



CONTINUATION OF PATRIARCHAL BELIEFS FROM 19TH CENTURY UNTIL THE POST-MODERN AGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores continuation of the patriarchal beliefs from 19th century until the post-modern age. It tries to find a similarity between the methods of control in the two periods in order to support this argument; from 19th century until the post-modern age a lot of changes happened in the social and cultural position of women, but the patriarchal beliefs remained the same. To do this investigation, this paper examines two feminist works, one of them from 19th century, and the other one from modern age. From 19th century this paper examines Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, while in post-modern age it examines Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Since the paper deals with a kind of power relationship between male and female, therefore, Michel Foucault's theories of power and control theorize the arguments.

Key Words: Patriarchal beliefs, Women, 19th Century, and Post-modern age.

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INTRODUCTION

In the nineteenth century women lived in a miserable condition in which they were trapped in home by the patriarchal rules of society, deprived of their rights, and treated as second class citizen. At that time, the society believed that a proper environment for women was home, and the ideal woman was the one who provided a good care for her family. Therefore, being mother and wife was the final stage in the development of female's condition at that time. Courtney Hoffberger in his work states, "because of the male-dominated organization of society, women frequently did not have legal rights, thereby, they were expected to obey the male decisions by raising families and

perform the duties of diligent wives and mothers" (2).

In this period, women's duties were reduced for maternity in which they had to produce children and bring them up for the patriarchal society. Those women who could find a job outside home due to the labor shortage were considered as less worthy because women were valued as housewife, and the jobs that were allowed for women to take outside home at that time were "factory girl, nun or convent girl" (Barret 4).

At the beginning of the twentieth century the conditions of women changed dramatically in which after the industrial revolution and labor shortage, the male-dominated society called women to work in the

factories. The male institutions took a huge campaign encouraging women to participate in the development of society. As a result, a lot of women left home and worked in the factories, but with less paid wages, and they could not hold leading positions as their male counterparts. After the stock crash in the 1929, the society moved back again as a lot of workers lost their jobs including women, and the rules at that time insisted; if men available for work, women cannot work, therefore, women lost their jobs and returned home.

During the Second World War, as many men participated in the war and left their jobs, the governments again encouraged women to take men's job and help the county. In this period, women's active participation can be noticed clearly in which they contributed in the country's production, and helped men in the battle fields. Therefore, women again moved a step forward in their conditions, but after the war ended, men came back and asked for their jobs. Due to this, women again lost their jobs and returned home as usual. So, this indicates that although women could go outside home, but they were as submissive as they were in home because they came out by men's permission and returned home by men's order. The patriarchal beliefs and control followed them everywhere, at home and at their work places.

In this period one can see a lot of changes that happened in women's condition in which they were allowed to work and vote, and the invention of television and radio became an outlet for women toward the world, but it seems that the previous belief and attitudes toward women remained the same until the end of the cold war. At that time women were only allowed to work in its traditional forms like, nursing, and may be teaching. They could not take leading positions or develop at work in order not to share the power with men, therefore, a very limited number of jobs were available for women to take. So, one can conclude that the male-

dominated society were calling women in the time of crises to be active participant with men in the society, while in the normal times the government encouraged them to stay at home. It becomes clear that from 19th century until the post-modern age women could come out from home and have paid work, get the right of vote, but they could not get rid of the patriarchal control.

Patriarchal beliefs

In order to theorize the patriarchal beliefs from 19th century until the post-modern age, this paper examines two feminist works, *The Yellow Wallpaper* from 19th century, and *The Handmaid's Tale* from post-modern age, and since the paper deal with power and control, therefore, Michel Foucault's theories of power and control theorizes the arguments. Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punishment* states that organizations like prisons and schools employ discipline and punishment in order to have absolute control over the subjects' bodies and minds, as he says;

Discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distribute them and circulates them in a network of relations, therefore this could be done by the constitution of tables which transformed confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities and it's the first condition for control. (148)

Here Foucault demonstrates the characteristics of disciplining for regulating individuals by stating that discipline is used as a technique for arranging people, it can be achieved through separating individuals, scheduling time in order to create their docile bodies.

