

The discursive strategies of power and female resistance in margret atwood's the handmaid's tale: a foucauldian reading

Henir Sadeeq Ismael ^{1*}, Hasan Mohammed Saleh ²

¹ PhD student, Dept. Of English Language, Faculty of Arts, Soran University, Kurdistan Region – Iraq.

² Dept. of English Language, College of Education for Humanities, University of Mosul, Iraq.

Received: 12/ 2022 / Accepted: 03/ 2023 / Published: 09/ 2023 <https://doi.org/10.26436/hjuoz.2023.11.3.1096>

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the use of certain discursive strategies and the consequent female resistance in Margret Atwood novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). The novel portrays different forms of power exercised by totalitarian governments over women. In complex ways, Margret Atwood uses the feminist dystopian genre to resist gender-based oppression. To do so, Atwood must first build a miserable world that subjugates their female characters before she can create ways for these characters to resist. The events of *The Handmaid's Tale*, like most dystopian stories, take place in the future, but they express the anger and anxieties of the present, and more women speak out against sexual assault and harassment. This study applies Michel Foucault's concepts of power relations through discursive strategies in Margret Atwood's "*The Handmaid's Tale*". More explicitly, the research tries to shed light on the discursive practices used to control women's minds and bodies in a way that guarantees complete obedience to a specific ideology. The study also shows how women use strategies of language and education to resist and free themselves from the oppression imposed on them. These types of fiction have always been sites of power conflict, reflecting the atrocities committed against the public by those in power. It is concluded that Foucault's ideas about discourse and power explain why women are oppressed by totalitarian regimes and how they use the same power to build a discourse of resistance to free themselves from oppression and disciplinary power.

KEYWORDS: Power, Resistance, Michel Foucault, Margret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

1. Introduction

1. Foucault's Conception of the Discourse of power

As a philosopher and historian, Foucault uses the term "discourse" frequently in his ideas and studies. He explained what discourse is, in his former works, *The Order of Things* (1969) and then in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1977). Foucault's concept of discourse is based on the forms of knowledge structured by the social context of any given historical period. It focuses on the ways in which language and discourse are used to construct and maintain social institutions and practices. For Foucault discourse consists of regulated statements that present discursive formations. Simon During (1992) defines Foucault's intention of discursive formations, affirming that they "exist as the conditions of possibility for the existence and repetition of particular sets of *énoncés* (statements)" (p. 96). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault explains discourse by considering it the generic realm of all statements, an identifiable collection of statements, or a controlled procedure that accounts for a certain quantity of statements (Foucault, 2002, p.90).

Foucault regards statements as the elementary units of discourse. He refers to the statements that give meaning or grouping by a segment of society as the discourse of racism or feminism. He also states that these statements regulate operational practices as events that create effects structured and governed by hidden rules or refer to a similar discursive formation. Moreover, the statements and utterances imposed by institutions that are authorized and obeyed by people are

considered true and possible by speakers (Foucault, 2002, p. 224).

The rules that govern function statements determine what is possible to know. As Grace and Machoul (2002) in their book *Foucault a premiere* put it, these rules are linguistic and material. They can be analyzed by buckling down to "specific historical conditions— to the piecemeal, the local and the contingent" (p.39). They must occur under certain limits, laws, or states of possibility. Foucault main investigation in archaeological studies is to discover the rules of possibility and truth in three distinct periods of history: the classical age, the middle age, and the modern era. Foucault (2002) defined his archaeological concern in this way:

It designates the general theme of a description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence, of the enunciative function that operates within it, of the discursive formation, and the general archive system to which it belongs. Archaeology describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive (p. 148).

Foucault asserts that the truth at any given period is socially structured and authorized. Therefore, the discourses about objects, materials, and events at that time are structured to be true and real within that specific discursive structure. In other words, the discursive structure determines how objects, events, or groups of speech acts are conceived as real. Sara Mills (2004) confirms that, according to Foucault, these discursive systems' limitations and restrictions shape how we see these objects. Foucault examined epistemes as constituting statements (p. 46). Furthermore, according to Foucault (1977), the statements or discourses that are excluded by the limits of

* Corresponding Author.

This is an open access under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>)

discursive constraints also form the objects, and the excluded discourses to be activated, must first be legitimated and authorized. So certain discourses are centralized, and others are excluded. Foucault classified the excluded statements as truth as well (p.199).

In his essay *"The Order of Discourse"* Foucault is fundamentally concerned with the mechanisms of the structure of discourse and discourse constraints in such a way as to legitimize other discourses. He introduces the first mechanism as external exclusions in terms of taboo as prohibited subjects in society, such as the subject of sexuality, and in terms of the speech of mad people who considered their speech outside the legitimate discourses. As a result, these discourses are excluded. Furthermore, external exclusion is the distinction between true and false concerning the people in positions of authority and power over social institutions. They control the discourses and decide whether the discourse is true or false and they determine to exclude other discourses outside their speech configurations (Mills, 2003, p. 58). In this way, Foucault's concept of discourse shows the rules by which discourses are shaped, how they are circulated, and how others are excluded. He referred to the term "archive" to indicate the veiled rules that produce particular kinds of statements and the total circulated discourse at any given time. He also called the linking of statements to form a particular institutional topic in which they form and regulate the thoughts of individuals a discursive formation (Mills, 2003, p.64).

