

## Women in Chains: Religion as a Tool of Oppression in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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**Abstract.** This research paper examines the depiction of religious oppression and the misuse of Biblical text in Hulu's web series, *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-2022), to emphasise the systemic patriarchal systems that lead to the marginalisation of women. The paper analyses the dystopian storyline of the series and demonstrates how religion is deliberately employed to rationalise and sustain gender inequality and social dominance. The paper examines the intricate relationship between religion and patriarchy by analysing important scenes and personalities. It demonstrates how religious texts are manipulated to justify the oppression and domination of women in the represented society. The examination explores the consequences of religious and patriarchal frameworks on how feminism and women's rights are perceived in the real world. It posits that *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-2022) functions as a cautionary narrative highlighting the perils of merging religious doctrine with governmental authority, resulting in the degradation of women's independence and rights. Utilising feminist theological analysis, the study argues that the series encourages a reassessment of religious doctrines and cultural standards that have traditionally excluded women. The study finishes by urging for a sophisticated comprehension of the connection between religion and patriarchy. It advocates for the reading of religious texts that endorse gender equality and question repressive systems.

**Keywords :** Dystopian studies; gender; patriarchy; religion; feminism; social studies.

Religion, as a complex and sophisticated phenomenon, has played a major role in shaping societies and safeguarding the social order. It is considered a stabilizing force in society by providing a moral framework and cultural ideologies to govern the behaviour of individuals and maintain social cohesion. It provides a sense of meaning and identity which contributes to people's mental health by accommodating a sense of community belonging. "The fact that religions become part of social identities and thus appear to be "natural," or they become identified as "foreign" and remain marginal for long periods, creates a sense of fixity in the distribution of religions in the world." (Montgomery, 37). In *The*

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*Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1915), French sociologist Emile Durkheim discussed religion as a social construct, that serves important social functions in human societies. His idea of religion was equivalent to a collective reflection of a society's values and beliefs. This system of shared beliefs resulting from the implementation of religion in a cultured society, forms and strengthens a collective identity. Durkheim referred to this system as the formation of a 'collective consciousness' believing it to be the basis of all social life. Max Weber<sup>1</sup> further formulated the concept of theodicy which illustrates the role of religion in providing a sense of purpose in life. The morally good actions then benefit the overall environment of a society. Weber did agree with the fact that religion serves as an ideology which has both negative and positive impacts on society.

Religion becomes the source of knowledge to the people to behave in a certain manner which is beneficial to the ideologies of the whole community :

Religion influences political relationships because religion is central in the creation of symbolic worlds; in particular, religion shapes the phenomenology of culture members. To absorb a religious worldview is to absorb a set of taken-for-granted assumptions about one's duty to God and to society.

(Williams, 370)

Nietzsche's idea of god is significant in the understanding of the role of religion in the modern society. Though considered as an atheist, his belief in the existence of God is vividly present in his ideology. His famous quote, "God is Dead" proves that he was not an atheist who denies the existence of god, rather he claimed god to be dead now because of humans and their selfish acts manipulating in the name of god. Nietzsche's criticism of religions, Christianity in particular was wrongly interpreted by everyone as his disapproval of the belief in God. He criticises the so-called moral code of conduct which is implemented on the society in light of religious approval falsely credited to God to manipulate people in accepting the roles humans need to take without any questioning. He questions the limitations put on the individuality and freedom of the people in a society. He writes :

because it commands what is useful to us, but because it commands... Originally all education and care of health, marriage, cure of sickness, agriculture, war, speech and silence, traffic with one another and with the gods belonged within the domain of morality: they demanded one observe prescriptions without thinking of oneself as an individual. Originally, therefore, everything was custom, and whoever wanted to elevate himself above it had to become lawgiver and medicine man and a kind of demi-god: that is to say, he had to make customs—a dreadful, mortally dangerous thing! Who is the most moral man? First, he who obeys the law most frequently.... Then, he who obeys it even in the most difficult cases. The most moral man is he who sacrifices the most to custom... the individual is to sacrifice himself—that is the commandment of morality of custom.