He argues that control through discipline starts with "separating" the subjects from society, and confining them in a place in order to be ready for training (202). Through separation, these organizations take control over the subjects' body in away their bodies become the body of those who are in power. The subjects after separation lose contact with each other, and lack information about

those who share the same condition. So, through separation, the subjects become an easy prey in front of the authoritative power.

Catriona Macleod says, Michel Foucault in one of his lectures argues that "the same style of analysis which he used to study the installation of power in everyday relations and practices could be applied to the techniques and practices of governing populations of subjects" (Macleod 1). Therefore, feminists like Sylvia Walby, Monique Deveaux, and Sandra Bartky used his speech to theorize the patriarchal and social control over female in order to examine how women were and are controlled by the patriarchal beliefs and ideologies throughout history. Catriona Macleod studied "Foucault's thoughts on governmentality in everyday lives, action, and interaction of people rather than study the intentional aspects of power", he considered society as a male-dominated institution that exercises its power by preventing women from it. (Macleod 2).

These feminists theorized that the male-dominated societies employed discipline to regulate female body because they considered it as a site of power that may threaten their control over society. Thereby, women were disciplined inside home by their duties as mother and wife, and they were also disciplined outside by the strict rules of the male-dominated society. Walby stated that;

Women may participate in an institution in society for work, but they will be separated within it, for instance, they may be separated into less powerful positions. Separation is the social practice in which men and women are segregated from each other, and usually the dominant group which is the male taking the better positions. (12)

The male-dominated society employs separation over women at work places as a "patriarchal strategy" to prevent them from reaching power (Walby 13). Therefore, society prescribes functions, duties, and establishes "uninterrupted process of bodily activities" in order to produce women's docile bodies (Bartky 27). These functions and duties were and are used as discipline or routine to make women's bodies and minds be in a continuous

business and forget their trapped condition. Being mother and wife were also among those duties that were used by the patriarchal societies as discipline to confine women in home, and drive them away from the power.

In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* discipline also starts with separation. John wants to control the narrator after she gives birth to her baby, therefore, he chooses separation as a first step to control his wife. This separation can be noticed clearly in the narrator's speech when her husband takes her to a deserted house away from the society, "the most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think about English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people" (Gilman,6). From this quotation one can imagine the prison like house of the narrator. A house which is quite alone, away from the society, and walls and hedges lock the house. So, this technique can be interpreted as a patriarchal strategy by John to disarm the narrator, and make her lack information about those who share the same fate like her. In this way John uses separation as the first step for controlling his wife.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the male-dominated society wants to save the country from sterility, therefore, the government separates women from their families, and labels them into groups. The separation depends on the women's fertility in which the fertile women are assigned as handmaids in the commanders' house, while the sterile women are assigned as unwomen, and are sent to the colonies to work. Therefore, the society separates women from each other and society depending on their reproductive ability in order to produce their docile bodies.

Offred as a handmaid is considered as a "national property and recruited by the state for her reproductive ability" in order to provide child for the commander's family (Snodgrass 6). She is separated from her family as the society kills her husband, takes her daughter, and exiles her mother. The state through this step wants to disarm Offred from her partners, and indoctrinate her according to the

state's principles. As a result, Offred will not remain as a daughter after her mother's banishment, she will not remain as a wife after her husband's death, and she will not remain as a mother after her daughter's kidnapping.

After separation, these organizations according to Foucault employ time-tables to schedule the subjects' daily life and produce their docile bodies. Foucault argues that achieving a military body which "is a docile body" needs imposing military rules, therefore, the authoritative powers must "draw tables, prescribe movements, impose exercises, and arrange tactics" (138). Thus, time-tables and schedules can be used after separation to break up activities and produce behaviors according to the power's preferences.

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, after John separates the narrator from home and society, he tries to use time-tables to schedule her body, and this appears clearly in the narrator's speech, "I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day. He said your exercise depends on your strength your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time, making me lie down for an hour after each meal" (1660). From this quotation it becomes clear that John uses time-table to break up the previous behaviors of his wife, and impose new behaviors through arranging schedules according to his preferences. Through time-table John makes his wife be in a state of business in a way he does not give her free time to think about herself. By following this time-table for a long time, the elements of the schedule become habit in the narrator's life. In this way John wants to take advantage of time-table to control the narrator's body.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, disciplining women begins with labeling them into groups according to their physiological productivity and obliging them to wear clothes according to their positions. The handmaids who are able to give birth separated from other women by wearing red clothes, and their social function is reduced for bearing. The wives have higher position than other groups of women wear blue clothes, and their social function is limited for taking care of the gardens. The Aunts that are authorized by the government are separated from other groups by their brown clothes; they are

