of the Handmaids in the Red Center develop their "own ceremonies" such as "buttering/[oiling]" their bodies to remember that they are not properties. Via their communion, they create an awareness that they must resist dehumanization even when they must act as true believers. It is understood from the narrator's statement, "[w]e have ceremonies of our own, private ones" (Atwood 107) that, they are not passive during the brainwashing process and they are not indoctrinated.

The resistance methods seem effective since after they are separated and sent to serve as handmaids, the narrator remembers their common sharing and continues

this act when she is alone. The Handmaid's ceremony is done in secrecy while buttering her body to maintain personal care is a sign that points to remembrance of the times when she had friends. Some of the Handmaids mediate their beliefs through the allowable forms of the dominant structure. The muted group creates a duality by using the language patterns of the regime while adding alternative meanings to their words. They use the term "ceremony" for buttering themselves. On the other hand, "a ceremony" is a religious ritual that justifies the Handmaid's being raped by the Commander in dominant structure. It means that the Handmaid's womb does not belong to her but serves for the regime. The commander starts the Ceremony by reading from the biblical precedent which is the story of Jacob and his two wives Rachel and Leah, and their two Handmaids: *Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her*" (Atwood 99). The Gilead regime creates a myth which it calls a "Ceremony" in order to arrange a monthly sexual intercourse between the Commander and the Handmaid by selling tales of religion as natural facts. By changing the definitions of the words, the Handmaids break the silence and show a rebellion within the community.

For the narrator, Moira's friendship in the Red Center has an important impact in terms of her sanity and resistance. She emphasizes how this friendship brings her endurance and security in this unbearable place by saying, "It makes me feel safer, that Moira is here" (Atwood 81). In the time of Testifying, Moira is brought to the Red Centre, and they pretend they do not know each other. They later communicate secretly. Although Janine's example has created a kind of terror on the narrator, she gets over it after having a short conversation with Moira which makes her feel "ridiculously happy" (Atwood 83). Throughout the flashbacks during her time in the Red Center, Moira's presence with the narrator can also be considered as an opposition to the Aunts' brainwashing doctrines. As Stillman and Johnson suggest in "Identity, Complicity, and Resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale*", "Because of her feminist consciousness and activity, Moira, unlike Offred, was aware of —almost prepared for— the nightmarish possibility of Gilead. In the Red Center, Moira continues her resistance by maintaining her caustic humour. The hymn, 'There is a Balm in Gilead,' she renames, 'There is a Bomb in Gilead'" (74). Moira has opposing views to the regime's teachings, and she is aware of the regime's tricks and lies. Most of the time she shares her opinions with the narrator after the training. In one of the flashbacks of

the narrator, Aunt Lydia makes the Handmaids watch a movie, a pornographic one from the former times. It indicates that women are at risk of being objectified and humiliated through pornography without the regime's precautions. The narrator remembers how Moira opposes this trick: "Moira said later that it wasn't real, it was done with models; but it was hard to tell" (Atwood 128). By expressing her thoughts, Moira creates an alternative to the Aunts' indoctrination and helps the narrator be sceptical about the situation. The narrator trusts her and agrees with her, and their little talk which is based on sharing thoughts can be considered a dissenting communication which has a lasting effect on Offred since she resorts to the memories of Moira's words, against Aunt Lydia's influence upon her consciousness.

When the story of how Moira escaped from the Red Centre is shared among the Handmaids at bedtime, Moira's freedom provides encouragement and hope for others. Her defiance reduces the effect of steadfast authority in the eyes of the union. The narrator states that: "Moira was our fantasy. We hugged her to us, she was with us with secret, a giggle; she was a lava beneath the crust of daily life. In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and absurd. Their power had a flaw to it. They could be shanghaied in toilets. The audacity was what we liked" (Atwood 143). Moira manages to succeed in what they all dream of. Even thinking about her being free relieves the yoke of their own situation and creates a shared hope for freedom. They express their happiness for Moira's rebellion in secret via giggling. The way they react after learning this piece of news indicates that the Gilead regime lacks complete authority and its ultimate power and threat for them becomes weaker from this point onward. After learning that Moira has run away, the Handmaids' perception about Gilead's authority seems to change. When they are held captive in the Red Center, such an escape story is hope in terms of their liberation. They see that it is possible to get over this situation; however, survival seems possible only by faking obedience to the regime. Pretending handmaids like Offred are alert to any possibility of communication and solidarity to maintain a sense of individuality.

The "Red Center" section shows that although there are some women who cannot cope with Aunt Lydia's divisive strategies and the oppression from true believers, like Janine, some of them show resistance in order to protect their identities like June, Moira and Alma. In the narration, Offred meets with a Handmaid whose name is Alma at Birth Day gathering. Their dialogue shows that some of the Handmaids only pretend to be true believers and they try to help each other. As Offred

says: “[A]nd the woman next to me says, low in my ear, ‘Are you looking for anyone?’ ‘Moira’ I say, just as low.’ Dark hair, freckles.’ ‘No’ the woman says. I don’t know this woman, she wasn’t at the Centre with me . . . But I will watch for you” (Atwood 134). These special gatherings provide the oppressed group with an opportunity to break the communication rule and open a way for cooperation. The narrator, for example, tries to find Moira, who still indicates hope for her escape. In short, the muted group has developed some resistance strategies in order to continue their own beliefs via alternative ways of communication within dominant structure. Besides, feminist consciousness and political awareness via friendship and sanity become a resistance for maintaining identity and hope for the future, thus the narrator searches for ways to gain individual power throughout the novel.

1.2. “Household”

In this part, the narrator’s relationships with the members of the Commander’s house, those that constitute the muted group including Rita and Cora (the Marthas), Serena Joy (the Commander’s wife) and Nick⁷ (the Guardian) and their attributions to her gaining individual power via communicating alternatively will be analysed. Although she is apt to dehumanization on the surface, I explore the possibilities of solidarity or hope for the future from Offred’s perspective by analysing her observations and experiences. I also analyse the narrator’s transition from an uninformed state to gaining knowledge on the political dissent in Gilead.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, being in an informed state has an important place for the muted group as the Gilead regime controls the media and communication. When the narrator comes to the Commander’s house for her third mission, although she considers the Gilead regime as having ultimate power over the citizens, she still hopes that “there must be a resistance” (Atwood 115). The narrator is mostly alert and tries to find any message which indicates a resistance against oppression. Offred and other

⁷ Despite being a man, Nick is also “muted” because of his inferior position in the Gilead regime. According to Ardener, “Men’s models of society are expressed at a meta-level which purports to define women. Only at the level of the analysis of belief can the voiceless masses be restored to speech. Not only women, but inarticulate classes of men, young people and children. We are all lay figures in someone else’s play” (84).

household members have the chance to watch the news while waiting for the Commander before the Ceremony. Offred is interested in any kind of news to figure out what is going on, although she considers them fake: She says: "...Serena always lets us watch the news. Such as it is: who knows if any of it is true? It could be old clips, it could be faked. But I watch it anyway, hoping to be able to read beneath it..." (92). Although the news does not give information about the circumstances in the country, it nevertheless includes some clues for one who can understand hidden messages with the given vocabulary. For example, one of the news that the narrator watches on the television in Serena Joy's room is about smuggling natural resources. In political issues, rather than calling them as the "Handmaids" which is a religious term to make these women believe that they are in servitude for holy reasons, they seem to be mentioned as "national resources" since the Handmaids are responsible for increasing the population. The news includes real information in some cases although it does not give any news about the escape of the Handmaids openly. For example, the narrator says: "Now he [the anchor-man]'s telling us that an underground espionage ring has been cracked, by a team of Eyes, working with an inside informant. The ring has been smuggling precious national resources over the border into Canada" (Atwood 93). It is clear that the news aims at showing the success of Gilead power. The Eyes control anti-government acts, such as smuggling of some properties or products that belong to Gilead. Also, it includes an important hidden message considering that in her retrospective narration, Offred defines herself ironically as a "national resource" while lamenting that she is not different than a property in the Gilead regime. Thus, "national resources" signify the Handmaids in this regime. Offred does not suggest that she is aware of the escape of the Handmaids at that time and does not comment on whether she has read beneath the news after hearing them. The narrator's ironic definition of her body as property shows that as a retrospective narrator, she could figure out what the news means and could read the hidden text. It is understood that in the time of Offred's being at the Commander's house, she is not aware of the underground groups help in the Handmaid's escape while they smuggle some products to other countries.

Besides the television, political speeches in public, like Aunt Lydia's speech in special gatherings like Prayvaganza and Salvagings⁸, at which almost all citizens from all ranks are present, do not reflect the truth and the news seems to be fabricated. Thus, this kind of official news serves for the regime's maintaining power upon the silenced people. In that sense, the only useful source of information comes from communication among people. The information based on the success of the anti-government group is not broadcast and remains in secrecy or language of this kind of information is open to interpretation rather than being clear. Therefore, a Handmaid who is limited with official news may not consider any hope for escape from her situation. And besides their success or failures in their escapes, their stories are important since they have the chance to reach out to people for whom the Handmaids' oppressed position indicates a universal problem and needs to reach a solution. In that aspect, Offred searches for information that will give her an idea about the situations in Gilead.

The narrator creates an alternative source for news such as listening to the gossips of the Marthas. It is very risky to socialize for both parties. Thus, Offred does not have the chance to converse with them, however; the communication Offred looks for is not limited to verbal expressions. She tries to read the Marthas' faces and tries to catch a sign that would suggest identity or recognition. The narrator does not want to be perceived as invisible by others. Consequently, she looks at any signal from Rita's facial expressions that will give her a glimpse of this recognition: "Rita sees me and nods, whether in greeting or in simple acknowledgement of my presence it's hard to say, and wipes her floury hands on her apron and rummages in the kitchen drawer for the token book" (Atwood 19). The narrator analyses each of Rita's acts and facial expressions in detail. She observes her and tries to figure out what her presence means to Rita. Rita's behaviours show that she is determined to stay within the limits of a communication which only entails necessities like shopping and the personal care of the Handmaid. In their interaction, Rita does not show any sympathy to Offred, and according to the narrator, the apathy stems from her situation as a Handmaid: "Her face might be kindly if she would smile. But the frown isn't personal: it's the red dress she disapproves of, and what it stands for. She thinks I may be catching, like a disease

⁸ Prayvaganza: A public wedding ceremony of the Guardians whose marriages are arranged after their victories.

Salvaging: Executions in Gilead Republic

or any form of bad luck” (20). Offred’s observation implies that the Gilead regime’s policy of segregating women and creating hostility among them works properly in the Commander’s house since it precludes any human communication which is based on asking for help or information and sharing thought and feelings.

After her attention, she overhears the Marthas’ conversation and learns that Rita does not like her presence and discriminates against her for being a Handmaid. However, Cora seems to feel empathy toward her in saying that “they are doing it for us all” (20). After hearing this, Offred feels closer to Cora by indicating that she is “more pleasant to [her] than usual” (20). She prefers to stay in the kitchen and Cora’s little show of empathy makes her think about mutual attachment. She imagines a conversation between them which includes common grievances and sharing of emotions. However, she decides that this kind of talk is very distant to her now. Offred needs friendship but the authority’s strict rules are an obstacle for this kind of sharing. She gives up thinking of this kind of association when she remembers that “The Marthas are not supposed to fraternize with us” (Atwood 21). The Handmaids seem to be excluded from any social interaction which is based on sincerity and intimacy from each rank. Probably the Marthas are taught not to interact with the Handmaids personally, so they only interact through formal communication. After Offred and Rita’s shopping dialogue, Offred states it is not possible for them to be friends, and that she will not try. However, her comment on the relationship between a smile and its meaning as an “invitation to friendship” points to extra-spoken means of communication: “Tell them fresh, for the eggs,” she says. “Not like the last time...”. “All right,” I say. I don’t smile. Why tempt her to friendship?” (21). The narrator uses the word “tempt” to emphasize that closeness among these women is forbidden and very risky for both parties. Even though Rita does not answer Offred’s expectations in terms of harmony; this comment suggests that certain codes of behaviour may compensate for the lack of disclosure between the Handmaids. The recognition of these codes means that Offred continues her former psychological schemas, which are integral to her identity. After more observation, Offred does not expect any kind of overt closeness; it is only a necessary shopping dialogue between them. However, she relates smiling to friendship and this statement includes resentment and disappointment, which are emotional reactions.

In the Commander’s house Offred is not recognized as human, she cannot socialize, she is at the risk of slowly being dehumanized; however, the text points to

alternate means of expressions in a way that continues some kind of identity. For example, the smell of the kitchen brings back some memories:

I walk around to the back door, open it, go in, set my basket down on the kitchen table. The table has been scrubbed off, cleared of flour; today's bread, freshly baked, is cooling on its rack. The kitchen smells of yeast, a nostalgic smell. It reminds me of other kitchens, kitchens that were mine. . . . It smells of me, in former times, when I was a mother. This is a treacherous smell, and I know I must shut it out. (Atwood 57)

Via her memory, Offred catches the sense of the state of being human rather than being a machine, since the smell of baking reminds her of the feeling of motherhood and comfort. The product of oppressed women creates a kind of communion within the dominant structure that segregates women and creates hostility. With the smell, the narrator's resistance through remembering comes to the foreground.