2-Development of Foucault's Views of Power and Resistance

While Foucault's archaeology research is concerned with analyzing discursive practices, Foucault's study of genealogy is about power relations and how it is inscribed in the body and produced from these discursive practices. Foucault's main definition of power differs from the previous concepts, which are sovereign and hierarchal from top to bottom. He theorized the power from the base to the top as local and micro physic. Foucault states that power emanates from below, which means that there isn't a binary opposition between rulers and subjects acting as a general matrix at the foundation of power interactions. (Foucault, 1978, p. 94). He considers power the web that is interwoven in all the institutions and people's relationships in society. According to Foucault, power exists in each field as multiple. Further, he asserts that different kinds of forces determine the individual's behavior or performance or how they look. He believes that power is "omnipresent" that exists and is exercised in all fields and areas of life through the relationship and interactions of individuals. According to Foucault, power is dispersed not because it contains everything but rather because it comes from everything (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). Also, Foucault believes that power is exercised, not possessed.

Actually, Foucault assumes a strong relationship exists between the struggle of political practice and subjectivity by relating them with his main concepts of power relations and the production of discourse. McHoul and Grace (2002) assert that understanding the role of "power" in the development of knowledge, especially self-knowledge, requires an understanding of Foucault's discourse insight (p 57). Foucault clarifies that power relations and knowledge assert the role of each one. Power relations produce knowledge, and in its role, knowledge constitutes power relations. Foucault explains that there are many systems of power relations in social institutions during history. Power is applied differently in the past than nowadays because of the diversity of knowledge. There are diverse forms of power according to different institutions, but the method and application techniques are the same as the method of confession of sexuality and Panopticon. (Alec, 1993, p. 65). Foucault examines the power exercised on individuals'

bodies in terms of discipline in his book titled *Discipline and Punish* (1975).

Disciplinary power is targeted specifically to individuals as objects or instruments to its power it's a kind of productive individual. The main technique is the effects of power's application upon the body. The main aim of this disciplinary power is to produce a more docile body and, as a result, to increase utility. "more obedient as becoming more useful, and conversely" (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). In this connection, according to Hoffman (2014), Foucault's central notion of disciplinary power is to normalize the individual through the use of what he labels the "micro-physics of power," which aims to subdue people's bodies and behaviors in order to normalize them. The process of disciplinary authority spread from prisons into all social institutions by monitoring people and using particular discourses to influence their thoughts (pp. 29-30).

The achievement of disciplinary power over bodies is accomplished by distributing individuals into visible architectural places to be observed and watched constantly that structure their behavior and make them changeable, and as a result, their bodies are exposed for judgment to be normalized and objectified. According to Foucault (1979), this gaze symbolizes both the objectification of those who are exposed to it and the subordination of those who are seen as objects. The investigation of the disciplinary power process leads to the shaping of disciplinary knowledge that subordinates the objectification of the subject (pp. 184-5).

What is worthy of note here is that Foucault found the formulation of this disciplinary power from English philosopher Jeremy Bentham's concept of the Panopticon, which he formulated in 1791. Bentham's Panopticon is about the design of a prison that keeps all the prisoners on constant watch to alter inmates' prison behaviour for the better. The prison is constructed with cells and a watchtower in such a way that the supervisor in the watchtower can see all the inmates who are distributed in cells individually by the light from their cell's back windows. The structure is designed so that the inmates are unable to introduce themselves to the supervisor and also unable to see their existence. The supervisor can document their altered behavior by putting them under surveillance as a kind of practising power on inmates. The inmates feel that they are under the gaze and will be transformed to be self-subjected under the control of power. Foucault asserts that this modal of disciplinary power is transformed from the prison to other institutions, as mad asylums to all social institutions to shape a disciplinary society.

Foucault's concepts of resistance

In his later works, Foucault asserts the ways of resistance by shaping and transforming the self, focusing on the concepts of ethics and subject, how a human being can understand itself, and the essential techniques by which the subject can be self-transformed. Koopman (2013) puts out Foucault's vision about understanding, analyzing, and diagnosing ethical forms depending on the interdigitation between how we come to be who we are and how we change that same self. The concept behind Foucault is how to relate to oneself while, simultaneously, being its subject and object. He contends that a vision of freedom is presented as a practice of self-transformation (p. 526). According to Foucault, in order to recreate one's self throughout the process of self-formation and come to know oneself, one requires conversion to liberate oneself from limitations. An individual, to transform the self, must go through different technologies of practices of the self, as Foucault claims in his book *The Hermeneutic of the Subject*. A very significant activity in taking care of oneself and other people is the practice of reading, writing, keeping records for oneself, communication, mailing treatises, etc. (Foucault, 2005, p. 362). Foucault's aim in the process of practical ethics is to formulate self-reflexivity through the practices of

conversion by delimiting the self as an object of self-constitution.

According to Koopman (2013), Foucault's perception of caring for the self is to take care of oneself while enjoying the freedom to establish one's creativity, while taking care of oneself and fashioning oneself is to liberate oneself from obedience (p. 531). Another way that Foucault views the skills of the self is through his definition of spirituality, which he uses to describe it as a collection of exercises and experiences that the subject engages in to arrive at the truth. Spirituality, on the other hand, presupposes that the subject does not have an entree to the truth since it is never given to the subject by right. Additionally, he must alter his posture and exert himself in order to discover the truth, as he claims (Foucault, 2005, p16).