responsible for educating the handmaids through implanting Gilead's ideologies in their minds. The last group of women are known as unwomen, they are infertile women, and their social function is limited for cleaning up the nuclear plants in the colonies. These groups of women are disciplined by regimented time-tables in order to regulate their body, and thereby, to "produce docile body" which is ready for indoctrination (Hsieh, 15).

Michel Foucault discusses the idea of time-tables in the disciplinary systems, "time-table establishes rhythm, imposes particular occupations, regulates the cycle of repetition and controls its development" (Discipline, 149). Therefore, through discipline and time-tables, the state of Gilead does not give the handmaids a space in order not think about their conditions, as Offred says, "On first days we are permitted front doors, but after that we're supposed to use the back. Things haven't settled down, it's too soon, everyone is unsure about our exact status" (Atwood, 17). So, the state makes the handmaids' minds be busy with following time tables, as a result, the time-table increases the handmaids' obedience politically, and at the same time it increases their productivity economically (Gerhard, 27).

Foucault in *Discipline and Punishment* argues that through discipline "the individual body becomes an element that may be placed, moved, articulated on others. Discipline is no longer simply an art of distributing bodies, of extracting time from them and accumulating it, but of composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine" (87). Through discipline, the authoritative powers create a collective society that individuals work in it like machine to achieve a certain goal. So, in Gilead the power through separation and grouping creates the idea of collectivism in which the society values women as a social body or one body, while as individual it does not value them because they can be replaced by others since all women are disciplined and following one schedule.

Offred at the very beginning of the story describes the disciplinary conditions of their place, as she says; "we slept in army blankets and coats that had been set up in rows, the Aunts standing at the end of the bed, we weren't allowed out, except

for our walk twice daily, As we walk they are watching” (Atwood, 13-19). Her narration reveals that they were confined in a place that suggests discipline and rule in which every private aspect of their lives was disciplined such as sleeping, and the army coats and blankets suggest the military discipline that Offred and her friends were suffering from in the Red center. Her narration declares that the male-dominated society considered their bodies as a “site of power” that may go against their interests, therefore, the power restricted and confined them, and even in their walking, the women were going out with accompany of another woman to monitor over them (Mills, 29). As they go for shopping, the handmaids reveal another form of control and military discipline as appears in Offred’s narration, “we reached the first barrier, there are men with machine guns on either side of the rode” (26-27). It might be said that the male-dominated society militarized the life of women in this country by imposing military rules and disciplines to control their movements.

As a part of discipline, the patriarchal societies also tries to control sexuality because they considered it as a site of power. Michel Foucault in his book, *The History of Sexuality* argues, “sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality; useful for greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies” (108). Foucault explains that although sexuality does not produce power directly, but it can support it for various strategies. Therefore, in most of the patriarchal societies women are sexually controlled or oppressed because sexuality aids women to create relationship with others, and thereby, resist the authoritative power.

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the patriarchal society sexually controls the narrator through separating her from her husband, and confining her alone in a room, as she says, I have a room not “for two beds, and no near room from him if he took another, it is quite alone, I am afraid, John is away all day, he does not know how much I really suffer” (1659). Her speech claims that she suffers from being separated, her husband is always away from

her. She does not want to be alone in the room at night, and she tries to tell John about that as John asks her about her conditions, “I do not weigh a bit more, nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away” (1661). Here, the narrator indirectly explains her lack of passion and love that her confinement brings upon her.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the majority of women suffer from sterility due to the nuclear radiations and air pollution, therefore, fertile women are considered as a national property of the state that must be used only for providing children for the ruling elite, and thereby, saving Gilead from sterility. Thus, the state deprives the fertile women or the handmaids from “any sign of sexuality and reduce them for the basic level of the biological function” in order to dedicate their life only for child producing (Hsieh, 8). In this process the handmaids are prohibited from any sexual relations except in the ceremonies, and they are obliged to wear long skirts and cover their heads in order not to attract the males and involve in illegal sexual relations. Therefore, the society makes use of women’s sexuality according to its own interest, which is mainly reproduction.