The Marthas also become a source of information for the narrator through their gossip. In Gilead there is no open ban for the muted group's gossiping among themselves via whispering, thus gossip becomes a back-channel communication among these women. Although they are "muted" and have no chance to "articulate" themselves in dominant structure of the Gilead regime, they can discuss the regime in the kitchen and seem to "find their own satisfactions in its interstices or outside its dominant structure" (Ardener 14). Overhearing them, Offred has an opportunity to learn some details about Gilead and she develops a consciousness that will help her question her position as a Handmaid in Gilead. Is she a holy woman because of her position in Gilead like Aunt Lydia taught them at the Red Center or not? She has a chance to learn how people perceive her. The gossip about herself is important for the narrator in her process of figuring out the truth about her position in Gilead. When she hears others' opinions about herself, she realizes that the myths for the Handmaids that shows them respectable and holy are not true. Offred secretly listens to the gossip of Rita and Cora about Offred's situation as a Handmaid. They freely express their thoughts and feelings about the Handmaids in general:

Sometimes I listen outside closed doors. . . . [O]nce, though, I heard Rita say to Cora that she wouldn't debase herself like that. Nobody is asking you, Cora said. Anyways, what would you do, supposing? Go to the Colonies, Rita said. They have the choice. With the Unwomen, and starve to the death and Lord knows what all? said Cora. . . . Anyways, they're doing it for us all, said Cora,

or so they say. If I hadn't got my tubes tied, it could have been me, say I was ten years younger. It's not what you'd call hard work. (Atwood 20)

This paragraph shows the contradicting views of two women about the Handmaids in Gilead. They freely exchange information, feelings and thoughts about the circumstances in Gilead as two citizens. Through their conversation we learn the women who choose not to be the Handmaids are sent to the Colonies. There is a category called "Unwoman" and they are left to die or live in very bad conditions in the Colonies. Being a Handmaid means a way to survive, it is not a choice. In Gilead, the citizens seem to believe that the Handmaids are voluntarily doing their mission. Rita's word "debase", being used for Offred's situation shows that being a Handmaid is shameful and disrespectful. She also criticizes Offred for not choosing to go to the Colonies like other rebellious women. Rita's opinion lacks empathy and affection for Offred, however she also criticizes the Handmaids' position in society. Her opinion implies that she is not a real believer, who is brainwashed into thinking that being a Handmaid is voluntary and it is a holy mission for the Gilead regime. On the other hand, Cora respects Offred's situation since she believes that Offred's pregnancy indicates hope for the Gilead regime. With the help of the Marthas' gossip, the narrator learns about their different views about her situation.

While in the news the regime tries to persuade the citizens that everything is under control and "there will be peace" (Atwood 93), the Marthas' conversation reveals that the opposite is true. Even though the news shows the power of the Gilead regime, the Marthas' rumours and whisperings reveal the regime's inhumane treatment. Their conversation helps Offred to have a different point of view about the power of Gilead. By overhearing their conversation, the narrator learns that the guarantee for the peace of the citizens in the news is not true. Also, there are some rebellious acts that the regime cannot prevent, like the assassination of the Commanders by the oppressed group. Gossiping, in that sense, both informs the narrator and the reader about Gilead's failure. The narrator explains how she learns the news about other houses and privacy of people by overhearing Cora and Rita:

"I've heard them at it sometimes, caught whiffs of their private conversations. Stillborn, it was. Or, Stabbed her with a knitting needle, right in the belly. Jealousy, it must have been, eaten her up. Or, tantalizingly, it was a toilet cleaner she used. Worked like a charm, though you'd think he'd of tasted it. Must've been that drunk; but they found her out all right." (21)

By breaking the silence with their gossip, though not intentionally, the Marthas become helpful to the resistance since their private conversations include news. This quote can be interpreted in three ways: Firstly, “stillborn” gives hints about the population decline. In the narration, it is understood that the Gilead authority enables its ideology by forming a perception in people’s minds that by turning their backs on traditions of the pre-Gilead, it is possible to increase the population. This possibility is a part of the brainwashing process. Both the Handmaids and others in Gilead are persuaded that the future depends on these women. The promise to solve the problem of sterility is a basic reason that the citizens trust them. The word “stillborn” shows that Gilead regime is unsuccessful in solving problems with methods which deny science and are mostly based on the regime’s myths. Thus, the knowledge about the birth rates is very valuable for the citizens.

Secondly, In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the Wives can possibly harm the Handmaids because of their fertility. In the narration the Wives are associated with jealousy as well as knitting. For example, in one of the narrator’s flashbacks, they are warned of the wives’ hostility and jealousy by Aunt Lydia: “It’s not the husbands you have to watch out, said Aunt Lydia, it’s the Wives” (Atwood 56). When the conversations of the Marthas are considered in that respect, the narrator who has this knowledge can interpret this short speech as news. She may think that a wife causes a baby to be stillborn by stabbing her with a knitting needle because of her jealousy. As for Offred, it is an indication for the failure of the regime since they fail in creating a sorority among women as they promised. Additionally, the gossip creates a suspicion that Gilead regime cannot protect the Handmaids and she needs to be careful in the house.

Lastly, the gossip implies that some of the Commanders call the Handmaids to their private rooms and they have affairs. Offred becomes aware of the possibility of such relationships while the Marthas are speculating about the “stillborn”. The sentence by a Martha, “It was a toilet cleaner she used” can be interpreted as a piece of information on the possibility of a wife’s using a toilet cleaner for poisoning the Handmaid secretly, causing her baby to be stillborn. The gossip also hints at the illegal tendencies of the Commanders. Throughout the novel, it is known that some of the Commanders and the Handmaids drink alcohol together secretly and becoming a

mistress is an issue. “She” in the gossip refers to a Handmaid who is found alive. As the Commander has not recognized the taste of poison, it has “worked like a charm”. So, Offred learns that there is a possibility of going to the Commander’s room as a Handmaid, and a close relationship is a possibility, too. Although in this event the Wife attempts murdering a Handmaid, the narrator learns that killing the Commander is also possible by “stealing” a toilet cleaner and putting it in his glass if they have a secret relationship. The narrator becomes aware of the fact that some of the Commanders make the Handmaids their mistresses secretly, so she may think there is a possibility that some of the rebellious ones harm the Commanders. For a Handmaid who is determined to act against the regime, it is possible to assassinate the Commanders and cause the regime to lose power. Although the narrator does not attempt this kind of thing when she is in the Commander’s house, she includes in her narration that this is a possibility. For example, “Stealing” is associated with the narrator’s rebellious feelings since she has the desire to steal a “knife” in the times of individual resistance while secretly exploring the Commander’s house at night. The information given through gossip is open to alternative interpretations. Gossip is “veiled”, ambiguous and cannot be trusted. Nevertheless, it can give clues about the problems in Gilead society. When it is considered with regard to Offred who searches for hope in each kind of information, this telegraphic speech is very informative about a way of direct rebellion of the oppressed women like herself. On the other hand, the gossip reveals the Wives’ hostility towards the Handmaids as alternative facts against the Gilead’s myths such as “a spirit of camaraderie among women” (Atwood 234). Although the narrator gets some hope for resistance from the oppressed group in the house, she cannot find direct solidarity; nevertheless, she reclaims the Martha’s trivial discourse on behalf of her own individual resistance. In terms of creating a political awareness in public and sharing information about the elite’s privacy, the gossip can be considered as an indirect way of resistance which will be discussed later as a part of “the grapevine”.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, on the surface Offred does not find any solidarity from the women in the Commander’s house, nevertheless, she has a chance to get knowledge or find some hope for resistance from their alternate means of expressions through experiences appealing to her senses. The narrator’s conversations with the Commander’s wife is a disappointment for her in terms of humane treatment and harmony in general. She ostracizes Offred for being a Handmaid, and she shows hatred

rather than care. Serena Joy's behaviour toward her reinforces the idea that Offred is inferior and not being liked by her although both are silenced as women in the Gilead regime. However, it can still be seen that Offred is open to communication and she wants to be understood as a sentient being:

I was disappointed. I wanted, then, to turn her [Serena Joy] into an older sister, a motherly figure, someone who would understand and protect me. The wife in my posting before this had spent most of her time in her bedroom; the Marthas said she drank. I wanted this one to be different. . . . But I could see already that I wouldn't have liked her, nor she me. (26)

Offred says that she imagined in vain that she can feel close to and get sympathy from this woman. The regime has already created a hostility between them, their position does not permit any closeness and intimacy. Another important point is that the Wife preceding Serena Joy seems to have found a solution to escape this unbearable situation with the help of alcohol, even though she is higher in status when compared to Offred.

It is only after Offred thinks that there will be no opportunity for friendship that she behaves according to her supposed role as a handmaid in not showing any individuality in her conversations. Her speech assumes an automatic character: "Yes, Madam, I said again, forgetting. They used to have dolls, for little girls, that would talk if you pulled a string at the back; I thought I was sounding like that, voice of a monotone, voice of a doll" (Atwood 26). The regime's dehumanization of the Handmaids through uniform costumes, deprivations of individual rights, and bans continue in their household relationships. The communication between women is discriminating, and it is a disappointment for Offred, in terms of solidarity. While these women are observed as hostile to each other in the dominant structure, there is still a bond between them stemming from some features such as "botanical imagery" that "do not fit into that definition [of men] (Ardener131). Although she does not show any solidarity as an oppressed woman in the Gilead regime, she indirectly creates a sense of resistance and hope for Offred with her works such as gardening. Serena Joy's flower arrangement reminds her of her own garden, and this visual richness appeals to her senses thus helps her maintain power. Also, her productivity in gardening gives clues about Serena's desire of articulateness of herself, sexuality and motherhood. As an alternative means of expression, she "articulates" herself with the arrangement of flowers in her garden.

Serena Joy is among the silenced women in Gilead since she lives in domesticity. Her position as a Wife has similarities with the women's situation in Victorian period. She is limited to controlling the house. She is restricted with domestic issues; she is busy with knitting, gardening and governing the house. As a woman living in a patriarchal community, although she has some power over her servants, her superiority comes from her husband's status. She is excluded from logos, too. She cannot make speeches on television as she used to do in the past before Gilead, she cannot make love with her husband because of the regime's rules. Instead, Serena Joy creates a chance to reflect her productivity (both mentally and physically) in the arrangement of flowers in her garden. The flower arrangements, which have the aura of matriarchy within patriarchal dominant structure, inspire the narrator. As for looking at Serena's garden, she feels hope in terms of the power of the muted group and says: "There is something subversive about this garden of Serena's, a sense of buried things bursting upwards, wordlessly into the light, as if to point, to say: Whatever is silenced will clamour to be heard, though silently" (Atwood 161). In terms of Serena Joy, "buried things bursting upwards" can be associated with Serena's view about returning to the traditions. Nevertheless, the narrator becomes motivated in terms of resistance and she proves with her tale that as a silenced woman she can reach an audience. Although she understands that Serena Joy does not show irreverent behaviours openly, the narrator goes on observing her and finds some hope in terms of resistance. According to Cataldo:

Offred's hope is to survive, "keep on living, in any form", but also to escape, to step outside the circle that encloses her, and to re-appropriate her own life. Thus, every little thing that seems to set a crack in the dystopian circle represents to her some reason for hope, such as the cigarettes Serena Joy possessed: "the cigarettes must have come from the black market, I thought, and this gave me hope". (163)

Serena's smoking which is illegal in Gilead becomes a sign for Offred that indicates a hope for resistance and a message that the Gilead power does not have total control as it seems to. Offred realizes that although indirectly, the elites contribute to the weakening of the regime since the trade of illegal products means violation of official regulations. While the Gilead authority claims that everything is under their control via media, the black market which is overlooked by the regime signals the power of the underground.

As for Serena, Offred is a vehicle for her being a mother and she limits her communication with Offred within this framework. After spending nearly three seasons together in the Commander's house, Offred and Serena have a real conversation for the first time. While Offred is returning to the house from her routine shopping expedition, Serena calls her to the garden and asks her to sit on the cushion. Before starting a conversation, the narrator looks at her knitting and habitually tries to figure out her personality. She finds some clues about her strong character by interpreting her way of knitting. The narrator figures out that although Serena is limited with the activities that is designed by the authority to make them busy, she goes beyond the recommendations by producing more: "it's been medically prescribed: ten rows a day of plain, ten of purl. Though she must do more than that" (Atwood 214). As for the narrator, she reflects her personality to her products, her identity is not erased by the regime's definition of passive, obedient and weak image of Wife. Interpreting Serena's way of knitting, the narrator says, "Perhaps the knitting, for her, involves a kind of willpower. . . I see those evergreen trees and geometric boys and girls in a different light: evidence of her stubbornness, and not altogether despicable" (214).

Right after this indirect communication between muted groups, in their conversation Offred understands that she is not wrong about Serena's rebellious personality. The Commander's Wife asks her, "Nothing yet?" by alluding to her pregnancy, "'No,' [the narrator] say[s]. Nothing" by figuring out the context. Serena only says, "Too bad," then shows her anxiety about this situation by reminding Offred that "[her] time is running out" (214). She does not accuse Offred because of this situation although it is Offred's mistake according to the authority. Instead, she shows empathy and says, "May be [the Commander] can't" (215), which is a direct rebellion within the Gilead regime as it accuses a man of sterility. She shows disobedience both to the Commander and to the authority. As a silenced woman, the Commander's wife directly articulates her opinion, and reveals the truth by not accepting the regime's myth, "It's only women who can't, who remain stubbornly closed, damaged, defective" (215). Her act shows that she is a rebellious woman in contrast to the myth of "Wife" that is obedient to authority and has not a Word. This conversation is important as it shows that solidarity and resistance against patriarchy in this society is possible even between two segregated women. Serena tries to solve this problem by offering the narrator to become pregnant in another way, although both know that it's

against the law. It's seen that she has thought options beforehand. When Offred hesitates about this offer, she says "I would help you. I would make sure nothing went wrong" (215). Feeling such a closeness, the narrator says ". . .for this moment at least we are cronies, this could be a kitchen table, it could be a date we're discussing, some girlish stratagem of ploys and flirtation" (215). After discussing the secure ways of alternatives in a friendly tone of conversation, they make an agreement when Serena offers Nick, who she relies on. Excluding the Commander from their secret plan, Serena shows that she is the authority, she has the Word. For the narrator, it is a sign that female power is not erased; even the Commander's Wife who is supposed to obey the rules of her own will, is not content with the regime's ideology and acts against authority. This secret plan makes the narrator excited as she finds feminine power within the male dominant ideology: "This idea hangs between us, almost visible, almost palpable: heavy, formless, dark; collusion of sort, betrayal of a sort. She does want that baby" (216).