Furthermore, Foucault's investigation of critique examines the subject regarding the past to form the possibility of new self-formation in the future concerning of being a different subject as a kind of transformation of the self. It implies that one has to escape past limits, be free, and think and act differently. In other words, it means to reform ourselves in a modern way. In addition, Foucault associates confession with critique power and freedom to shape the subjectification of the individual. The repetition of freedom is through the critique of power to reveal the unfree inner self "telling-the-truth-about-oneself" (Foucault, 2021, p.54). However, the confession is a repressive church political power also applied through pastoral power. Still, the individual practices critiquing power by telling the truth to transform himself to free the self from ethical violence. Schubert (2021) argues that confessions of the flesh establish a brand-new area of research into the development of criticism as well as the constrictive and freeing effects of factual and juridification (p.10).

3- Discursive strategies in Margret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Margret Atwood is a well-known Canadian writer who became world-famous for her valuable literary works. She was born in 1939 in the capital city of Ottawa. She has written many famous novels, short stories, poems, and children's books. Her masterwork is the 1985 book *The Handmaid's Tale*, which has gained even greater notoriety in recent years due to its portrayal of women's struggle under the danger of a theocratic government. According to Bloom (2004), theocracy is a living threat, as seen in Iran and Afghanistan, the Christian Coalition's power over the Republican Party, and on a much lesser scale, the academic feminists' rule over English-speaking colleges (pp. 7-8). Moreover, the demand for the novel increased after the 2016 US election, when Donald Trump won and became president. Indeed, Atwood notes in her essay in "The New York Times, *The Handmaid's Tale* 'Means in the Age of Trump'" (2017) "In the wake of the recent American election, fears and anxieties proliferate. Basic civil liberties are seen as endangered, along with many of the rights for women won over the past decades, and indeed the past centuries."

Further, the ideas of *The Handmaid's Tale* have numerous justifications, all of which are connected to Atwood's own experiences. Atwood moved to many countries and places during her life. She received her education at Harvard in Massachusetts, the place of both her ancestors and the novel's setting. She was born during World War II and read George Orwell's 1984 in her teens, which led her to write dystopian literature. She began writing the novel in West Berlin, and she visited many European totalitarian communist countries, such as East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, where she found that these fundamental regimes depended on spying. As a result, Atwood was inspired by all of these occurrences as she was creating the elements for her novel. In other words, Atwood found that people live under the threat of these totalitarian states and that spying on people is one of their

fundamental problems. All this gave her environmental ideas for her writing.

Besides, Atwood wrote her novel because she believed that the threat of theocracy still existed and targeted women's rights and identity in particular. Moreover, while the activist women in the 1970s and 80s asked for women's rights, religious movements rejected any progress in women's rights, and they still believed that the home was the fundamental place for women. Atwood (2022) puts it out:

They wanted to go back to the 1950s, at least to the "Good Wife's Guide" version of that decade—skip the rock 'n' roll—but this time they wanted it shored up with the puritanical religious dogma that had underlain it all along. "He for God only, she for God in him," as John Milton had spelled it out in *Paradise Lost*. And, as Saint Paul had it, women could redeem themselves only through childbirth. This was a lot too close for comfort to the Kinder, Kirche, Küche—children, church, kitchen—advocated for women by the Nazis (p. 263).

The novel's events take place in America amid the Sons of Jacob religious movement's takeover of the American administration. They killed the president and the majority of Congressmen. They imposed a new constitution based on religious fanaticism, in which law and religion are identical. Atwood (2022) states, "In *The Handmaid's Tale*, so-called Biblical literalism is used to control women (and low-status men) for political reasons and to support a power Elite" (p. 267). The new government changed the country's name to the Republic of Gilead. Women's communal position in the new republic is at the lowest level. In addition, women are no longer allowed to work or own properties, even though their bank accounts have been transferred into their husband's accounts or any closest male family member's accounts.

Furthermore, in Gilead, women's status is at home. In addition, women are not allowed to be educated, and reading and writing are forbidden to them. That is, they believe that women are productive people who bear children. Even their names have been taken away from them. The new government imposes its religious ideology on the citizens through language and the means of power. The novel is narrated by the protagonist's first-person narrator, Offred, who describes her suffering as a woman under the new government and uses flashbacks to describe her life before Gilead. Women are divided hierarchically, from the commander's wives to the aunts, who are responsible for applying the new laws to other women. Handmaids in Gilead are women who exist only to produce children for the commanders. Marthas are barren women who work as servants, Econowives are the lowest level and belong to lower-status men. Handmaids who cannot bear children are also classified as unwomen and placed in risky environments in the colonies.