The Aunts are responsible for indoctrinating the handmaid’s mind through presenting pornographic movies that show how women were abused in the past. These movies are shown to brainwash the handmaids through implanting Gilead’s ideology about sexuality. As a result of this manipulation, the handmaids are obliged to work as machines, deprived from their identity, as appears in Offred’s speech, “we are for breeding purposes, we are two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalice” (Atwood, 176). This quote suggests that the handmaids are not treated as human beings, and the regime considers them as robots that perform a certain kind of work, therefore, the handmaids become “slaves to their reproductive organ” (King, 31).

Foucault argues that discipline needs surveillance to ensure the subjects’ docility, therefore, in organizations like prisons, observation or surveillance becomes a major tool for examining

the subjects' docility. He discussed the idea of surveillance in relation to Jeremy's Panopticon that is used for monitoring in prisons;

Panopticon induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary. (Discipline 201-249).

Panopticon creates a state of consciousness or awareness in the subjects in which they realize that they are subjected to a permanent monitoring, so, they behave according to rules that are determined for them. Foucault argues that power employs surveillance at every aspect of the subjects' life to create the fear of being watched by the authority. Thus, when the subjects internalize this fear, they do their duties properly even in the absence of the guards, and thereby, the fear becomes their internal monitor that prevents them from any possible resistance against the authoritative power.

In *The Yellow Wallpaper* after separation and discipline John uses surveillance to ensure his control over the narrator or his wife, and this appears clearly in her speech, "He is very careful, and hardly lets me stir without special direction" (648). It seems that John through his monitoring wants to make his wife internalize the fear of John's permanent visibility in order to make his wife or the narrator be under control even when he is away from her. So, the importance of surveillance lies in its psychological influence in which it makes the narrator internalize the fear of being watched by her husband, and follow the patriarchal schedule. In this John provides the narrator's docile body. This Panopticon or monitoring can be seen clearly in both of the works.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the authoritative power of Gilead achieves complete control over women's body and mind through using "the Eyes" to permanently monitor women's behaviors, thinking, and movements (Atwood, 226). The guards, reporters, and the aunts are employed as "Eyes" by the male-dominated society to monitor women

wherever they go. The duty of these Eyes is to report on any woman that behave or speak negatively against Gilead's main stream, therefore, these Eyes are everywhere such as the Aunts in the Red Center, the one who accompanies the handmaids in their shopping, and the guards on the streets. This constant surveillance of the Eyes is used to ensure that all women in the state follow Gilead's rules that determined for them.

The regime in Gilead uses the Eyes as Bentham's Panopticon to regulate women's body through making them internalize fear of being watched, as Foucault says "instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible (Discipline 116). Since these Eyes are everywhere, therefore, the women in fear of being watched by the Eyes, automatically perform their work without questioning, and even in the absence of the Eyes women still committed to their work. So, through monitoring "each individual is fixed in her place. And, if she moves, she does so at the risk of his life, contagion or punishment" (106).

Foucault states that through separation, time-tables, and surveillance the authoritative powers would have the subjects' bodies controlled, and after that they use language to control their minds just like their bodies. He marked the importance of language for the authoritative powers by stating that;

Language produces power; reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. We must conceive of discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them; and it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity. (67).

Here, Foucault explains that language is a tool that produces power, and helps those who use it to reinforce their position by imposing their ideology. He stated that there is a strong relationship between power and language. Those who are in power they use language to redefine truths, manipulate others, and thereby, impose their ideologies upon the subjects.

Feminists came to relate Foucault's theory of language to the language of society. They say language of society is also an important element that aids the patriarchal control over women. Duygu Ersoy examined the importance of language for the authoritative powers by stating that;

Language is a ground which provides the established system its continuity and closed structure when it is manipulated, it will be taken as the precondition of all other institutions since without language it is not possible for people to agree on the content of other institutions. The manipulation of language changes the perception of other domains by defining the boundaries of thinking and creating the sense of having no alternatives as well as living under the best system ever, therefore, language identify the subjects' subjection in order to behave automatically in the manner that is imposed on them by the political order. (5-23)

Duygu Ersoy considers language as an effective tool for those who hold power because it allows them to avoid the subjects' resistance through changing their thoughts and behaviors. Usually, the authoritative powers use language through prescribing social ideology according to its preferences, redefining truths, and sometimes, through the language of religion to support their positions.