Different from the depiction of regime's myth of Wife who accepts the inferiority of women, Serena is a strong, dangerous, and rebellious woman, and she acts in accordance with her own will by taking risks. She does not fit into the stereotype of the Wife image in the Gilead regime. She is not "an angel in the house." As Gilbert and Gubar suggest in *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), "the angel woman manipulates her domestic/mystical sphere in order to ensure the well-being of those entrusted to her care reveals that she can manipulate; she can scheme; she can plot-stories as well as strategies." (26). When Offred does not become pregnant after the ceremonies, Serena Joy thinks that the Commander could be sterile, and she finds a solution utilizing Nick and Offred's fertility to this aim. As she desires a baby, she tries to find a solution and concocts a secret plan by considering the risks and taking precautions. For Serena Joy, Nick is very reliable; he obeys his masters and does not talk much. Thus, guaranteeing not being betrayed, she chooses Nick and shows Offred a picture of her daughter "as if offering [her] some juvenile treat..." (Atwood 216). The narrator understands that Serena knows where Offred's daughter is when she says "Your little girl. But only may be" (216). In order to get what she wants the Commander's Wife reaches to the situations strategically. After their conversation, she has pleasure of showing that she has the power, as the narrator states: "She is actually smiling, coquettishly even; there's a hint of her former small screen mannequin's allure. . .

(216). With her secret plan she shows that she has more authority beside the domestic issues and she is the subject who decides in accordance with her will rather than being a passive wife who is inferior to her husband; with this act, she steals the Word from the Commander and the Gilead regime and she becomes authoritative by showing that she is not limited with controlling the house, designing motifs for her knitting or does not arrange only flowers; she uses her ability or control in other plans which means rebellion.

Serena Joy's power of self-articulating and rebellion against the dominant ideology (as a member of muted group) indirectly opens a way to the Handmaid's liberation. Intimacy between Nick and Offred becomes possible only after this secret meeting. From the beginning of the narration onwards, Nick, the chauffeur and the Guardian, is the only person who treats the narrator as a human being and an individual in the Commander's house. Nick tries to make Offred understand this and finds alternative ways of communication. He sends "nonverbal" and "inarticulate" signals to Offred and she reads them while observing his gestures, so the communication has already begun from the beginning of the novel. They interact with each other through body language. Although his facial expressions, such as a smile and a wink are considered as "friendly" by Offred, she hesitates to get closer to Nick since it is very risky. Offred is cautious, she just observes him and does not interact with him; nevertheless, they communicate with each other in silence. For example, when Offred is still new at the Commander's house, when she returns from shopping: "Nick looks up and begins to whistle" (Atwood 55). He tries to show his interest in Offred, although they are only allowed to utter the expressions belonging to the artificial communication that the regime allows. Nick's whistling is a kind of serenade for Offred, whom he tries to attract. (Music and singing are also forbidden in Gilead). Similar with the muted group's whispering, Nick sings through his body, he makes musical sounds by blowing air through his lips. Then he goes beyond this by saying "Nice walk?" (Atwood 55) and tries to interact with Offred by asking a question. Although she keeps silent, Offred gives a nonverbal answer: "I nod, but do not answer with my voice" (55). Offred interprets Nick's attention as a risky step to get close: "He isn't supposed to speak to me. Of course, some of [the Guardians] will try, said Aunt Lydia. All flesh is weak" (55). As Offred understands from the beginning, Nick is not overly worried about the bans and he takes risks; he tries to find some individual reminders. Offred tries to understand Nick by forming an impression of him then

making some evaluations. By reading his nonverbal communication, Offred finds some elements which reveal that he still has individual tendencies such as smoking and wearing perfume.

On the other hand, Nick takes advantage of each circumstance to send nonverbal messages to Offred. For example, when the “household” assembles for the Ceremony, Nick assumes a place behind Offred, and the tip of his boot touches Offred’s foot. He “moves his foot so it’s touching [hers] again” (91). Nick tries to send Offred some messages alternatively via appealing to her senses which reminds her of her human nature. Offred and Nick, as members of muted group in dominant structure, become visible to each other and they alternatively find ways of having pleasure. According to Shirley Ardener:

The triviality of the occupations and restrictions placed upon members of muted groups. . . may play a part in ensuring their submission. Further, the importance placed upon small concerns and minutely detailed forms of control enables correspondingly great personal satisfactions to be got from small scale pleasures. (15)

For both the narrator and Nick, alternative ways of communication become a way of expressing their feelings towards each other without taking a risk as their veiled communication is non-social and is not observable openly. The act of touching, for example, creates a satisfaction between the members of muted groups. In this process, although each member of the house is there, they cannot realize their communication because of her red cloak. Also, metaphorically, they cannot see her human side because of her red cloak. As Offred says: “No one can see, beneath the folds of my outspread skirt. I shift, it’s too warm in here, the smell of stale perfume makes me feel a little sick. I move my foot away” (Atwood 91). While the narrator’s and Nick’s subconscious desire is to be touched, within this context this insignificant act of touch gains deeper meaning for them. Although people do not understand their interaction, the sender and the receiver of the nonverbal message are active, and they understand each other. By moving her foot away, Offred tries to show Nick that she does not want to take a risk, or she is not going to respond to his interest.

Throughout the novel, Nick is also a witness of the dehumanizing treatment of the Handmaids in Gilead. The commander orders him to arrange their meeting with Offred. The narrator says:

I visit the Commander two or three nights a week, always after dinner, but only when I get the signal. The signal is Nick. If he's polishing the car when I set out for the shopping, or when I come back, and if his hat is on askew or not on at all, then I go. If he isn't there or if he has his hat on straight, then I stay in my room in the ordinary way. (162)

Nick informs the narrator through body language and he seems to be accustomed to this method already. The narrator observes him by looking out of the window and says she does not have a chance to speak with him: "He's only my flag, my semaphore. Body language" (Atwood 91). She emphasizes that their communication is based on nonverbal messages. The narrator sees that he is generally quiet but clever. This creates the suspicion that he is an Eye, so she does not take a risk. When they look at each other in a coincidental meeting, the narrator says: "I have no rose to toss, he has no lute. But it's the same kind of hunger. Which I can't indulge" (201). The narrator suggests how the Gilead regime deprived them of sexuality as 'rose' is a symbol of femininity and "lute" is for masculinity. The narrator implies that although they both have irresistible desire toward each other, there is no way to have a relationship with each other because of the strict laws of Gilead. They can understand each other's feelings by reading one another's faces and Offred thinks that they are feeling the same. After this exchange of glances, she remembers Luke, her husband and thinks of the possibility that Nick can replace Luke. Affective ties such as love, family relationships and friendships are considered as threats for the regime and they are forbidden. For this reason, the communication ban is a precaution for collaboration. According to Cataldo, "Love is the real subversive force present in the novel, since it is exactly what the regime has tried to destroy" (165). Considering the effect of love upon individual power and rebellion, the possibility of a strong bond between Nick and Offred indicates hope for her survival.

Although Nick tries to stay close to Offred throughout the novel, she does not want to take the risk. The situation that binds Nick and Offred together is created by Serena Joy's plan of alternative way of pregnancy for the Handmaid. Offred witnesses that beside Offred's body, Nick's body also serves the elites' desires. Serena's secret plan creates a bond between Offred and Nick, they both share a similar fate. The narrator starts to take risks and follows her personal desires. She says: "I went back to Nick. Time after time, on my own, without Serena knowing. It wasn't called for, there was no excuse. I did not do it for him, but for myself entirely" (280). Offred needs to

be known as a human being, she wants to be recognized by the other with her identity. She says, “I tell him my real name, and feel that therefore I am known” (282). His humane treatment of Offred is juxtaposed with his silence in the presence of the Commander. In “Breaking the Circle of Dystopia: Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*”, Adelina Cataldo suggests that:

The only male character in the novel that does not “have the Word” is Nick, who significantly becomes Offred’s escape from the dystopian circle, first at the psychological level, since Offred falls in love and thus finds in him someone that can make her feel human and alive, despite her state of subjugation, and then by concretely organizing her escape. (165)

As members of the muted group, Offred and Nick’s silent communication turns into a silent rebellion through body language and affective ties. They speak through their bodies while willingly making love. They remind one another of their former independence. Both metaphorically and literally, Nick has an important role in helping Offred’s escape from dehumanization in both by being somebody with whom she can interact on intimate level, and by making her recognize her individual power. After gaining autonomy by writing (which will be discussed in next part) and deciding to fight against the oppressive regime, the sexual experience in which she denies authority and opens ways to liberation. According to Curti, “The way out can only be in the attack moved against phallogentrism through the exploration of the continent of female pleasure, which [Cixous] states is neither dark nor unexplorable (114). In her process of gaining autonomy, with this sexual experience she steps into the wild which means rebellion and freedom.

As the narration’s ending is not definite, it is not exactly clear whether Nick helps her escape, it is apparent that he helps her escape the red cloak by touching her body as a human-being, which gives Offred strength. In their sexual relationship, Offred does not feel objectified. Her body is touched by someone who can see beyond her cloak, her personality. Although they do not talk about love, the narrator seems to be in love with Nick. She feels safe and tells him about Moira and Ofglen. She shares her real name with him, since Nick’s behaviour toward her reflects that he sees her as an individual, not as property. Throughout the novel, Offred gives importance to love. When she chooses to stay with Nick instead of escaping with the help of Mayday, her

feelings are clear: “The fact is that I no longer want to leave, escape, cross the border to freedom. I want to be here, with Nick, where I can get at him” (Atwood 283). As their relationship means recognition of each other with their willing acts, the more they interact with each other the more aware Offred becomes of her human identity. The secure sense of attachment with Nick seems to create a strong sense of self-worth for the narrator. This romantic experience and strong attachment bond which reminds her of her early experience with Luke and her daughter seem to create a satisfaction and independence on the narrator.

Considering Nick’s mobility and going to the Black Market, which indicates “resistance” for the narrator, he has the opportunity to interact with Mayday members for helping the Handmaid’s escape. He even has the possibility of interacting with Moira via the “network”, which will be explained. In the process of Offred’s being taken by two strangers, he wants Offred to trust him and makes her feel not afraid by whispering which is the voice of the muted group. By opening her room’s door and coming closer, he whispers: “It’s Mayday. Go with them” (Atwood 305). Offred’s willing act is a very risky step for regaining her body from the Gilead regime. But it is an important step that makes her reach her freedom. As the narrator’s knowledge about the Mayday is limited to Ofglen’s information, she cannot assume that although Nick is an Eye, he can be a member of the active resistance. Instead she supposes that Nick betrays her. In order to clarify this ambiguity, it is helpful to look at the communication system of the underground and solidarity among the muted group which will be discussed in the second chapter.

1.3.Nolite te Bastardes Carborundorum

*By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,
As clerkes han withinne hir oratories,
They wolde han writen of men more wikednesse
Than all the mark of Adam may redresse.*

—Geoffrey Chaucer—

Longing for intimacy and solidarity, in her isolation at the Commander's house, Offred finds a tiny note scratched on the inner surface of her wardrobe while exploring her room at night. This note which reads "Nolite te bastardes carborundorum" can be treated as a graffiti made by the previous Handmaid, so is an element belonging to "trivial discourse" as designated by Kramarae. While artificial communication, such as "Bless your fruit" and "Praise be", emphasizes her dehumanization, this visual means of communication creates an affective tie between two Offreds and suggests hope for resistance. This "graffiti" makes Offred pleased since she takes it as a message, and feels as if she has interacted with a friend and remembers Moira, a self-confident, disobedient and clever woman whose existence suggests hope for the narrator, a hope regarding the possibility of escape. Rather than a victim, the sender of the message is perceived as strong by the narrator: "quirky, jaunty, athletic...Freckles, I think; irreverent, resourceful" (Atwood 62). The adjectives that are dedicated to the sender show that she could succeed in rebellion. In her isolation Offred finds solidarity in her communication with a silenced but strong woman through the matrix of time. Even before knowing the meaning of the sentence, in the Ceremony, this sentence becomes a mantra for the narrator when she is supposed to complete her "holy" mission by sacrificing her body for the regime's population increase. As standing against the Commander's religious words and prayers that justify the Handmaid's rape, the message becomes a symbol of the resistance. The narrator says: "I pray silently: Nolite te bastardes carborundorum. I don't know what it means, but it sounds right . . . The scratched writing on my cupboard wall floats before me, left by an unknown woman, with the face of Moira" (101). Offred cannot stand the religious texts of patriarchy that "subordinate and imprison women" (Gilbert and Gubar 13). Instead of accepting the religious texts as fact, she believes in the solidarity and rebellion of oppressed women which she associates with Moira throughout the novel.