In Atwood's novel, power and language work together to force Gilead's ideology on citizens and women in particular. Handmaids in the new Gilead have no principal rights to live as humans, though they are stripped of their original names and called by their commander's names. Besides, reading, writing, and developing relationships are forbidden for Handmaids in the new Gilead republic. The new system of Gilead is implemented on Handmaids by Aunts by learning them in what is called the red center before they work as Handmaids in commander's houses. Offred as Handmaid in the novel narrates her experiment in the new restricted life in Gilead. She is the handmaid in Commander Fred's house, and for that, she is called Offred. In the novel, she describes her suffering in Gilead and compares it with her life before Gilead or what they called the old days. Offred as Handmaids stripped from all female rights. It is forbidden for her to develop any kind of relationship. Moreover, she is under surveillance everywhere to be disciplined under Gilead's laws and ideology. Also, education is forbidden for her to prevent them from acquiring any kind of education and knowledge. Consequently, the

purpose is to make them powerless, ignorant, and under their control. Conversely, Offred, the protagonist, by imagining the life before, struggles to construct her inner self, and she develops hidden relationships against the discipline of Gilead, and resists the new patriarchal system.

3.1. Disciplinary Power as an effective strategy for control

Disciplinary power is the most effective strategy used by the authority of Gilead to control women. In Gilead, women must be disciplined by their restricted religious ideology. In fact, they pass from all the strategies of disciplinary power to what concerns constant surveillance, examination, and normalizing judgment. Hence, they used women to be docile and utilized. To be submissive and obedient to the whole ideology of Gilead accentuates the fact that women are stripped of all their rights to live as independent human beings, and utilized to be fertile and productive. In other words, women's bodies and minds are controlled and exploited. Language is the main tool used to control women's minds and behaviour. Women are constantly watched, examined, and ranked according to their ability to produce. So any woman who is not fertile is considered an unwoman. Due to the strong relationship between power and knowledge that is correlated to social issues, language is the main tool for knowledge and power as well. In other words, holding the main strings of language means controlling access to power. In Atwood's novel, language is a tool of power widely used in Gilead society for controlling citizens, particularly women. To deprive women of sources of language means to control them. Gilead uses many language techniques to control women. Handmaids are deprived of their original names, reading and writing are prohibited, and developing communications and relationships are also forbidden for women.

In the universe of *The Handmaid's Tale*, controlling women can be done in a variety of ways. One of the tools of power that is widely used by Gilead's authority to control and oppress women is language. Atwood introduces the protagonist under a new name called Offred, forced by authority. Offred is a combination of Of and Fred, her commander's male name. Offred feels the value of her previous original name, which expresses her true identity "I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day" (Atwood, 2006, p. 99). In her inner self, she still keeps the hope that she will use her true name (June), one day. It is the first patriarchal oppression of the Handmaids, and the fact that they were denied of their original female names means that they were stripped of their identity. As a result, being addressed by their male commander names implies being powerless and subordinate to others.

Another language technique Gilead uses to oppress and exploit women is prohibiting reading and writing. The main purpose of encouraging ignorance among women is to control them. Offred tells the commander that her rooms are exposed to searching for things that are not allowed "Books, writing, black-market stuff. All the things we aren't supposed to have" (Atwood, 2006, p. 183). Another insistence is when Offred tells songs on her mind, she says, "Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden" (Atwood, 2006, p. 50). Moreover, when Offred and Offglen walk out, they pass the street and compare the place with the way in the past. She acknowledges, "Doctors lived here once, lawyers, university professors. There are no lawyers anymore, and the university is closed" (Atwood, 2006, p. 32). Women are forbidden from obtaining education or knowledge in religious societies such as Gilead for fear of being oppressed. The social language used in Gilead is religiously composed. The greeting words used before Gilead are replaced with religious and biblical ones. As Offred met Offglen for the first time to go out shopping, "Blessed be the fruit," she says to me, the accepted greeting among us." And her response is "May the

Lord open," or "Under His Eye." When Offred met the commander in his secret room, he greets her "Hello," he says. "It's the old form of greeting. I haven't heard it for a long time, for years. Under the circumstances, it seems out of place, comical even, a flip backward in time, a stunt. I can think of nothing appropriate to say in return" (Atwood, 2006, p. 158). By extension, Gilead's authority pays more attention to using phrases and words that are religious. When Offred met the doctor to examine her body that is still healthy or not for childbearing "I almost gasp: he's said a forbidden word. Sterile. There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood, 2006, p. 72). Gilead's regime use language to support the patriarchal social system and marginalize women's role in society. Furthermore, "FAITH. It's the only thing they've given me to read." (Atwood, 2006, p. 68). Faith is a word printed in cushion, it is just this word supposed to bind a person with religion that may is allowed to read. Singing publicly by using specific words related to freedom and liberty are forbidden in Gilead, particularly the songs with the word free are very risky. Offred claims, "Such songs are not sung anymore in public, especially the ones that use words like free. They are considered too dangerous. They belong to outlawed sects" (Atwood, 2006, p. 65). Julie Millward (2013) confirms this dystopian structured language as in the case of George Orwell's 1984:

Perhaps less obviously, however, most dystopian narratives incorporate and interrogate "old" or "obsolete" language: words which have ostensibly "disappeared" from the language of the future. For the citizens of Nineteen Eighty-Four's Oceania, for example, words such as freedom, happiness, love, privacy, and friend no longer exist in any meaningful sense (p.96).