(Nietzsche, 9)

Nietzsche's observation focused on the awareness about the death of god in the society but not completely agreeing with the fact. He credited this reluctancy towards the acknowledgement to religion as an instrumental function. He proposed that religion plays a significant role in the society by using the religious beliefs and practices to foster the interests and objectives of a particular section of the society. His opinions of considering religious beliefs and doctrines to be incorrect was also based on the function of religion in the society. But it should be understandable that he did believe in the capacity of religion as a means to maximize one's human potential.

It has been thoroughly researched that religion is thus an important part of the social structure. It is used as a medium to help sustain ideologies created by a certain group of people to control without resistance. This paper highlights how patriarchy is kept alive in the fabric of the social structure with the help of religion, particularly Christianity in relation to Hulu's television series *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-2022).

In the noteworthy work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno investigated the concept of the “culture industry,” which states that the elements of any culture including media, art, literature and major ideologies work towards the upliftment of capitalism. The text argues that the culture industry generates a standardised and commercialised form of cultural expression that inhibits critical thought and promotes conformity. In the chapter “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” the authors state that “Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated.” (97)

Adorno and Horkheimer claimed that in capitalist societies, religion frequently operates as an ideology that reinforces social hierarchies and perpetuates dominance. The assessment of any organised religion as a social control mechanism employed by the ruling classes to maintain power and suppress dissent is a major argument put forward by these theorists. Moreover their argument questions religion as it serves to conciliate the masses by distracting them from social and economic injustices thus resulting in maintaining the status quo. In addition, Adorno argued that religion mostly promotes a false sense of transcendence and escape from the brutal realities of capitalist society. He criticised religious practises for fostering a deceptive sense of security and comfort, which ultimately prevents individuals from recognising and opposing oppressive social conditions.

The relationship between power, faith and societal framework and its intricate relation to religion, dystopian literature has been presenting a critical stance in light of it for quite some time now. Religion plays a major role in the dystopian narratives as a means of control, oppression or resistance. As a tool, the governing class uses religion to maintain dominance over the masses by manipulating them into following beliefs and practices which are in the favor of elites. It represses free thought individual expression and dissent, by effectively enforcing obedience. With these notions, the narratives portray myriad ideological perspectives. In some cases, the idea of religion is completely eradicated from society and replaced with a new system of control. This eradication represents a wish to terminate alternative sources of authority and allegiance that could pose a threat to the prevailing ideology. Whereas in other dystopian narratives, religion is co-opted and manipulated by those

in power to legitimize their actions and maximize control over the population.

Althusser's concept of Interpellation describes the process of how humans in a society are trained to not question the system and prevalent ideologies to maintain the status quo. Through the process of interpellation, individuals are turned into subjects. Patriarchy as noted by Eisenstein (1999) is "defined to mean a sexual system of power in which the male role is superior in possession of power and economic privilege. Patriarchy is the male hierarchical ordering of society. Although the legal institutional base of patriarchy used to be more explicit, the basic relations of power have remained intact." (202-203)

Patriarchy serves as a power given to a specific gender over the other. This system is defined as "the manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance over women in society." (Stopler, 365) It is so deeply embedded in the social fabric which affects the individual's subjectivity by 'hailing' them into preconceived notions. In this framework, religion serves as a crucial 'Ideological State Apparatus' (ISA)<sup>3</sup> and becomes a tool in the process of 'interpellation' by arranging individual beliefs and identities parallel with societal norms and power hierarchy. This alignment of different elements is perceived by individuals as self-imposed rather than directed which leads to the reinforcement of the system from within. Religion acts as a determinant which helps to legitimise the existing social power structures by representing them as divinely functional and thereby discouraging any rebellion against authority. As per the history of the creation of patriarchy, men and women were predominantly considered as equals. Even so, women's power of procreation was accepted as divine which resulted in the formation of women goddesses. Gerda Learner's historical study explains how the archaic states and kingships modified the religious symbols which resulted in the gradual replacement of the 'mother-goddess' into a male creator god, "These changes in religious symbols and meanings closely reflect the gradual absorption of female rights by the patriarchal structure and the transition from matrilineal kinship and royal succession to patrilineal kinship and succession." (373) This was just the beginning of the refabrication of religious doctrines which created the inferior status of women in the society. This has been done to a level that now has become an ideological tool, consciously woven into the fabric of societal control. The misuse of power and religion

to marginalize one section of the society becomes the focus of the following visual narrative.