After finding the note, the narrator says: "It pleases me to ponder this message. It pleases me to think I'm communing with her...It pleases me to know that her taboo message made it through, to at least one person" (62). The piece of writing which is written either by pin or nail can be considered a way of speaking out, since it comes from a Handmaid who is trying to be silenced completely in Gilead's patriarchal and religious system. According to Canton, this message connects three generations of

Offreds, and this piece of writing, when seen from a larger perspective, can connect to the act of narrating which is undertaken by Offred as the narrator:

The phrase symbolizes the “Offred” personality; that is, it symbolizes not only “our” Offred who finds the phrase but also the Offred who came before her and hanged herself and carved the phrase as well as the Offred who will succeed “our” Offred and re-read the motto . . . Because the phrase signals resistance —“our” Offred’s resistance; the violent, self-destructive resistance of the former Offred, who hanged herself; the resistance that will be the “new” Offred’s, when “our” Offred is replaced—its aural resilience further emphasizes the resistance inherent in the act of narrating counter-memories. (9-10)

The message represents the voice of a silenced woman who challenges the authority and resists by maintaining her power with the act of writing. This phrase is “a text in which the ‘wild zone’ becomes the place for revolutionary women’s language, the language of everything that is repressed and for the revolutionary women’s writing in ‘white ink’” (Showalter 201). When the Handmaid’s position who is responsible for giving birth and breastfeeding is taken into consideration, the little note is a revolutionary text that becomes herstory. In “The Laugh of the Medusa” Helene Cixous emphasizes the importance of women’s writing as a resistance to oppression:

It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (881)

Women’s use of language and their taking place in narrative space have a liberating effect as their silencing depends on the control of the language by the patriarchal authority. Women’s act of writing and narrating open ways for them to articulate themselves within the dominant structure and this act of breaking the silence has a role in the social and political change within the oppressive system. Offred makes her voice heard by recording her tale and the extended message reaches to the next generations as she intended. The process of the narration is an activity of never-ending story telling with an effort to pass the female collective memory in which she challenges patriarchal

definitions of women as creating alternatives to the regime's myths which are considered as truths. Her tale does not only include her oppression story, but also gives place to the muted group's struggle. Although the plot shows the dominance of the Gilead regime in general, there lies a resistance story called "nolite te bastardes carborundorum" beneath the surface. Her tale includes women's experiences in which both their oppression and their resistance against silencing takes place. Therefore, her story including Serena's arranging a secret meeting, Martha's gossip and the Handmaid's writing experiences in the dominant structure can all be considered as attacks on Gilead's patriarchal ideology.

In Gilead, reading and writing are forbidden for the Handmaids, even the names of the shopping places are symbolic or when they are caught using pens, their hands are cut. Since the regime prefers the women to be illiterate, and these activities are associated with authority and power in patriarchal tradition, the women are deprived of these rights. Any attempt at reading and using a pen signifies individual power against the regime's authority. In this aspect, the narrator is privileged. Offred's relationship with the Commander does not make her feel valued, she feels objectified. Her relationship with the Commander is not something she can do away with; however, she uses even this situation for acquiring knowledge and a way to liberate herself from the regime. During the timespan of her mission in the Commander's house, she seems to get strength and it is not a coincidence that her escape becomes possible right after she is there for her mission as a Handmaid. This is Offred's third mission as a Handmaid, she seems to know how she can succeed in escaping via information and being more conscious. (Her tale does not include any memories about the houses she has previously stayed as a Handmaid). However indirectly, this relationship serves Offred's individuality since she gains some privileges like reading books in his room, or using a pen, or learning information about the regime. She uses the opportunities of her very disadvantaged situation for the benefit of her rebellious personality.

For the Handmaids who are in danger of being dehumanized, reading is a basic resistance since it provides individual power by remembering. For example, "[t]he dictionaries in the Commander's room, which represent this lost knowledge, are the

bridges to the past and the keys to power over the present (Klarer 134). In a short time, Offred has a chance to read some magazines and even novels in the periods when the Commander calls her to his room secretly at nights. In this respect, the narrator is advantageous. Since reading is a taboo for the Handmaids, Offred's reading activity probably makes the Commander excited. The Commander's gaze makes Offred feel as if she is naked, she claims: "the watching is a curiously sexual act" (194). The Commander's soft spot becomes a source of power for the narrator. In this way, she has a chance to lead a silent act of rebellion. The Commander's room is full of books and in time, he allows Offred to read books from his library. It even goes further and becomes a habit. The books she has read in this process become helpful for the narrator's resistance against oppression. For example, Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* which Offred reads includes the theme of mechanization of human beings and utilitarian ideologies. While reading this novel, the narrator finds the chance to have a communion with female characters in the novel that share common problems, so forgets her loneliness. According to Thomas, both *The Handmaid's Tale* by Atwood and *Hard Times* by Dickens hints at the same problem, the victimization of women:

Both works feature a woman—Louisa in *Hard Times* and Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*—victimized by a totalitarian system that attempts to control her thoughts and deny her humanity. Furthermore, in developing these themes in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood appears to echo a number of Dickens's details as well as his larger concern with imagination and love in *Hard Times*. (90)

While reading, she is reminded of her human nature by communicating with the characters. She can gain a perspective about how to show resistance in her hard times and escape from her situation. Besides novels, Offred has the chance to read magazines in that room such as *Mademoiselle* which is "a magazine giving young women beauty and fashion advice" (guides.library.harvard.edu). In Gilead, issues of beauty and fashion are just beyond imagination or reminiscent of the past. When the narrator has a chance to see the same issues (such as body care and beauty in pre-Gilead) again with the help of the magazine, she is reminded of the perception of women in the past, and she remembers her individuality. As Gerhard asserts: "[M]agazines represent feelings and thoughts the Handmaids are not supposed to have, something humane and spontaneous" (69). With the help of the magazines, Offred has a chance to resist the myth of women which is imposed by Aunt Lydia, as the magazines perpetuate

alternative myths about women's bodies. The advices about body care, beauty and fashion are helpful for Offred in that when there is an alternative to the imposed mythology.

Besides reading, the narrator finds a chance to write which shows her control over language/power. Writing for a woman in Gilead is associated with power and authority, among women only Aunts can read and use pens. The pen belongs to the oppressors. For a Handmaid who is deprived of producing anything that reminds of her power (even knitting or having a bath), using a pen means a direct rebellion which indicates her own authority against the Gilead regime. The narrator, "longing to attempt the pen, [has] longed to escape from the many-faceted glass coffins of the patriarchal texts. . ." (Gilbert and Gubar 43) and has created a chance to regain autonomy as she rescues her body from being an object. In the Commander's room, Offred uses a pen, to find out the meaning of the sentence, "Nolite te bastardes carborundorum". Since she does not pronounce the sentence correctly, she suggests to "write it down" (Atwood 195). And the Commander accepts after a quick hesitation. While writing the sentence, Offred feels the authoritative power of the pen in herself: "The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains" (196). The narrator indicates openly how she finds her individual power with the help of using the pen which means authority. In this way, she also carries herself to the subject position which opens the way to the liberation of her body from patriarchal texts as the sentence becomes alive. For a victimized and muted handmaid whose rape is justified by the biblical texts and whose body is reduced to a national property or a sexual object in the Gilead structure, to articulate her resistant sentence to the Commander (authority) via writing means that she has won back her body. According to Cixous:

To write. An act which will not only "realize" the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any. . .)— tear her away by means of this research, this job analysis and illumination, this emancipation of the marvellous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak. A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter. (880)

The act of writing stimulates the narrator's rebellious feelings and the more she feels individual power, the readier she feels to fight against the oppression. After writing the sentence, she wants to take the power from the authority and stealing means an act of rebellion in that respect: "It is one more thing I would like to steal" (Atwood 196) says Offred. Her desire of stealing refers to taking back her individuality and carrying her individual consciousness to a collective space by narrating her story of survival. When she holds the pen, she has pleasure of writing that reminds her strength to fight for freedom.

The meaning of the sentence is "Don't let the bastards grind you down." After learning the meaning, Offred thinks: "I can see why she [previous Offred] wrote that, on the wall of the cupboard, but I also see that she must have learnt it, here, in his room" (197). The sentence once is considered as a message for the narrator, (since it is sent by another oppressed woman like herself) on the other hand, it does not imply anything which makes the Commander restless or alert in terms of rebellion. The message makes the narrator question; she sees it as a warning since she is at risk of committing suicide, and the Commander's closeness to her misleads her to think that she is loved. On the other hand, for the Commander (who is a member of dominant group), the Latin sentence does not make any sense as a message of solidarity. He cannot reach the "wild zone" of these muted women who speak out. In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", Showalter explains the "wild zone" by basing her argument on Ardener's diagram of the relationship of the dominant and the muted group. According to Showalter:

Much of the muted circle Y falls within the boundaries of dominant circle X; There is also a crescent Y which is outside the dominant boundary and therefore (in Ardener's terminology) "wild". We can think of the "wild zone" of women's culture spatially, experientially and metaphysically. . . . If we think of wild zone metaphysically, or in terms of consciousness, it has no corresponding male space since all of male consciousness is within the dominant structure and thus accessible to or structured by language. In this sense "wild" is always imaginary; from the male point of view, it may be the projection of unconscious. (347)

The communion and solidarity of two oppressed Handmaids (Offred and her predecessor) can be an example of how the muted group creates a wild zone and transfers a resistance message to each other with the language of the dominant

order. Before learning the meaning of the sentence, Offred has already interpreted the sentence as a message from an oppressed woman (predecessor) to the next Handmaid (herself) that. In Gilead, some of the Handmaids who share the same destiny and have a similar conscious level because of their oppressed and dehumanized situation inhabit in the same zone which is “wild” and outside the conscious level of the oppressors. Thus, “*nolite te bastardes carborundorum*” means only a joke for the commander who cannot reach these two women’s “wild zone” and Offred’s unconscious. He explains the sentence to Offred in dominant structure, from the male point of view. And he does not sense any kind of resistance from this sentence like Offred. He says: “That’s just a joke . . . You know how schoolboys are” (Atwood 196). Then he laughs. He does not go beyond the meaning of the sentence and does not reach the “wilderness” of the oppressed women. The commander interprets this message according to its humorous meaning in public/dominant structure. The previous Offred breaks the silence by scratching patriarchy’s rude and humorous joke on the wall, but the sentence has alternative meanings for the oppressed which means resistance. In the wild zone the graffiti has a political (rather than humorous) meaning.

After figuring out the meaning of the sentence, Offred considers this meaning in terms of her situation in the Commander’s room. Offred figures out with which purpose the precedent Handmaid had bothered to write this message for her. It is a warning that Offred should be careful, she had a relationship with the Commander like the present Offred, and according to the Commander she committed suicide. This message reveals a fact about the Handmaid’s situation and Offred now knows one of the Commander’s secrets, with this knowledge “[she has] something on him, now” (Atwood 198). By gaining strength after the act of writing, Offred is able to articulate herself and dares to ask questions to the Commander and carries their communication to another level in which she is not muted. As she knows knowledge is power⁹, she tries to gain consciousness and more strength by asking questions to the Commander

⁹ “Knowledge is power” is a dictum adopted by some feminists; “Second-wave feminism developed its own epistemology in the process of consciousness raising, a model for generating knowledge from the authority of individual women’s experience (Kolmar and Bartowski 46). The narrator’s background, her being raised up by a feminist mother and her education level show that in order to fight for liberation, she is aware that knowledge is an important tool for struggle and should be utilized in order to get power. And the communication between her and the Commander shows that her strategy works well as she can get answers to her questions.

about their ideology. Thus, she decides to utilize her knowledge by getting to other information. Throughout the end of their dialogue, Offred demands information from him after he asks what she would like: “‘Know what?’ [the Commander] says. ‘Whatever there is to know,’ I say; but that’s too flippant. ‘What’s going on?’” (198). The dialogue shows Offred’s hunger for information about her own situation and politics, and she wants to awake. As a Handmaid she is considered as an object and she has difficulty in maintaining her identity, but knowledge is a tool for her to fight for freedom.

Offred’s communication with the Commander reveals some facts about Gilead’s patriarchal ideology that she is not taught at the Red Centre. For example, in one of their conversations in the Commander’s room, he implies that the equality of men and women in pre-Gilead disturbed them because there was no area left for men to show their superiority. The Commander says: “The problem wasn’t only with the women...the main problem was with the men. There was nothing for them any more... There was nothing to work for, nothing to fight for...” (Atwood 221). The Commander tells the truth about their ideology; while their basic reason for changing the regime is religious, he confesses that men oppress women for their own benefit. Offred implicitly criticizes this situation by remaining silent. She tries to keep calm. In his dialogue with Offred, the Commander tries to justify himself and their ideology. But at the same time, he accepts that they created their inferiority and harmed other people because of their own desires. He states: “You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs... We thought we could do better... Better never means for everyone... It always means worse for some” (222). The quote shows that he oversimplifies victimization of the Handmaids with the use of his language. (Eggs are associated with fertility of the Handmaids in the novel). By using accepted idioms such as “breaking eggs” that is valid for natural truths, he fixes and validates the cruelty of the elites as if it is a natural fact and a necessity. And by justifying their ideology, the Commander accepts that they harmed some people. The hidden text of the regime’s ideology is revealed with their dialogue. To maintain power and feel superior to women, they changed the circumstances and created a segregation among them. Their ideology is based on the elite men’s personal interest while they oppress women and maintain their power with religious teachings.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, in terms of the relationship as master and slave, their scrabble game can be considered as a confrontation that shows power. The game is

important since it shows the relationship between knowledge and power. As an objectified Handmaid who is deprived of using language, playing scrabble is a chance for Offred to use her mental capabilities and feeling human through language and consciousness. The Handmaid and the Commander's confrontation represent the dynamic between the oppressor and the oppressed. In their first game, the Commander loses the game intentionally. In the game, the words that Offred chooses contain the letters x and z are difficult words to remember and are not common in English. Although not illiterate, she has difficulty because she was remote from language in the Gilead regime: "It was like using a language I'd once known but nearly forgotten...You can do it, I know you can" (164). She tries her best, she seems alienated from her own language comprehension skills. The commander is happy with his superiority in terms of knowledge. There is a correlation between remembering (knowledge) and power dynamics therefore it can be considered as an ability to fight against victimization. While Offred has difficulty remembering the words, she becomes powerful in time especially after some chance of reading in that room. As Gökçen states in "Homo Ludens in Gilead: *The Handmaid's Tale* Revisited":

Access to the written word particularly empowers Offred as a player: The grounds of language, native soils of play, become doubly fertile in writing because the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified has an added layer of the visual symbols in writing. By taking advantage of this added arbitrariness in written language, Offred employs Scrabble to beat the Commander at his own game. (149)

The power dynamics of the oppressor and the oppressed which is based on language and knowledge slowly changes after the narrator takes advantage of the Commander's library by reading magazines and books. These experiences remind her how she has a command on language. In their final scrabble game, the narrator wins by choosing a word that the Commander does not know. She also uses an archaic Word, "zilch", that the commander does not know during the game (Atwood 193). Scrabble can be considered as a symbolic struggle that designates the Handmaid as the winner with the help of language. In "The Hysteric as a Chronicler in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*", Ghosal and Chatterjee associate scrabble with the Handmaid's escape by gaining self-esteem through language:

The game of scrabble becomes symbolic as it helps Offred obtain control over words and letters, a kind of empowerment forbidden by the regime. . .