In addition, when the commander asks to take Offred out, for Offred, the word "out" is a strange word in this strange world "Tonight I'm taking you out." "Out?" It's an archaic phrase. Surely there is nowhere, anymore, where a man can take a woman, out. Out of here," he says" (Atwood, 2006, p. 263).

Axiomatically speaking, language is the main tool for communication and developing relationships. In Gilead, women are not allowed to form relationships or friendships in order to keep the Handmaids powerless. When Moira came to the red center, Offred could not communicate with her. Besides, developing friendships with others is not allowed for handmaids, even with Marthas, the servants in the commander's houses. Accordingly, they prevent Handmaids from accessing knowledge and using language, making them vulnerable individuals who are easily controlled by authority. In short, to keep others powerless and unable to resist means to keep them ignorant. Language, as the main source of knowledge, is widely used in Gilead to exploit women. Depriving handmaids of their names means stripping them of their identities. Prohibiting women from accessing education means keeping them powerless. The aim of prohibiting communication in Gilead is to isolate them and keep them weak and easily controlled by the authority.

3.2. Strategies of Female Resistance

Atwood excels in depicting the kinds of power imposed on women by the hegemony of Gilead's dystopian authority. Furthermore, she deals with various strategies of female resistance. As a result, Atwood's novel is considered one of the initial works of the critical dystopian genre. However, Offred, the novel's narrator and protagonist, suffers from the oppression of Gilead's totalitarian patriarchal society. She resists them by keeping herself strong and hopeful to survive this repressive regime. Offred uses many techniques of resistance to defy the theocratic regime, she practices counter-discourse, and techniques of language to reverse its power. Offred cares for her body to keep it healthy and soft helping her

to form and construct herself. And she uses power relations and holds hope to resist the hegemony and discourse of the regime. Language is used as a weapon, on the one hand, as power for domination used by the state, and on the other hand, is used by female characters as a counter-discourse to resist the oppression of Gilead. Moylan and Baccaloni (2003) assert the importance of language in new modern feminist dystopian novels. The dominant dystopian power structure's primary tool is language. As a result, the dystopian hero's resistance often starts with an argument and the reappropriation of language since they are typically forbidden from using language, and when they do, it is just to spread meaningless propaganda (pp. 5-6). In the novel, and in the red center, while using communication for handmaids is forbidden, Offred says:

We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semidarkness we could stretch out 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, 2006, p. 10)

This means that if the repressive regime prohibits speaking, they cannot shut the mouths of others. Actually, as a challenge of resistance, the handmaids were able to communicate by reading lips and touching their hands, introducing themselves and knowing the names of each other by whispering and reading lips or physical language to keep their identity as resisting women. Moreover, Offred intends that they try to compose the events that happen to know what is going on with the others. In the red centre, each woman told her a part she heard from the other as a kind of communication, suggesting the aliens among them to resist the author's oppression. They fearlessly share their suffering and stories with one another demonstrates their self-transformation by rejecting the part of the self that is linked to the state.

Beyond any shred of doubt, acquiring knowledge is a kind of resistance, to know the nature of this strange community, and what is happening in this country; in other words, to be an informed character. What Foucault calls be curious means the will of knowledge that helps to constitute the present subject. Offred states, "Sometimes I listen outside closed doors, a thing I never would have done in the time before. I don't listen long, because I don't want to be caught doing it. Once, though, I heard Rita say to Cora that she wouldn't debase herself like that" (Atwood, 2006, p. 16). This means that Offred is a courage character who wants to learn more about the regime; being curious means being able to resist them. She confirms, "But I'm ravenous for news, any kind of news; even if it's false news, it must mean something" (Atwood, 2006, p. 28). Furthermore, when they allow them to watch TV news, Offred watches carefully, despite the fact that she doesn't believe their news, but she may find something in it. "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. Any news, now, is better than none" (Atwood, 2006, p. 97). Offred is curious about what is going on in this refusal society, which aids her in denying her membership in this totalitarian theocratic society. Consequently, this curiosity encourages Offred to resist, so it helps her to constitute herself by acquiring knowledge of the state.

Raffaella Baccolini (2004), in her paper titled "The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction", asserts that these kinds of feminist critical dystopian novels encourage the characters, as in the case of Offred, to use their memory and knowledge for resistance. Baccolini (2004) asserts that most of these novels use the recovery of history and literacy, as well as the recovery of individual and collective memory, as a tool of resistance for their protagonists (p.520). Indeed, Offred practices her imagination instead of reading and writing, which are forbidden to her, to form herself into an educated and active

resistant character in the story. In her mind, she is telling her story to an imaginative character to someone to recover her past because writing is forbidden. "It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden. But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else" (Atwood, 2006, p. 50). Offred creates an imaginative character with whom she can converse, allowing her to shape herself and her mind and resist the depression she is experiencing.

Another language technique of resistance, in the novel, is when Offred secretly finds a phrase written in Latin in her cupboard. She admires it because she considers it a message addressed to her from the previous handmaid who lived there before her. She states, "I knelt to examine the floor, and there it was, in tiny writing, quite fresh it seemed, scratched with a pin or maybe just a fingernail, in the corner where the darkest shadow fell: *Nolite te bastardescarborundorum*" (Atwood, 2006, p. 63). It is spiritual communication between them aiming to search the truth that help to transform the self as a technique for resistance. Offred confirms that it is a hope or something to reshape herself against their dominance that gives her the strength not to give up:

It pleases me to ponder this message. It pleases me to think I'm communing with her, this unknown woman. For she is unknown; or if known, she has never been mentioned to me. It pleases me to know that her taboo message made it through, to at least one other person, washed itself up on the wall of my cupboard, was opened and read by me. Sometimes. (Atwood, 2006, p. 63,64).