*The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-22) A web series produced by Hulu based on the infamous novel by the same name, the Republic of Gilead is a theocratic state that oppresses women and builds a hierarchical society constructed on strict religious precepts. The society represented in the series have rejected very essential aspects of a civilized society, such as the idea of individual liberty, autonomy, and equality. The lives of the people of Gilead, specifically women are regularly surveilled and they are denied access to basic rights resulting in the devaluation of human life.

Religious fundamentalism is a political force that focuses on obtaining complete control over the society, according to WAF (Women Against Fundamentalism), which defines religious fundamentalism as such. In “Women, Religious Fundamentalism and Reproductive Rights”, Rayah Feldman and Kate Clark stated :

Such movements may be state projects themselves or in opposition to the state but they always claim that their version of religion is the only authentic one and they use political means to impose it on others. (12)

The implementation of religion as a force to marginalise women and affirm control over their physical and mental autonomy is evident in the television series *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-2022). The clinging onto traditional norms and practices, sometimes referred to as “following the book,” has been seen as a confinement and surveillance of women in the modern society. Within this particular system, women are systematically deprived of impartial acknowledgment as independent persons and are deflected into accepting themselves as mere conduits for the sake of reproduction. Mary Daly, heavily influenced by the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir, presents a critical analysis of religion (in her text, the church) due to its rigid norms and deeply ingrained partialities. The author states that “Christianity demonstrates a protest against adapting its frameworks in order to accommodate the present-day circumstances faced by women. However, it tenaciously imposes conventional values of obedience, passivity, and meekness, while seemingly disregarding or neglecting the

profound aspirations of a substantial segment of the population for autonomy and holistic personal fulfilment". (54)

In this visual narrative, the accessibility of the Bible is restricted to a particular segment of the human population, specifically privileged males belonging to the upper tier of society. This section uses the book as a medium for manipulating the general public and, moreover managing their conduct. The exclusive privilege held by these individuals gives them the power to interpret the text based on their conveniences. In opposition, women of whatsoever position and class are forbidden from engaging in the act of reading the Bible or expressing its words orally. The restrictions imposed upon Handmaids extend beyond the scope of biblical teachings. Women are excluded from the opportunity to read any sort of written material basically depriving them of educational rights, preventing them from their involvement in discussions and debates and forbidding them from expressing their viewpoints on subjects concerning politics. The above-mentioned imposition implies a more comprehending objective of hindering women's ability to acquire knowledge and think critically, as such understanding has the potential to empower them to rebel against the authorities. June, the protagonist is shown as a journalist in her life before Gilead. So, it was education which established the ability in her to question the wrong happenings against women. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a series, divided into 5 seasons as of now and post-season one, the rest of the four seasons are based on the rebellion against the authoritarian governance majorly led by June.

In Gilead, customary greetings such as "under his eye" are employed instead of conventional greetings, which serves to focus the surveillance that controls the lives of the people. Expressions such as "praised be his bounty" function as acts of thankfulness directed towards the attentive and authoritative entity mentioned as 'The Eye', which symbolises a divine male character associated with wealth and sustenance. Dorota Filipczak considers this as a parody of its biblical source, probably from 2 Chronicles:

'For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him' (Filipczak, 172)

Moreover, the usage of the phrase “blessed be the fruit” signifies the promotion of conception within the Handmaid community, thus it provides an additional clarification of the deliberate manipulation implemented on their mental and physical well-being. Their cognitive and corporeal angles of existence are constantly regularized with the help of new linguistic measures. It is stated in the history of feminist research that it is “through language, which is our means of classifying and ordering the world, a view has been constructed in which males continue to be seen as superior, and females continue to be seen as inferior, therefore strengthening the myth and reinforcing the justification for male power.” (43)

The constant examination of their physical and mental forms puts light on the fact that their experiences as human beings are being monitored which compels them to adapt to the situations without any hesitation. The dominant authority is further strengthened with the employment of white blinds covering their faces, thereby limiting their visibility solely to the frontal direction. This methodology is most often used on animals particularly horses during competitive events, aims to sustain their concentration and mitigate any distractions. The visual representation of such a restriction in this context refers it as a metaphor for the limited agency and awareness experienced by these women, suggesting their purpose of existence is limited to conception and reproduction.