Hereafter, Offred begins to take control of her life just as she takes control of the game with the Commander. . . Negotiating her way through Gileadean dictatorship Offred gradually but surely transforms herself from a mere captive to a woman, who employs every resource at hand to define herself as a chronicler. (38)

As an oppressed woman, the Handmaid succeeds in winning the game which represents her struggle against patriarchal authority. Since she gains control over her language which has been taken from her by elite men, she finds a chance to escape from the regime.



CHAPTER II

THE MUTED GROUP'S COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

In her relationship with the Commander, Offred's position as a mistress becomes her advantage since, she finds an opportunity to meet her closest friend Moira. When the Commander takes the narrator to the Jezebels towards the end of the novel, she has a chance to listen to Moira's escape story which makes Offred enlightened in terms of resistance. Jezebels is an unofficial place for prostitutes. In the text it is stated that if women do not want to be the Handmaids, "[t]hey have alternatives" (Atwood 256). But these alternatives are limited to the Colonies and the Jezebels: "The official creed denies them, denies their very existence, yet here they are. This is at least something" (247), says the narrator when she sees the place that reminds her of the past in different ways (since all the forbidden things from make up to sexuality take place there). The minority consists of educated (lawyers and sociologists) and rebellious women or prostitutes from pre-Gilead. In Gilead's hierarchy and society, they do not have a place, but their place is important in terms of solidarity. For example, Jezebels as an underground place becomes an opportunity for Offred to learn a lot of information about resistance. After Moira's escape from the Red Center, they do not see each other until the narrator is taken to the Jezebels by the Commander. When they meet, they create an opportunity to talk secretly. Their meeting and conversation imply that there is possibility of sharing important information among oppressed women in the Gilead regime. Moira tells Offred her story of escape in that place. Then Offred finds utopian hope with Moira's news that informs her about active resistance.

Moira's story reveals lots of information about the weakness of Gilead authority. The story reveals that, while liberals and marginal groups are gathered and they are under the regime's control, some citizens are not touched since they are not considered as a danger both because of their religion and their lifestyle. While Moira tells her escape story to Offred, her story reveals important information about the

situation of active resistance in Gilead at that time. Earlier, when Moira has escaped from the Red Centre she says: “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” (Atwood 259). This passage explains the position of Econowives in Gilead and shows how the Quakers¹⁰ have a chance to take part in the Underground network. The Quakers are not considered as a danger because they belong to Christianity. They have not been in the servitude of the elites yet, however some of them act against the regime by helping the Handmaid’s escape because of their own religious reasons. Although the regime bases its own ideology on Christianity, the Quakers, whose belief system does not fit into Gilead’s, do not accept their ideology and rebel against it silently. When Moira escapes from the Red Centre, she gets in contact with the underground in a way that they have planned beforehand. Moira says to Offred: “At last I tried to remember what I could about our mailing list. We’d destroyed it, we divided it up among us and each one of us memorized a section, and then we destroyed it. We were still using the mails then, but we didn’t put our logo on the envelopes anymore” (255). This passage explains how the oppressed group has a chance to escape from the regime with the help of secret communication and a planned organization. This secret group has taken precautions beforehand and each member has planned rescue. Therefore, the muted group in Gilead regime has some advantages as it includes some secret members who have developed a network in order to escape and fight against oppression. Since the ones who are gay and dealing with abortion are considered as not safe, Moira chooses a married Quaker couple. After remembering their zip code and address, she hides in their home for a while. Then these people send her to another house which is “a station on the Underground Femaleroad” (258). For Quakers, Moira says, “they said they’d try to get me out of the country...each one of them was in contact with only one other one, always the next one along...they were better organized than you think” (258). It

¹⁰ “The Religious Society of Friends, also referred to as the Quaker Movement, was founded in England in the 17th century by George Fox. He and other early Quakers, or Friends, were persecuted for their beliefs, which included the idea that the presence of God exists in every person. Quakers rejected elaborate religious ceremonies, didn’t have official clergy and believed in spiritual equality for men and women. Quaker missionaries first arrived in America in the mid-1650s. Quakers who practice pacifism, played a key role in both abolition and women’s rights movements. Many, but not all, Quakers consider themselves Christians” (“Quakers”).

is understood that in the first years of the Gilead regime, some liberal or marginal people have found ways to escape from the country with a well-organized system.

Although Moira could not escape, her story reveals a lot about how the Handmaids have a chance to escape from the Gilead regime with the help of resistance groups and the way they developed a secret communication. In the section of Historical notes, the Underground Femaleroad refers to the safe houses that Moira mentions in her escape story. According to Professor Piexoto, there are other texts which belong to the Handmaids such as “The A.B. Memoirs” and “The Diary of P” (Atwood 313). These discoveries indicate that silenced women tried to carry their writings while escaping from the regime with the help of anti-government groups. They make their voices heard by not giving up control over the language. These alternative voices that reached the borders and next generations contribute to the change in society within time as their stories create a consciousness against the regime’s myths by revealing the truths. Feminist historian Lerner asserts that:

When young women encounter a gender-neutral narrative and some important female historic figures, and when they learn of women’s agency in the shaping of events, their entire worldview changes. Often, they begin to engage with history seriously for the first time. They are inspired by female heroines and begin to think of themselves as potentially more capable than they have been before. (112)

Thus, the women’s writing helps to change the power dynamics between the oppressors and the oppressed as it contributes to raise a feminist consciousness against authority. In Gilead’s patriarchal regime, although trivial, the muted group’s articulateness becomes a threat for the regime’s authority or the dominant group for which communication ban is a tool for maintaining power. As they articulate themselves in the dominant structure, they find a chance to change the situation of women who are “‘overlooked’, ‘muted’ ‘invisible’: mere black holes in someone else’s universe” (Ardener133).

It has been mentioned that the Gilead regime controls the news in accordance with its own direction either by changing or hiding the truth. For the narrator, the knowledge about the regime is limited to the news and alternatives are the Marthas’ gossips and the Handmaids’ speculations. Thus, for the narrator another resource information about the regime especially from a reliable friend becomes a light for her to see better and she finds ways of creating an opportunity for escape. Moira’s story

includes some informations about active resistance and gives clues for escaping from the regime. Her story confirms that national resources in the news are the Handmaids. Lastly, the historical notes include the smuggling of the Handmaids to Canada. The news mentions how the regime has controlled the action of escaping with the help of Eyes, although they cannot prevent some Handmaids from escaping with the help of Quakers or other groups. As the narrator says, “They show us only victories, never defeats. Who wants bad news?” (Atwood 93). Bad news indicates hope for the rebellious ones who pretend to be true believers and gives news of the underground’s victories. Therefore, it is understood that hidden messages beneath the news can be interpreted by one who is aware of the escapes and anti-government acts. Within a short period after the meeting with her close friend, the narrator’s fate changes. She perceives herself as a subject who aims to survive and tell “herstory”. The narrator completes her quest for discovering the truth about the regime in Jezebels with the help of Moira’s information about resistance. In short, the relationship Offred has with the Commander indirectly forces her to gain consciousness and individual power.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, resistance is not limited with the narrator’s individual communication dynamics and her use of language against the regime. There are two active organisations that fight for oppression and violence in Gilead; Underground Femaleroad introduced by Moira and Mayday Organisation which is mentioned by Ofglen. The narrator’s communication experiences with these two rebellious characters reveal the hidden story of an active resistance which is organized well. While these alternative voices tell how the underground networking works for active resistance against the oppression and weakens its power, the historical facts go parallel with their stories and enable the reader to see the lightness of utopian hope which is created by the muted group through solidarity and re-appropriation of language.

The situation of Gilead is not as gloomy as the tone of the narrator in terms of the power of active resistance. There are victories of the underground alongside the regime’s success. The narrator finds it hard to believe in the opposing power although she hopes for it. When Ofglen talks about the resistance, Offred does not take her seriously. The Handmaids can go out for shopping, but only with their shopping partner. They seem to be friends since they spend time together every day. However, they are assigned by the regime as control mechanisms. The Handmaids are also responsible for their communication control of their peers. In Gilead, there is a lack of trust among the Handmaids who are not acquainted with each other beforehand. At the

beginning of the novel, when the narrator first meets with Ofglen, she says, “The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers” (Atwood 29) which indicates the distrust between them. The shopping partners are also responsible for reporting any rebellious acts of each other. The narrator’s statement “She may be a real believer, a Handmaid in more than a name” (29) suggests that there are two types of Handmaids; a Handmaid only with her appearance and name like Offred who does her mission just for survival, her mind still serves for her individuality, not the regime. “A Handmaid more than a name” indicates that there are volunteers as spies among the Handmaids who serve for the regime by detecting the rebellions and leaking information about any anti-government acts.

It is difficult to distinguish the rebellious Handmaids since they all seem the same from the outside. Asking questions and answering with the sentences which include individual opinions is suspicious. The narrator keeps her observation with her shopping partner Ofglen for whom she says, “We are syamme twins” (174). After Ofglen goes beyond their artificial communication by asking Offred her opinion about Gilead, they start asking information to each other. Offred obtains some knowledge about Mayday organisation, although she still does not believe in it. As Ofglen’s rebellious situation is considered, it is understood that the members of this anti-government group hide themselves in their uniforms which can be considered as an act of silent rebellion. This secret organization is a threat for the Gilead regime since their communication and networking include gathering information about the government’s issues by making use of the lack of authority and emaciation of the regime. Ofglen openly indicates that there are many people who pretend to be true believers and have an active role in anti-government organisation. As Ofglen states: “You didn’t think I was the only one” (178). It seems that while Offred has been passing her years in isolation as a Handmaid, Ofglen has been learning new ways of secret communication and reaching out to members of Mayday organisation. The narrator mentions hope, and she is motivated for resistance after learning that there is still an “us”. Ofglen directly gives the news of active resistance to Offred, however, since trust is not possible among the Handmaids, Offred hesitates to help her in espionage for Mayday and refuses Ofglen. Throughout the novel, Ofglen’s whisperings become a source of information for the narrator about almost everything, and their relationship can be considered as an act of rebellion since they break the communication rule and share information, thoughts and feelings with each other.

Under her veil and via whisperings, Ofglen runs a rebellion against the Gilead regime as she chases information about the elites in order to help the underground. And she also gives a lot of clues about how the Mayday underground members communicate with each other. Offred is an example of how a silenced Handmaid turns her veil into her advantage by not being seen and taking part in silent activism. Veiling is patriarchy's way of renaming women as invisible objects. Women do not take part in society anymore; the veil is a political symbol of Gilead's ideology which is based on women's dehumanization. Their limited vision because of the veil indicates that they have knowledge only within the limits of Gilead rules. According to Coad:

As only women wear a veil in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood associates the veil with femininity. As these women are under the control and power of men, the veil takes on moral, religious and political dimensions. Its function in the novel is two-fold: to help conceal and hide women as well as to prevent women from seeing. It helps render the Handmaids anonymous, it makes them nun-like, ostensibly pure, chaste, and virginal and it aids their effacement, actively disempowering them. (55-56)

The veils which are considered as a control mechanism for these women's communication seemingly operate as their function. The Guards or the Eyes cannot control their own methods like whispering since their faces are not seen. Their invisibility enables these women to have a conversation in crowded places. Also, the Handmaids learn to see better because of their wings and veils.

With the light of information and awareness that is gained by secret communication, they resist being captured and show rebellion to the patriarchy. Although the Handmaids seem very restricted and passive in terms of active rebellion, elite's illegal tendencies create unofficial circumstances in which the Handmaids break the communication taboos. The disadvantaged position stemming from the communication ban is not an obstacle for them to fight for freedom as they do not exclude themselves from the logos. Instead of staying passive, they accommodate alternative ways to reach information. Some of the Handmaids like Ofglen can be an example of how women's boundlessness becomes a source for their invention of new methods. While they obey the rules of patriarchal system, they try to undermine the regime with some rebellious acts. Although the Handmaids are invisible within the system, they play an important role in changing the power dynamics with their

advantages of plurality. French feminist Luce Irigaray discusses the multiplicity of female identities:

Because we are always open, the horizon will never be circumscribed. Stretching out, never ceasing to unfold ourselves, we must invent so many different voices to speak all of 'us', including our cracks and faults, that forever won't be enough time. We will never travel all the way round our periphery: we have so many dimensions. (75)

Differently from men, women's pleasure is based on the plurality of their bodies. Women's sexual difference provides them to create alternative spaces in their life instead of living in a life which is limited with standards of patriarchal dichotomies. Therefore, while pretending to be religious and obedient by remaining silent on the surface, the Handmaids create some resistance methods via their own system of communication outside the dominant structure.