Regardless of the fact that the message is from an unknown character, and because it is written in Latin, Offred doesn't understand it, but she is confident that it's a kind of resistant work. Offred considers her as an alliance and as a close friend. "I turn her into Moira, Moira as she was when she was in college, in the room next to mine: quirky, jaunty, athletic, with a bicycle once, and a knapsack for hiking. Freckles, I think; irreverent, resourceful" (Atwood, 2006, p. 64). Offred turns her into Moira, her best friend from her former life. Moreover, this message from an unknown friend encourages Offred to resist the oppression she lives under this totalitarian patriarchal regime. Even now she uses it in her prayer as a counter-discourse when the commander comes and everyone is watching him. He emphasizes childbearing and asks all to pray. Offred says, "I pray silently: *Nolite te bastardescarborundorum*. I don't know what it means, but it sounds right, and it will have to do, because I don't know what else I can say to God" (Atwood, 2006, p. 107). Offred's pray is different for them, and the phrase is her prayer which connects her to freedom and rejection of this totalitarian regime.

More to the point, in the ceremony, while the commander rapes Offred, she thinks differently as to steel herself. She comments, "I would pretend not to be present, not in the flesh" (Atwood, 2006, p. 26). Its strong expression of resistance and self-formation is similar to that one shown by Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. While Prynne was punished in the public display wearing the letter A on her chest by the restrictive Puritan authority, she steeled her imagination as she was not there showing resistance to them. Elsewhere, Offred feels the value of writing to form and constitute the self. She knows pen is the way of knowledge and power, "Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say, quoting another Centre motto, warning us away from such objects. And they were right, it is envy. Just holding it is envy. I envy the commander his pen. It's one more thing I would like to steal" (Atwood, 2006, p. 213). Offred always shows her rejection of this dominant society. She wishes to break the rules to steal, this time something valuable as a pen for its link to knowledge and power. The commander told her the meaning of the Latin

Phrase, "he says. "Oh. It meant, 'Don't let the bastards grind you down.' I guess we thought we were pretty smart, back then" (Atwood, 2006, p. 214). She became sure of the smartness of her unknown friend, who wrote for her secretly the message to resist and be courageous.

Offred resists this dominated society, and she is curious to reform her mind with the assistance of language. She is doing things that are forbidden the Handmaids, such as singing, but she sings in her mind, "Such songs are not sung anymore in public, especially the ones that use words like free. They are considered too dangerous. They belong to outlawed sects" (Atwood, 2006, p. 65). She sings a sad mourning song in her mind that she is not allowed to sing publicly or aloud. She sings with words of freedom, that she defies for it. It is a kind of self-formation to resist the ideology of Gilead. For Offred, this society is unacceptable, and as a way to express her rejection of this violated society, she doesn't care about its ideology. She says, "Maybe I don't really want to know what's going on. Maybe I'd rather not know. Maybe I couldn't bear to know. The Fall was a fall from innocence to knowledge." (Atwood, 2006, p. 223). Her refusal of their dominated system is a form of resistance.

Offred still wants to recover her real name, and she resists for it. For Offred, her name is her identity and her agency. She says, "I want Luke here so badly. I want to be held and told my name. I want to be valued, in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name, remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me" (Atwood, 2006, p. 114). This demonstrates that Offred is hopeful, and she needs her real name because she says one day she will recover it. "I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day" (Atwood, 2006, p. 99).

4- Conclusion

This paper has examined the discursive tactics of power to oppress women in a totalitarian theocratic government and the techniques used by the female characters to reform their subjectivity and resist power in Margret Atwood's fiction *The Handmaid's Tale*. What Atwood warned about is happening in various world places. In the United States, many people during Trump's elections in the United reviewed the novel because women saw Trump's views against women as the worse conditions of women in novel's events. So women across the United States protested against Trump's harmful language about women that panicked women "After a campaign season filled with derogatory language about women and sexist rhetoric about women's roles in the home and workplace, people of all genders united in opposition to Trump's anti-women agenda" (Phadke & Frothingham, 2017).

Foucault's concept of power relations is explored in this paper. The main tactics of disciplinary power and sovereign power act on women to oppress them in this totalitarian theocratic government. The main idea of Atwood's novel centers around the ideology of a totalitarian theocratic state to discipline women and control their bodies and minds and make them submissive and useful by observing them, studying them, and placing them in a hierarchy based on their usage of childbearing.

Because of the close relationship between power and knowledge, as suggested by Foucault, language as the main instrument of power was used to discipline women or to exploit and oppress them and render them powerless. The new theocratic vocabulary replaced the normal vocabulary used in the pre-Gilead era. It was clear to us that in this kind of theocratic community, love had no meaning, and women were denied access to education. The basic idea is to promote the ignorance of women to keep them under the domination of men and patriarchal authority. In such a totalitarian state, women are

subjected to constant censorship. Women must act and behave within the framework of their religiously restricted ideology. Atwood wants to warn her readers that there are dangerous efforts to make women housekeepers again, as in the Victorian era when women were called angels of the house. The main purpose of this state is to keep women powerless, so they can be easily dominated and subordinated.