In *The Yellow Wallpaper* after John assures the narrator's docile body through discipline and surveillance, he uses language to control his mind. John uses language as an effective tool of control to colonize the mind of the narrator in order to change the narrator's beliefs, and impose his ideologies. First of all, through the patriarchal language of medicine, Dr. Michel separates the narrator from the society, and confines her at home, then he prevents her from practicing any mental activity like writing. After Dr. Michel, John tries to manipulate the narrator through language in order to confuse her mind and keep her under his control, and this appears clearly in the narrator's speech "He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself of his sake, and keep well / John says the very worst thing I can do is to

think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad / John says it is good for me to sleep all I can" (1658). From this quotation it becomes clear how effective is the role of language in controlling one's mind. John through language tells the narrator to do things that prevent her from activating her mind. He tells her to sleep as much as she can in order to prevent her from writing, and he tells her that the worst thing is to think about your condition. In this way he avoids her critical thinking that may go against his control or his society's preferences.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the authoritative power of Gilead ensures women's docility in the society through controlling their minds. The society uses language to make the women accept their social functions, and perform their duties properly. The ruling system of Gilead uses language to make the handmaids accept the changes that happened in their social conditions. The state removes the official language of the society and creates its own language, and redefines truths depending on its ideologies, as appears in Aunt Lydia's speech;

Some women believed that there would be no future, they thought the world would explode. That was the excuse they used, say Aunt Lydia. They said there was no sense in breeding. Aunt Lydia's nostrils narrow: such wickedness. They were lazy women, she says. They were sluts, there are more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In days of anarchy it was freedom to, now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it. (Atwood, 96-21).

In Gilead, language is used as "a vital prerequisite for the achievement of power, and once this power has been achieved, every important characteristic of the human condition-memory, self-expression, self-identity, and freedom faces irreparable damage" (Loigu, 103). Pierre Bourdieu in his work explains the reason behind people's acceptance of their position while violates their identity by stating that;

What are behind people's acceptance of their position in the totalitarian society are the symbolic power and authoritative language. Symbolic power of language is

power which presuppose that is recognized as such and that at the same time those who acknowledge it cannot recognize that the violence that is exercised through that power, and authoritative language is that language that has to heard, believed, and obeyed which claims to be effective. (53)

The authoritative power of Gilead through constructing truths and indoctrination gets absolute control over the handmaids' bodies and minds in away when the handmaids hear the speeches, they receive them as absolute truths, while in reality the speeches dehumanize them, and deprive them from their rights. Through language or reconstructing truths, the regime makes the handmaids execute a doctor with a handmaid for having abortion. Here, it becomes clear that although this execution violates the handmaids' privacy, but they are unaware of it because they are subjected to a continuous indoctrination.

In the Republic of Gilead there is nothing called man's sterility, but instead women are accused for being sterile, therefore, the handmaids as child producing machines must save the state from sterility, "There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood, 79). The cruelty of this society appears when they accuse the handmaids for sterility in the state, while in reality the problem is with men as appear in the Commander's speech "The problem wasn't only with the women, he says. The main problem was with the men" (272). Here, one can observe the importance of language in this state, in which through it, the system makes the handmaids see themselves as subjects, and prove their citizenship by performing their social function which is child producing.

Conclusion

This paper explored continuation of the patriarchal beliefs from 19th century until the post-modern age through examining two feminist works; Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* from 19th century, and Margret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* from post-modern age. Since the paper dealt with a kind of power relationship between male and female, therefore, Michel

Foucault's theories of power and control theorized the arguments. The paper reached into a conclusion which shows that; although a century passed from 19th century until the post-modern age, but the patriarchal beliefs remained the same. In the 19th century the patriarchal societies were controlling women in home through separation, discipline, and surveillance, and in the post-modern age the patriarchal societies were controlling women through the same methods of control, but at women's work places because women could come out from home, and get paid works. So, although a lot of changes happened from 19th century until the modern age in the social and cultural position of women, but the patriarchal beliefs remained the same.

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