While the Handmaids seem to accept the myth of the regime which is ultimate faith, they try to reverse these myths by acting in accordance with their belief of freedom via their alternatives. They utilize the power of information as a tool for weakening the power of the regime since they can reach important information about the elite's privacy. Ofglen's demands from Offred for sharing information about the Commander indicates that some of the Handmaids have a chance to help the underground via reaching knowledge about the regime. The narrator's comment about the Commander's room which includes important documents implies that the Handmaids who become mistresses have possibilities of working as spies and leak important information to the anti-government network. Although the narrator has not attempted any rebellious act in this room, Ofglen implies how a Handmaid can utilize being in this room in terms of obtaining knowledge by asking Offred to learn whatever she can. Ofglen says that "[The commander] is at the very top" (Atwood 221) by indicating Offred's master is among the ruling class and he is high in status. Then she asks Offred to gather information about the Gilead regime. When the narrator tells the moments of her being in the Commander's room which is forbidden even to the wives and possibly hides governmental secrets, she says:

Forbidden room where . . . women do not go What secrets, what male totems are kept in here? There is a desk, of course with a Computalk on it, and a black leather chair behind it. There is a potted plant on the desk, a pen holder

set, papers . . . but all around the walls there are bookcases. They're filled with books. No wonder we can't come in here. It's an oasis of the forbidden. (Atwood 147)

There is a possibility of stealing things from the room, some Handmaids have a chance to reach the Commander's secrets, pens and papers and books, even their Computalks which include government secrets. By this way they may serve the Mayday organization by leaking information and help weakening the regime's power. Also, in one of their secret conversations, when Offred hesitates to be a spy by infiltrating the Commander's room and leaking information, Ofglen says: "We can get people out if we really have to, if they are in danger. Immediate danger" (283). Possibly some of the Handmaids who are smuggled to other countries are the deciphered Handmaids who share secret information about elites. In the historical notes, Professor Pieixoto who does research on Gileadean studies, underestimates Offred's tale because it does not include any documents from the Commander's room. He laments: "She could have told us much about the workings of the Gileadean empire, had she had the instincts of a reporter or a spy. What would we not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of printout from Waterford's private computer!" (322). Offred does not seem to be a rebellious Handmaid or a spy according to him. Because her tale does not include "some printouts" from Computalk that includes government issues. In her narration it is known that she does not join in Mayday Organisation when Ofglen offers her escape. To develop an idea about how Mayday resists against Gilead despite communication control and security precautions, it would be helpful to look at Ofglen's information by connecting it with Moira's story of escape.

In the process of state of emergency, some resistance groups were already unified pre-Gilead. Offred remembers through her memories and she says, "There were marches, of course, a lot of women and some men" (189) and says these kinds of loud rebellions are immediately shut down and eliminated by the regime. Thus, it is seen that the muted group continues solidarity against the regime secretly. The Gilead republic is constructed within time, not suddenly. Besides fertility, the regime aims to detect and arrest women who are considered as dangers for the religious and patriarchal regime. Although Offred is not considered as anti-Gilead because of her not being an activist like her mother, the statement "we are up against the wall" shows that Moira warns her friend that the hard times are coming for them. Some weeks after this phone call with Moira, the narrator suddenly finds herself in a situation where

usual things became abnormal; in the store where she usually goes, she cannot see the usual woman instead there is a young man who works there. After doing her shopping, she cannot use her account although she has got thousands on it. “‘It it’s not valid, he repeated obstinately. ‘See that red light? Means it’s not valid’. . . It was my number all right, but there was the red light again. ‘See?’ he said again, still with that smile, as if he knew some private joke he wasn’t going to tell me” (Atwood 185). The dialogue suggests that the women who are supposed to be the Handmaids are detected before the reign and first they are deprived of their properties. The red light can be seen as a premeditation of the red cloak of the Handmaids. Some of the Handmaids are the target women, the ones who are educated, have a job and earn money. And the men who are on the service for the government are aware of the situation beforehand. In this process, some activists like Moira have a chance to get organized. As the narration is from the perspective of Offred and her close relationships, Moira’s story and experiences give clues about how the Underground became a resistance group with their precautions in the Gilead republic.

During the process of regime change, the narrator and Moira have a telephone conversation, Moira tells that she and her friends from the collectives cannot use their accounts like the narrator. Upon this, the narrator says for her friend: “She was not stunned, the awry I was in. In some strange way she was gleeful, as if this was what she’d been expecting for some time and now she’d been proven right” (188). It is understood that some people like Moira already foresaw the danger and took precautions against the situation. Moira mentions a group called the underground and it is understood that there is a solidarity among these people before the regime changes officially: “I will go underground, she said. Some of the gays can take over our numbers and buy us things we need” (188). Her statement shows that there is already a group or movement organized secretly to work against an existing regime. It is seen that the “underground” consists of a muted group and they have already taken some precautions and planned to get in contact by foreseeing the regime change. In Moira’s story she mentions that some groups gather and take precautions. She relates how she found shelter in the Quakers’ home after her escape from the Red Center as: “I chose them because they were a married couple, and those were safer than anyone single and especially anyone gay. I also remembered the designation beside their name. Q, it said, which meant Quaker. We had the denominations marked where there were any, for marches.” (Atwood 257). Quakers are among the resistance groups that fight for

oppression and slavery because of their religious reasons. Their lifestyle does not disturb the regime since it is proper morally and religiously. Thus, they are not among the target group and they are free at that time. Since Gilead's ideology is based on dehumanization and violence, which disturbs some of them, they take part in this active resistance by getting organized to help the Handmaids escape. While at the beginning of the regime they are free, after some time they become the target of the regime because of their attributions to the resistance. Besides Quaker's shelter which is identified with the zip code Q, Moira remembers some doctors' addresses that are identified with a zip code "C", the capital letter of the curettage. But she does not prefer them because of the security reasons. Moira's statement, "It was no good calling on the C's abortion stuff. . ." (257) shows that doctors or scientists who contradict Gilead's ideology are among the underground organisation. And they are already among the target group. Throughout the novel they are also among the hanged men who are gay, priests or other marginal groups on the Wall which takes place at the heart of Gilead. The muted group members of the underground organisation are sentenced to death when they are detected, however their anti-government acts are hidden from the citizens. While looking at the wall, the narrator thinks that the regime punishes doctors just because of the pre-Gilead times abortions since she is not aware of the anti-government organisation. Moira's information gives clues about the resistance organisation which is called Underground Femaleroad. It is understood that the "dominance" of the Gilead regime is based on "block[ing] the power of actualization of" the liberals, gays, scientists, feminists and some religious groups "so that [they] have no 'freedom of action' (Ardener 133). However, the silent rebellion that occurs in the process of the regime's gaining authority shows that the dominance is on the surface, as the muted group members find alternative ways of communication in order to struggle against oppression within the dominant structure.

The other active resistance group called Mayday includes members from different ranks and genders. And they have possibly organized before Gilead and it is known that these two organisations have connections with each other (Atwood 322). Trying to figure out whether Ofglen is a true believer or not, Offred wonders whether Ofglen feels the same with herself while they are looking at the hanged ones who are executed because of their subversive acts. Ofglen mourns while looking at the wall as Offred says "I feel the tremor of the woman beside me. Is she crying? (Atwood 43). These executions of the Mayday members possibly make her sorrowful. Offred does

not know this underground resistance, she learns after Ofglen tells her about it. Although the regime does not give information about these groups, they are hanging up on the Wall when they are caught as a propaganda which shows the Gilead regime's power against individual power. Their identities or the reason of their punishment is not given explicitly. The Wall is a way of showing off the authority to suppress underground movements.

While the Gilead authority shows its power uproariously through media or via the Wall or Salvaging, the muted group fights for their liberation within the dominant structure in silence. Their secret communication provides them a way of escape from their slave-like position. Throughout the novel, the whispers, the rustlings and susurrations pass secretly through crowded public places. Some of them include rebellious thoughts, elite's secrets and news of resistance. The muted group communicates within dominant structure with its own methods. One of them is the "grapevine" which etymologically means:

A rumor; a secret or unconventional method of spreading information (1863); is from use of grapevine telegraph as "secret source of information and rumor" in the American Civil War; in reference to Southerners under northern occupation but also in reference to black communities and runaway slaves. (etymonline.com)

In the novel the "grapevine" is not overt, it takes place when Ofglen talks about a network that serves Mayday and she clarifies how the members can communicate secretly within limits despite the lack of trust among the citizens. Not defined by the authority, the grapevine does not take place as an information source in the dominant structure like the news. Instead, it is the muted group's way of getting information within the Gilead society via whispering in public gatherings or shopping places as is clear in Ardener's statement, "The muted structures are 'there' but cannot be 'realized' in the language of the dominant structure" (130). Although there is no overt suggestion in any speech which passes among the union members, Ofglen seems to have lots of information about the regime and this makes the narrator surprised. She seems to have connections with a lot of people which she indicates as a "network¹¹":

¹¹ Also, in *A Feminist Dictionary*, network is defined by Winter as: "a word coined and used by women. (As a noun, it is an entry in Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary famous for enacting itself an impenetrable network of interlocking words.) To network is to establish good connections with other women and provide for each other information, concrete help, and personal and professional support" (Kramarae and Treichler 299).

We stand looking at this building, which is a shape like a church, cathedral. Ofglen says. "I hear that's where the Eyes hold their banquets."
 "Who told you?" I say . . . "The grapevine," she says. She pauses, looks sideways at me. I can sense the blur of white as her wings move. "There's a password," she says.
 "A password?" I ask. "What for?"
 "So, you can tell," she says. "Who is and who isn't . . . I ask, "What is it then?"
 "Mayday," she says. "I tried it on you once . . . Don't use it unless you have to . . . it isn't good for us to know about too many of the others, in the network."
 (Atwood 212)

While the paragraph clarifies how the members of Mayday can distinguish other members from true believers, it also shows how the Handmaids break the obstacle of trust in terms of friendship and solidarity in Gilead by developing some mindful strategies with language play such as the use of passwords. It is understood that Mayday members like Ofglen try to find out who is a true believer or not, with some tests (including language games and reading reactions) and determine the ones who are close to anti-government ideas, then ask for help in terms of reaching information. When Ofglen's knowledge (from the Eyes to the Commanders) is taken into consideration, the Mayday network has a large information scale almost at each rank. In Gilead, the positions of the citizens are not different from the slaves since they only serve for the regime and are deprived of their individuality and freedom. The regime's ideology that turns back to traditions includes not only moral and religious aspects but also includes division of labour. Except for the elites, the others are in position of slavery. In *My Brother Slaves: Friendship, Masculinity, and Resistance in the Antebellum South*, Sergio Lussana tells the stories of how enslaved men fight for freedom with the help of friendship and their secret communication. The slaves who can escape from slavery help their friends for liberation. While mentioning the place of "the grapevine telegraph" in resistance and escapes, Lussana asserts that:

Despite the huge distances separating plantations throughout the rural antebellum South, enslaved people maintained a secret system of communication that linked their communities: the grapevine telegraph, which kept enslaved communities across the South informed of news and events. Enslaved men were more mobile than their female counterparts and, accordingly, more familiar with the local geography. Enslaved men used the grapevine telegraph to keep informed of daily events, but they also utilized network to hold conspiratorial cross-plantation meeting with other men. In some cases, they plotted active rebellion; in other instances, they harboured

runaway slaves and northward to freedom from one plantation to the next.
(125)

While the resistance story takes place in southern United States in the past, the Gilead regime takes place in the North, in Cambridge. The places and times change but the history duplicates the same themes of oppression and freedom. Humanity faces the same problem of slave labour. As a ruling class, elites take the master position in Gilead and turn its citizens into slaves. Nevertheless, the oppressed group finds ways of fighting for their freedom with the help of communication, friendship and solidarity and rebellion against the regime. Although the tone of the narration which is sad and painful does not make the readers feel the victories of resistance groups, she attaches them with the Marthas' rumours, Moira's story and Ofglen's whisperings into the texts.

Gossips and rumours which are parts of the grapevine are associated by the narrator with the Marthas throughout the novel. Also, they help Offred's resistance by creating a different consciousness about Gilead. The Marthas and the Handmaids live very close to one another; however, the possibility for them to carry information vertically seems not to be realized. But it is also possible for Marthas to communicate among themselves, horizontally. Offred says: "The Marthas know things, they talk among themselves, passing the unofficial news from house to house. Like me, they listen at doors, no doubt, and see things even with their eyes averted. . . I've heard them at it sometimes, caught whiffs of their private conversations" (Atwood 21). Seemingly the regime forbids communication among all women since it creates a danger for upheaval, but communication within the same rank is less obtrusive. It is understood that the Marthas who have different points of view about the regime can interact with each other freely, and without hostility. In "The Role of Language in Constructing Consciousness in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*", while discussing the narrator's gaining autonomy over language, DiBenedetto states that:

Because speech is so closely related to thought, and particularly because knowledge is proliferated through the written word, the Gileadean government is quite threatened by language's accessibility. If people have access to language, it is assumed, they also have access to an unlimited array of ideas—to knowledge and thought—and thinking "subjects" are more likely to stage a revolt than unthinking "objects". (21)

From this point, speculations and rumours have effect on the power dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed as they create alternative ways of thinking about the situations in Gilead. And in dominant structure that assumes gossip to be unimportant and “trivial”, their speech constitutes a part of resistance within the system of the grapevine. Their freedom of using language and producing an alternative source of information besides the media directly or indirectly helps the resistance against oppression. For example, they can discuss the situation in Gilead in their private conversations. The narrator mentions how Rita and Cora talk about an incident when young and fanatic Guardians shot a Martha who was fumbling in her robe and the Guardians shot her thinking that she is a disguised man hunting for a bomb. While Cora thinks the Guardians do their job to protect citizens, Rita does not accept this violence and she criticizes the regime (Atwood 30). Their conversation reveals that human life is worthless in Gilead. Although some of the citizens do not react against the authority, some like Rita do not approve of their methods of control. In that respect, gossip includes political topics that are discussed among the citizens and make people think about and question them.