Both the thoughts and the bodies of women were targets for authority. Women were deprived of their original female names and instead named after their male commanders, indicating that women were deprived of their true identity. In this religious society, women were raped by justifying it with religious stories from the Bible. People are hanged and publicly displayed to sow fear in citizens, indicating that people who live in fear live in a dystopia. Rape and forced marriage at an early age are examples of sovereign power applied in a dystopian state.

On the contrary, Atwood deals with various strategies of female resistance. These strategies have been examined in light of Foucault's visions of the skills of identity. Offred shows the narrator's ability to escape docility by taking care of herself, using strategies such as keeping her memory active to remember her past life, and being curious to access sources of knowledge. Offred, the maid, could keep her subjectivity and control herself to be free, and she rejected the objectification imposed on women in this totalitarian state. For these reasons, Atwood's novel is a critical dystopia as defined by modern critics such as Moylan and Baccolini: Curiosity, pleasure, memory, self-care, and bodily care are all elements to dominate and shape the self. As in the case of the novel's narrator, postmodernism's concept of self-referentiality means being subjective rather than objective, the search for one's own identity.

Atwood wants to warn her readers that there are dangerous efforts to make women housekeepers again, as in the Victorian era when women were called angels of the house. The main purpose of this state is to keep women powerless, so they can be easily dominated and subordinated.

ORCID

Henir Ismael: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8438-896X>

Hassan Mohammed Saleh <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7575-5235>

Works Cited

- Alec, M. (1993). *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject*. Routledge.
- Atwood, M. (2006). *The Handmaid's Tale*. Every man's library.
- Atwood, M. (2022). *Burning Questions*. Doubleday.
- Baccolini, R. (2004). "The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction." *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 119(3), 518-521. doi:10.1632/003081204X20587
- Atwood, M. (2017, March 10). "Margaret Atwood on What 'The Handmaid's Tale Means in the Age of Trump" *The New York Times*
- During, S. (1992). *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline & Punish* (2nd ed.). Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1). Pantheon Books. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521865906.003>
- Foucault, M (1997). *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth*. The New Press.

- Foucault, M. (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Routledge Classics. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203604168>
- Foucault, M. (2005) *The Hermetic of The Subject*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, M. (2021) *Confessions of The Flesh. The History of Sexuality* (Vol. 4). Pantheon Books.
- Harold, B. (2004). *Bloom's Guides: The Handmaid's Tale*. Chelsea House An Infobase Publishing.
- Hawthorne, N. (1992). *The Scarlet Letter*. Wordsworth.
- Hoffman, M. (2014). *Foucault and Power*. Bloomsbury
- Koopman, C. (2013). *A Companion to Foucault*. Wiley-Blackwell
- McHoul Alec, G. W. (2002). *A Foucault Primer*. Routledge.
- Mills, S. (2003). *Michel Foucault*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315621517>
- Mills, S. (2004). *Discourse* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Millward, J. (2013). *Dystopian Matters* (V. Fatima (ed.)). Cambridge Scholars.
- Moylan, R. B. and T. (2003). *Dark Horizon: Scientific Fiction and The Dystopian Imagination*. Routledge.
- Phadke, S. & Frothingham, S. (2017, April 25). 100 Days, 100 Ways the Trump Administration Is Harming Women and Families. CAP. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/100-days-100-ways-trump-administration-harming-women-families/>
- Schirato Tiny, Danaher Geoff, W. J. (2020). *Understanding Foucault* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Schubert, K. "The Christian Roots of Critique. How Foucault's Confessions of the Flesh Sheds New Light on the Concept of Freedom and the Genealogy of the Modern Critical Attitude." *Le foucauldien* 7, no. 1 (2021): 2, pp. 1–11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/lefou.98>

الاستراتيجيات الخطابية للقوة والمقاومة الأنثوية في رواية "حكاية الخادمة" لمارجريت أتوود -قراءة فوكولديّة-

الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث استخدام استراتيجيات خطابية والمقاومة النسوية في رواية مارغريت أتوود حكاية جارية (1985) التي تندرج تحت تصنيف أدب الديستوبيا. وتصور الرواية أشكالاً متنوعة من السلطة القائمة للحكومات الشمولية على المرأة بوصفها كائناتاً ضعيفاً. وهذه الرواية تقترّب كثيراً من الواقعية المريرة للأدب النسوي، وهي خير من تمثل هذا الجنس الأدبي، وهدفت الكاتبة من وراء هذا الرواية إلى وصف مقاومتها لهذا القمع بأساليب وأشكال معقدة. ولقيام بذلك كان يجب على الكاتبة الروائية بناء عالم روائي بانس يُخضع الشخصيات النسوية للاضطهاد والقمع، قبل أن يقمن بالمقاومة، والأحداث هي واقعة في المستقبل لكنها تعبر عن غضب وقلق الحاضر، وتطبق هذه الدراسة مفاهيم ميشيل فوكو في علاقات القوى من خلال الاستراتيجيات الخطابية في هذه الرواية. ويسلط البحث الضوء على الممارسات الخطابية المستمرة للسيطرة على عقل المرأة وجسدها، بطريقة تضمن الطاعة الكاملة لإيديولوجيا معينة، وتبين الرواية كيف أن تستخدم المرأة استراتيجيات اللغة والتعليم للمقاومة والهروب من هذه الطاعة، وهذه الأنواع من الروايات تعكس القوة والفظائع التي تفرضها السلطة على مواطنيها. وختاماً، يستنتج البحث أن مفاهيم فوكو للخطاب وعلاقات القوى منطقية وعقلانية بالنسبة للمرأة التي تعاني من الاضطهاد من الأنظمة الشمولية وكيف تتحرر المرأة بقوة نفسها وتبني خطاب مقاومة لتحرير أنفسهن من القهر والسلطة الانضباطية.