The regime’s lack of control upon the Marthas (in terms of communication) provides a source for information for both Mayday and the Underground Femaleroad. Among the oppressed women, the Marthas are possibly the most privileged in terms of gathering information. In Gilead, they are not considered dangerous and are not under surveillance like the Handmaids. While the Handmaids are isolated in the Commander’s house, the Marthas have private conversations among themselves. For example, when Rita is going out, the narrator says: “She puts the veil on to go outside, but nobody much cares who sees the face of a Martha” (19). Since the Marthas’ servant position is different from the victimized women like the Handmaids, they are not considered as danger and not strictly controlled. However, their listening at the doors indicates that they are trying to learn and gather information about the Commander’s house. Although the narrator does not suggest anything about Marthas’ being a potential danger in terms of active resistance, she associates them with unofficial information and the grapevine. In one of the dialogues with Rita, the narrator implies that the Marthas have a connection with the grapevine; the narrator tries to get information about her precedent and upon their conversation the narrator figures out that: “[Rita] knows there must be a grapevine, an underground of sorts” (Atwood 63). After this short conversation, Offred realizes that Rita does not question how and

where she has found out this information. This shows that the Marthas are accustomed to these kinds of rumours and they exchange information among themselves. It is not clear in the text whether a Martha is directly associated with “the underground”; however, it is always possible for a rebellious Handmaid like Ofglen to overhear their conversation and use the information on behalf of “the underground”. Although it does not directly take place in the narration as Ofglen’s overhearing an important knowledge but while she wonders how Ofglen knows so much about everything, the narrator implies that there is a possibility of Martha’s being a source of information. “How would she have found out about Janine? The Marthas? Janine’s shopping partner? Listening at closed doors. . . (227). Also, the Marthas are associated with active networking for wives but this is connected to their own interests. When Serena Joy shows Offred a photograph of the narrator’s daughter, she thinks that Serena supplied this with the help of the Marthas. The narrator says: “It must have been a Martha, who got it for her. There is a network of the Marthas, then, with something in it for them. That is nice to know” (240). As the Marthas’ network is associated with group interests, their loyalty is questionable. For the Underground Femaleroad and Mayday organisation, this kind of gossip has an important place since it serves to undermine the regime’s power by revealing their hypocrisy and weakness.

Throughout the novel, the Marthas have the chance to converse among themselves freely. They can get and share information about the elite’s life with the help of a networking among themselves that is based on gossip. Since their speech is considered “trivial” by patriarchy, their conversation is not controlled by the regime. However, their access to language becomes a threat for the regime since their gossip reveals the facts about what is going on in Gilead. Although they do not directly revolt against the regime, their gossip becomes a catalyst by creating different perceptions among the citizens in Gilead, thus indirectly helps the revolution. In the article, “Gossip as a Burdened Virtue”, Alfano and Robinson state that:

Gossiping is a way of performatively endorsing or contravening a system of norms and values. When the oppressed gossip about their oppressors, it is a low-cost and relatively safe mechanism for fighting against the norms and values of their oppressors. Since gossip can be an effective tool of protection and resistance for the oppressed, it is no wonder that gossip has traditionally been regarded (by those in power) as a vice and more frequently attributed to women. By claiming that gossip can be virtuous, we aim to vindicate this means of resistance. (481)

As the function of gossip is taken into consideration, the information about Gilead that leaks through gossip has an important role in creating an awareness for the citizens who have access to knowledge via media and public speeches of authority that hide or change the truth. The exchange of information among the Marthas has an important, though indirect, role for resistance. According to Hahn, rumour becomes a “political weapon” in fighting for freedom among enslaved people, and he gives antebellum South as an example. In the societies where slavery takes place, “rumour is cloaked in anonymity’ and ‘flows through established channels of everyday life. . .” (59). Similar to the American history of slavery, in the Gilead regime, which aims to return traditions like slavery, the oppressed group fights for freedom by using similar communication methods with the slaves. In Gilead, the muted group became a threat for Gilead authority as they act against oppression and fight for freedom by using alternative methods of communication. As their voices are heard, the resistance become possible, as the oppression is a universal problem. The Handmaids’ autobiographical writings or records that are carried outside the borders of the Gilead regime can be considered as slave narratives which is a subcategory of witness stories¹² in which “Witnesses tell of their experiences of terrifying events or the evils of certain political systems in order to heal themselves and to influence others to emphathize with the victims and to take action against the oppressive system” (Lerner 134). The Handmaids who escape from the regime seem to have an effective role in networking by recording or writing their experiences that reveal the truth. The recordings gathered by active resistance organisations such as Mayday and Underground Femaleroad becomes an important proof to undermine the Gilead authority which controls the communication to show that citizens live in a peaceful environment.

Beside the Handmaids and the Marthas, in their position as sex-slaves in Gilead, rebellious women in Jezebels can be considered as a part of the networking for the underground as well. Anyone who openly rebels against the regime, tries to escape or does not accept their mission is either at risk of death by being sent to the Colonies or are kept in “Jezebels”. They are not allowed to go out, but there is a circulation of information in that place. Besides the sex work, this place can be considered a

¹² As Lerner explains, “In the twentieth century, witness stories have proliferated as victims of oppressive regimes, of wars and civil wars, and of religious persecution record their struggle for survival. Holocaust literature has become a separate academic field of study, as aging survivors have testified to their lived experience for the historical record” (137).

gathering place for the rebellious women in the Red Center. The information network in Jezebels is a threat for the regime since it may serve for “the underground”. In that respect, rebellious women still have a chance to continue their resistance by utilizing the advantages of these places and in the long term, they help to weaken the regime’s power by leaking information to the underground. “Officers from all branches” visit the place and Businessmen from other counties are hosted there (“trade delegations”). Some of the Commanders like Fred also go Jezebels secretly. When Offred is taken to Jezebels by the Commander, he comments, “You can overhear things too; information. A man will sometimes tell a woman things he wouldn’t tell another man” (Atwood 249). This place is suitable for undermining the regime by providing a service for the underground networking. The rebellious women can violate the state secrets that they learn from the top of the elites. When Moira tells Offred that the man who helped her escape is executed, she says: “You hear about these things; you hear a lot in here, you’d be surprised. The Commanders tell us themselves, I guess they figure why not, there’s no one we can pass it on to, except each other, and that doesn’t count” (259). While the Commanders do not see any danger for sharing state secrets with these women, they overlook that the women in Jezebels become a threat for them by sharing this information with the Handmaids or other people who have a chance to visit the place. Any Handmaid who is a member of Mayday may use these secrets for espionage like Ofglen who asks for Offred to learn any information for the benefit of the underground. Hence, the rebellious women in Jezebels are a crucial part of the networking. Like Offred, other Handmaids come to this place from time to time and in that place, people communicate with each other more freely. In this way, the secrets can pass from Jezebels to the Handmaids, then to the Marthas and they can use this information for resistance as a part of the grapevine. As the Commander says for Jezebels: “It is a good place to meet people” (247). Business men from other countries come to this place. There is a possibility that the secrets pass to other countries that helps resistance for oppression. By hearing the stories of the Handmaids, the rebellious women become a part of the espionage for propaganda since they have relationships with the men from other countries. Besides, if a man reveals a secret about himself or the state, it becomes a tool for the hearer who works for the underground and she requests something in return. So, they may arrange smuggling of the Handmaids with the help of networking.

Since the ending of the narrator's story is ambiguous, there is a possibility that Moira, the heroic friend, arranges a smuggling for Offred by interacting with a foreign businessman in Jezebels. If not so, it is known that Moira has connections with the underground and after learning Offred's exact place, she may have found a way of smuggling her friend with the help of her connections that leads from the underground to Mayday. It is not a coincidence that after a short period of these close friends' interaction, Offred has a chance to be taken by strangers for whom Nick says "it's Mayday. Go with them" (Atwood 305). It is true that these women who are gathered in Jezebels cannot escape from the regime, however, they have the chance to struggle against the oppression. Until the end of the narration, Moira is known with her rebellious and activist personality and she has the ability to find a solution to the problems. In that respect, Moira possibly has a role in the narrator's escape. Although this possibility does not take place in Historical notes, since Prof. Pieixoto who (still represents patriarchy as ignoring the narrator's tale) links Offred's escape to two men, either Nick or the Commander, by underestimating the power of and the solidarity among women. In her tale, the narrator not only liberates herself by telling her own story, she also immortalizes Moira by telling her story, by saying "I've tried to make it sound as much like as I can. It's a way of keeping her alive" (256). Moira's story shows how solidarity and their secret communication among the muted group becomes a resistance in the escape of the victimized Handmaids. It also shows the regime's weakness in terms of ultimate control over the people.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the narrator's ending depends on her gaining awareness and showing responsibility besides affective ties and communication dynamics. In her survival tale Offred tells how she maintains individual power against the Gilead regime. In her tale which is a double voiced discourse, she narrates her bodily experiences in which she is a property, a sexual object in dominant structure. Beneath the surface, the narrative is an escape and rebellion story, in which she carries herself from object position to the subject and reveals how the regime's power is destroyed via secret organisations and hypocrisy of the elites. Offred desires to learn any information or acquire knowledge in every instance she can. These instances vary from the News to Ofglen's talks with her. This shows that lack of knowledge about weakness of the Gilead regime is an obstacle for her in reaching her freedom. Consciousness is a key for becoming free. The strict rules that block any act of communication, from reading to having a conversation for a Handmaid, are the

methods the regime uses as precautions. With these methods the regime tries to create women that are completely ignorant and passive. Thus, they will not question anything. What the regime wants from them is an ultimate faith that means also a blindness, since it keeps them from both searching for alternatives and questioning the power of the regime. The Wall is the conspicuous display of power by the regime with the purpose that people will know there is no hope for the rebellious people. Also, the news shows the success of the power of the regime. Inside the limits drawn by this information, a Handmaid who is searching for hope to show resistance is supposed to give up her desire for freedom. Any information that shows the weakness of the regime or any news in terms of resistance become a hope for individual's resistance. Throughout the narration, it is understood that she resisted the brainwashing process in the Red Centre with the help of her friend Moira whose knowledge and views makes her conscious about the ideology of the regime. Also, a friendship that is based on trust provides a motivation for her to maintain her own individual power. This is clearly understood when the flashbacks about Aunt Lydia brings Moira's intervention together. Moira's words can be considered as an antidote to the poisonous teachings of Aunt Lydia who channels the patriarchal voice of the Gilead regime. Offred's resistance to dehumanization is based on reaching out to the knowledge that reminds her of human nature.

Throughout the novel, the more information Offred acquires, the more conscious she becomes of the regime's workings and the closer she gets to escaping. Her rebellion is not direct like stabbing the Commander or trying to run away on her own, her activism is parallel with her search for information and gaining consciousness. To fight for oppression, the muted group who lives in the oppressive structure of Gilead Republic creates a resistance by using language and with the help of solidarity. Ardener asserts that, "a structure is also a kind of language of many semiological elements, which specify all actions by its power of definition" (133). The muted group's "freedom of action" which is created via alternatives, especially their articulateness of themselves with writing or recordings seems to change the dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed in a long term. The Handmaids who escape from Gilead rebel by speaking out and revealing lots of information about the regime with their letters, diaries and tales and break the silence. They take part in Gilead's history as the voice of the muted group. Since the Handmaids are secret and an issue of interest for other countries, possibly they have reached out to these countries and at

least they reveal the true situation of the Handmaids. Also, the muted group's stories have effect on the process of history since their truth has the possibility to change the future. Probably they lead to revolution with their stories that makes the new generation think about freedom. *The Handmaid's Tale*, including the Marthas' gossips, the Handmaid's tape recording, whisperings in the shopping places, Moira's story from Jezebels, becomes the oral tradition, like fairy tales that pass to the next generation with the narrations of women. Oppressed women must speak through their bodies by whispering and including in these whisperings the resistance stories for the future and their freedom. Offred's tale is considered as an act of rebellion. As Gerhard states:

Offred's narration embodies a great act of resistance, which by its sheer existence constitutes opposition and reluctance to accept Gilead's new ideology. Since language is erased and words on signs are substituted by pictures, Offred's story telling where she reconstructs the language can be viewed as a brave act of resistance. (67)

Throughout *The Handmaid's Tale*, the narrator seems motivated while she tells her tale that reaches to the following generations. The narrator's tale reveals lots of information in terms of the regime's hypocrisy and the truths of the Handmaids and proves that the Gilead republic is not a utopia for the citizens, but it is a muted group's dystopia. Creating alternative meanings by using the language of dominant structure, they show how they steal the language from patriarchy and use it for fighting for their freedom. In *Control and Resistance in The Dystopian Novel: A Comparative Analysis*, when stating his idea of *The Handmaid's Tale* being the extension of the message "nolite te bastardes carborundurum", Gerhard suggests "Offred challenges the system by speaking up against it through stealing the language and spreading the message of the silenced victims, thus making the act of her narrating a rebellion in itself" (70). For Linda Kauffman, "epistolary heroines are deeply subversive because for them writing [or narrating] itself is an act of revolt" (226).

The voices of muted group have an important role in changing the society because "the Gileadean regime was in the habit of wiping its own computers and destroying printouts after various purges and internal upheavals" (Atwood 316). The regime destroys all the knowledge that reveal any anti-government act and event that will pass through new generations. In the Historical notes section, Professor Piexeto overlooks the muted group resistance story and does not consider the Handmaid's tale

as a document because of the ambiguous, multi-layered and indefinite body of the text, However, Lerner asserts that:

A holistic history, not bound by the old categories and “fields,” must be true to the multicausal, multi-layered, energy-flowing interplay of forces, the clash of contradictions that make up life. Each actor on the historical scene was once a living organism set within an environment, grounded in an interplay of cultures, belief systems, superstitions, customs, and trivialities. No event in life is two- or three-dimensional; no event occurs isolated in time and space. No slice of life can present reality. (170)

When the muted group’s story is read beneath the surface of dominant story of Gilead, it is understood that members of the muted group have a role in the social change, especially the narrator who gives them voice. Although female experiences or muted group member’s role in historical change is ignored by the male point of view, the resistance story in parallel with my analysis shows that women’s culture¹³ (muted group’s communication dynamics) has a significant role in both individual and collective resistance.