ستراتيژی‌های مبتنی بر گوتاریک بین هیژین رایهدار و بهر هینگار بیوونا نافرمتی د رومان مارگریت نه‌تود دا یا ژیر نافی *The Handmaid's Tale* :خواندنه‌کا فوکولدی

بوخته:

ئهف فهكۆلینه باس ل رومان (مارگریت نه‌تود) یا لژی نافی (*The Handmaid's Tale*) دكهت، نهوا كۆل سالا (1985) ئی به‌لاقبووی كو دكهفته دخانیا نه‌دهی دیستوبیادا لگۆر شیوازی پۆلینكرنی، ئهف رومانه چهندین جورین ههمه‌رنگ بین دهسته‌لانا سمر كۆكرنی بین حكومه‌تین تاكرووی و تۆتالیزمی دژی بهری نافرمتی و مكو مروفه‌كا لاواز و په‌ریشان به‌رچاف دكهتن، همژی خۆیاكرنی یه كو رومان (*The Handmaid's Tale*) گه‌له‌ك یا نیزیكه ژ دۆره‌لی سه‌خت و دژواری نه‌دهی منیاتی بلكو ب باشتیرین شیوه نوینه‌رانییا وی ژانری نه‌دهی دكهت، نفیسه‌را رومانێ نارمانجا وی ژ دارێشتنا فی رومانێ نه‌ه كو په‌سن و سالو‌خدانا خۆراگری و بهر هینگار بیوونا خۆ بكهت بو وی سینهم و سمر كۆتكارین یاكو دژی بهری نافرمتی ده‌یه‌مكرن ب چهندین رهنگ و شیوازی پر گری و نالز، نه‌فجا ژبووی كو وی مه‌رمی ب نه‌نجام بگه‌هینیت پیندی بوو لسه‌ر روماننقیسی ریتوال و جیهانه‌كا روماندارێشتنی یا بی هیفیوون نافیكه‌ت كو تیدا كه‌سایه‌تییا نافرمتی هه‌فرویشی سمر كۆتكرن و ژناقیرنی بكهت بهری كو ده‌ست ب پینقاژویا خۆ یا بهر هینگار بیوونی بكهت، دۆره‌لی بوویس و روویدانین وی رومانێ دۆره‌له‌ك پاشه‌وژسازه، لی دهربرین ژ تۆرمی و دلگرا نییا نها دكهت، ئهف دویفچوون و فهكۆلینه شه‌نگست و تیگه‌هین (میشیل فوكوی) ل بیافی په‌یه‌ه‌دین هیژین رایهدار به‌رجه‌سته دكهت نه‌ژی ب ریا ستراتیژییه‌تین گوتاریکی دفی رومانێ دا، هه‌روسا ئهف فهكۆلینه سیناهیین به‌رده‌ته سمر وان کریار و چالاکیین گوتاریکی بین به‌ردهوام ژبو کۆنترۆلكرنا میتۆد و له‌شی نافرمتی ب شیوازمی و هسا كو ملكه‌چیوونه‌كا ته‌مام بو ئایدۆلۆژییه‌كا دیارگری به‌رخسینیت و دابین بكهت، رومان خویا و شروفه دكهت كو چه‌را نافرمت ستراتیژییه‌تین زمانی و فیركرنی بو بهر هینگار بیوونی و خۆ قۆرتالكرنی ژ وی ملكه‌چیوونی بكار دینییت، ئهف جوهره رومانه‌ژی رهنگانه‌فه‌نه بو وان هیز و کریارین چه‌په‌ل و هوقانه بین كو ده‌سته‌لات لسه‌ر وه‌لاتین خۆ ده‌سه‌پینیت، ل داوی ئهف فهكۆلینه وی فمیزی دگه‌هینیت كو تیگه‌هین (میشیل فوكوی) سه‌بارت شیوازی گوتاریکی و هه‌قه‌ه‌ندین هیژین رایهدار دلۆژیکی و عقلا نییه‌ لۆر نافرمتی یا كو هه‌میشه یا سمر كۆتكریه ژبال رژیمین تاكرو، هه‌روسا چه‌را نافرمت ب شیانیین خۆ دئ خۆ نازاد كه‌ت و گوتارمكا خۆراگری و بهر هینگار بیوونی بونیانیت ژبو رزگار كرنا كه‌سایه‌تییا خۆ ژ سینهم و ده‌سته‌لانیین تاكرو.