While Gilead aims to create its own history that shows the ultimate power of the regime, the voices of the muted groups become their memory which give news of individual power, solidarity and resistance. It is understood that a new generation of the Handmaids get enlightened by reaching out to the texts of the oppressed women and develop a female consciousness beside the regime’s myths as realities. These stories have effect on changing the idea of regime’s supreme authority on the silenced groups. The stories reveal the truth and the victories of the muted group while TV news and politicians’ explanations show the information in accordance with the regime’s power maintaining their success. True stories beside general information show the weakness of the regime. Mayday members communicate with each other in public by using a password and they can get and share information through networking. The Handmaids learn how to resist the myths of the regime forced upon

¹³ According to Lerner, “Women’s culture is the ground upon which women stand in their resistance to patriarchal dominion and their assertion of their own creativity in shaping society. . . The term has also been used in its anthropological sense to encompass the familial and friendship networks of women, their affective ties, their rituals. It is important to understand that women’s culture is never a subculture. Women live their social existence within the general culture. Whenever they are confined by patriarchal restraint or segregation into separateness. . ., they transform this restraint into complementarity and redefine it.” (242)

them by mediating their own beliefs via whispering or creating their “own ceremonies”. Marthas’ gossip which implies hostility among women coming from segregation challenges the regime’s ideology that shows everyone living in peace in Gilead. The power of the Gilead regime which is based on controlling the thought system of an oppressed group weakens when the muted group uses the language and creates an alternative consciousness beside the dominant groups belief system that is forced upon people as reality. In order to resist against the silencing methods of Gilead, the oppressed group shows how they break silence with the help of secret communication, using language via alternative methods such as whisperings and renaming. *The Handmaid’s Tale* is embroidered with the melodies of friendship, solidarity and power of the muted group which indicates hope for freedom, within its dystopic plot and elegiac, dark tone of narration.

CONCLUSION

Considering Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as "double voiced discourse", I intended to hear the alternative voices of the silenced groups and their resistance to dehumanization in the dominant structure of the Gilead regime. The purpose of this study is to understand the effect of alternative ways of communication and solidarity on the power dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed. "Don't let the bastards grind you down", once a joke among boys, gains a different meaning within the language of oppressed women. Two generations of Offred "speak out" and show resistance in dominant culture by renaming the old concept as a political warning. Offred's tale is an extension of the message of the oppressed woman which needs to be deciphered to be understood beyond the dominant structure. As readers, if we are willing to hear the voices of the oppressed in *The Handmaid's Tale*, we should read it as Showalter suggests "Women's fiction can be read as double voiced discourse, containing 'dominant' and 'muted' story. What Gilbert and Gubar call a palimpsest" (204). Considering the tale as an extension of the Latin phrase which carries double meaning, "in some sense palimpsestic. . . whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" the female narrator "manage[s] the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards (Gilbert and Gubar 73). When the novel is read from the perspective of dominant structure, it is the story of powerlessness of a muted group, especially of women. They are banned from communication and deprived of language. It is the story of Gilead power that is based on creating ignorant women as slaves. However, it is the tale of the oppressed group who shows resistance to authority by maintaining individual power and speak out to break the silence.

In narration, "Nolite te bastardes Carborundorum" means feminist consciousness, and silenced women's decision in resistance against oppression. As a literary woman, the narrator accomplishes her mission of carrying the message. She contributes to the muted group's taking place in history from female point of view and with their own culture, pains and pleasures. As it is recorded, their stories are narrated

from generation to generation and take place as a collective memory of the lost generation. Besides the resistance story, the narrator's memories, (narrated within the fragments) gives the text a palimpsestic quality as the Gilead regime constructs its own culture by erasing pre-Gilead culture. By giving place to this lost culture, she reconstructs the erased history of her generation by remembering and giving details about this culture (places, clothing, hobbies and sexuality). The female narrator's memories have an important effect on carrying the culture of previous generations in which new generations get knowledge about female power, freedom of education, equality, freedom of sexuality and the muted group's resistance. To sum up, the multi-layered and multivocal narration both reveals a history of the muted group which is destroyed by the Gilead regime and their resistance story which is overlooked by the historians.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the role of the female narrator as a member of muted group is important as her narration experience opens a way to liberation by creating cracks in the patriarchal structure. As a literary woman who has gained feminist consciousness and political awareness, she uses her weapon against patriarchy, and by controlling language and carrying memory and knowledge, she fights against oppression. According to Cixous, the way of resistance against patriarchal oppression is women's writing experience:

She must write her self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history, first at two levels that can not be separated. (880)

As she believes in resistance, she tells her story and women's stories in which they reach liberation as they are alive with their experiences, pains and pleasures. Via her narration, in which she reconstructs herself by evaluating her past and present position and gains awareness and consciousness, she rescues herself from the red cloak which signifies her objectified position and steps on the light of utopian hope which means liberation. She makes her body fly into the text which is fragmented, ambiguous, reconstructed and never-ending., the female narrator revises and rewrites the myths of the Gilead regime which are patriarchal stereotypes about women as she gives them voice and narrates their experiences of their own truths, decisions, weaknesses and

strengths, pleasures and pains. From the female point of view, women are not sexual objects, they are not weak and inferior, instead they have alternatives to cope with problems and create solutions within limits. Nature is not a reason for their captivity but a source of love and peace. They are not excluded from logos, they actively use their mind even if they are in a disadvantaged position in dominant structure. The female narrator does not finish her story, therefore opens a way to ambiguity, plurality and infinity. By giving silenced women voice by including their stories, sentences and experiences into her text, she rescues these women from their position of mutedness. In her tale, she also rescues these women from the myths of the regime that is based on dichotomies such as “woman” and “unwoman”, as she includes their own stories and represents them with their own pleasures and identities. Janine is not articulated as “Offwarren”, Serena Joy is not “the Wife” of the Commander, Moira is not a “Jezebel” but a heroic friend, and her mother is not “Unwoman”; instead, she is a strong and conscious woman in her tale. By writing/narrating about her self, the female narrator shows that she has an identity, she is not excluded from logos, or deprived of sexual pleasure, and, she is not limited with reproduction, domesticity or object of male pleasure.

The female narrator’s way of story telling is an act of survival, and as the narration is unfinished, storytelling is a never-ending process in its own way. Therefore, the structure of the story is also a resistance working to undermine the dominant structure. The female writing makes the narrator rebellious at that point because the female narrator’s text which is different from traditional male writing in terms of its structure, becomes another weakening power against patriarchal authority that maintains its power basically through controlling the language system. Moreover, the “articulateness” gains another perspective via the female narration as it includes the muted group’s own ways of expressions and, the story telling process makes the oppressed group visible. The ambiguous, multiple, fragmented and open-ended structure of the text is a reconstruction that has an important effect of changing the language system of the patriarchal canon. Nevertheless, on the surface or from a male point of view, it is difficult to realize the narrator’s rebellion through narrating/use of language. Thus, reading the female text as a double-voiced discourse by hearing the silenced group’s voices is important for the readers’ attributions of changing the dynamics between the oppressors and the oppressed. Although the female narrator takes place in the history, there is a possibility of her being underestimated by the

patriarchal canon. *The Historical Notes* section is important in order to understand the situation of the women in the past, present and the future, women's visibility and not being overlooked in history both depend on their narrative and writing experiences, and an evaluation of their texts from a female point of view.

The Handmaid's Tale includes universal themes stemming from world history such as oppression, silencing and hedonistic power, and reflects on an anxiety for the future. Written in 1985, the novel has recently attracted attention from masses, especially with the TV series adaptation created by Bruce Miller. While introducing the series in Hulu TV (2017), Lisa Allardice argues: "The central theme in Atwood's fiction is power, inequality or abuse of power, against women or anyone else". By projecting the oppression and violence from the past to the future, the novel suggests that through remembering and evaluating the past, it is possible to manipulate the future. Atwood's critical dystopia which emphasizes the necessity of political awareness and responsibility for a better future has an alarming role after the authoritarian tendencies of the rulers around the world increased. Allardice associates the novel's regaining popularity with anxieties of people that stem from political changes especially in the United States. In *The Guardian*, she writes: "Post Trump's election, the novel is back on the bestseller lists, placards reading 'Make Atwood fiction again' appear on the streets, and women have adopted her red robes in silent protest at threatened anti-abortion legislation". It seems that people who have anxieties for the future because of the changing political climate in the United States, show resistance as a precaution via silent rebellion representing the oppressed group who fight for freedom in Gilead.

The TV series also lays bare the Gilead regime's silencing ideology through uniform costumes, communication patterns, the Wall, and the Red Centre. The dehumanization of the Handmaids is again a central theme. The secret communication and resistance is also clearly seen in most of the episodes. The Handmaids interact with each other especially in public places or while shopping, crowded places become an opportunity for the Handmaids to share information and ask for help. The streets seem to be under the control of the regime; however, silence does not mean that each rebellious act is controlled. For example, in the first episode of season one, the Handmaids are on a daily shopping route when a black van reaches Ofglen, and Ofglen just keeps walking silently. Although they communicate via whispering, their wings and veils make their speech invisible to the Eyes ("Offred"). As suggested in the novel,

in their daily shopping routine, they have a secret communication via whispering and are not seen by the Guardians with the help of their veils. The series makes it possible to see how the secret communication takes place among the muted group. In the second episode, Offred learns about the active resistance that has been going on; Ofglen invites her to the resistance by telling her to join the resistance (“Birth Day”). Also, in the episode “Birthday”, as Offred plays Scrabble with the Commander, she learns that the Commander is going to Washington and she decides to share this information with Mayday. In this scene, there is an implication that Offred’s fate changes when she becomes the winner. As suggested in the novel the game can be considered as Offred’s symbolic struggle against the authority. The series takes advantage of the audio-visual capacity available to it and Offred’s gaining individual power to resist is indicated with the rhythmic music and the actress Elizabeth Moss’s excited facial expressions.

In the first season of the series, the message “Nolite te bastardes Carborundorum” is emphasized by being shown several times and Offred tries to keep sane remembering this message of solidarity, especially after the ceremony which is depicted as a very disturbing process. Although Nick’s position is left in ambiguity in terms of trust and betrayal in the novel, in the series it is easily seen that Offred has real communication with Nick as her facial expressions suggest that she does not pretend and reflects her individuality around him. Also, Moira’s friendship seems to have an influential in the narrator’s individual resistance, and a solidarity between the silenced women is seen. In season one, episode nine, it is clear how networking extends from Jezebels to the shopping places. Offred receives a package which includes the Handmaids’ letters and journals by interacting with Moira, and Moira finds a way to send it to Offred (“Bridge”). The package is important since it is an example of the alternative voices of the muted group, which reaches to the people outside the borders that fight against oppression. The series mostly give place to the muted group’s resistance, solidarity and secret communication with each other and reflect the utopian hope while presenting the oppression of the patriarchy in a dramatic way.

As also seen in the series, which is necessarily an interpretation, an emphasis on communication and language is crucial in understanding the novel. In accordance with that, in the “Red Centre” section of my thesis, I tried to show that Gilead, similar to the totalitarian regimes, attempts to utilize language as a discursive power for

creating ultimate faith and as a tool for turning individuals into uniform masses by erasing their individual identities. Besides violence, the Aunts use methods such as “silencing” in order to discipline the Handmaids’ behaviours, communication patterns, and thought systems according to the Gilead norms. The Gilead regime creates “myths” as realities and aims to influence the Handmaids’ opinions via education, propaganda, religious texts and testifying. Isolation is aimed at for weakening their individual power. Nevertheless, it is possible for the oppressed group to create opportunities for human communication and resist against silencing with their own methods such as whispering, remembering and rumours.

In “The Household” section, Offred’s experiences with the oppressed women in the house clearly shows that although the Gilead regime prevents solidarity among women in the dominant structure, the narrator finds some ways to resist dehumanization either through her memory and imagination, or with the help of alternate means of expression. Especially the message of the previous Offred helps her to survive. The narrator’s relationship with the Commander becomes an advantage for her, she gains control of language/power. With the experience of writing that gives her pleasure and strength, she decides to fight against patriarchal oppression. She manages to get her body out of the red cloak and gains an individual self-image with the help of Nick’s intimacy as she reaches female pleasure and female power. By utilizing the advantages and gaining awareness in the process, the narrator shows individual resistance. As she narrates the silenced groups’ story from a female point of view, she succeeds in making the invisible gain visibility in history with their own identities and experiences.

In the second chapter, the active resistance is analysed. It is understood that Mayday and “the underground” were organized before the Gilead regime with the help of political awareness and consciousness. By maintaining solidarity and developing alternative methods of communication, the individuals silently but actively resist against dehumanization throughout Gilead. Using a network that extends beyond the Gilead’s borders, the muted groups from almost each rank break the silence. With the help of grapevine, they re-appropriate their language and use their knowledge as propaganda for helping the Handmaids escape. Using an alternative communication system that is similar with the slaves in American history, the members of the muted group make their voices heard. Especially the writing/narrating experiences of the silenced women have an important role in the resistance against oppression.

Throughout Gilead, “trivial” discourses contribute to social change in a long-term project of resistance. *The Handmaid’s Tale*, representing the oral tradition of the silenced group, is also a narration of collective memory which includes stories of survival, pursuit of freedom, and the oppressed group’s communicative experiences that influence power dynamics.



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CAREER

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