In the first episode of the season one, a situation takes place in a supermarket where Offred is asked to grab a bunch of oranges. As a reaction, she gets engrossed in introspection, thinking,

I don't need oranges. I need to scream. I  
need to grab the nearest machine gun.

(Episode 1, 14:57)

It signifies frustration and disagreement that very naturally comes to June resulting from complete control on the physical entities of the handmaids. The next scene leads the audience to the residential area, where an obstruction in the form of a wall becomes apparent. The wall is used as a warning sign board embellished with a display of deceased human beings, suspended and obscured, insinuating signs of decay in their physical structures. The act of showcasing dead bodies of people with particular symbols on their covered faces acts as a warning to the people as the

repercussions of challenging the authority or choosing to go against the law. This particular method of punishment strictly conforms to the principles and beliefs of the specified ideology.

An ideological perspective is gained through Aunt Lydia's assertion who is the authoritative figure responsible for 'handling' the Handmaids throughout the series. A detailed analysis of the origins of the infertility crisis, is justified with the divine punishment occurred on humanity for polluting the environment and degrading the culture mostly driven by industrialization and capitalism. But according to Aunt Lydia, the issue of infertility involves approaches which puts the blame entirely on women and their free body choices like contraception methods such as birth control pills, as well as surgeries like abortions, all linked to women as if the degradation of environment was solely because of women and their bodily choices. The accessible options provided to every individual in the modern world with the help of advanced medical and technological upliftment, granting women bodily autonomy and the capacity to make personal decisions regarding motherhood. But, in the context of Gilead, autonomy is subject to criticism especially for women, since the women who opt for them are stigmatised as "dirty women" and "sluts". Aunt Lydia therefore states :

Fertility is a gift directly from god. He  
left you intact for a biblical purpose.  
(18:06)

The biblical narrative alluded to the book of Genesis, specifically Genesis 30. According to the story, Rachel, wife of Jacob, suffers infertility and is unable to bear children. Rachel is anguished due to the distress of not being able to conceive which leads to her direction for her husband to procreate with the maid, Bilhah. This act of an infertile wife offering her maidservant as a surrogate to bear children in her place is not an uncommon practice in the past. Jacob accepts Rachel's proposal, resulting in Bilhah delivering two male offspring, namely Dan and Naphtali. The children are regarded as Rachel's which fulfils her desire to become a mother. Using this narrative and by manipulating it, the government of Gilead handled by men rationalise the utilization of handmaids as surrogates without their permission. The way Rachel convinced Bilhah of the opportunity to bear children in her place, the Gilead society employs Handmaids to fulfil the reproductive needs of the ruling class. The biblical story is reframed to emphasize the societal expectation forced upon women

to complete their inherent responsibility of procreation, even if it requires the involvement of surrogacy. The engineering of this biblical tale highlights the prevailing reproductive structure of the society which denies any sort of autonomy to women with respect to the manipulated religious context. It is also interesting to note that the name of the centre where these women are forcefully trained to be handmaids is named on the basis of biblical characters, “The Rachel and Leah Centre”. De Beauvoir in chapter 6 of her seminal work, *The Second Sex*, argues over forced pregnancies in the name of god,

Church leaves it to the grace of god; it accepts that man is only an instrument in his hands and that the soul’s salvation depends of the church and god. ...

The truth is that this is a conflict with a stubborn old tradition that has nothing to do with morality. (Beauvoir, 599)

In a half way between a med shot and a close up of Offred while she is in a bath, the camera zooms to focus on a metal earring she is wearing. The earring exhibits a striking numeral sequence: 0-1185. Also, the episode 10 of season 1 presents the forceful punching of the ear tag that served the purpose of an identity code that is assigned to all Handmaids, so providing a unique marker for each individual. The tag’s visual presentation has a striking resemblance to the tags commonly used for animals’ ears through harsh techniques, symbolising their subjugation to human ownership. The usage of animal tags allows to highlight the dehumanising aspect of this practise as shown in the series. The Handmaids’ identifying numbers explains their diminishing status as independent individuals to simply material possessions. This act identifies the issues related to oppression, the erosion of individuality.

In the season one episode three, a handmaid given the name of Ofglen is charged with the offence of gender treachery in recognition of her sexual orientation. Her partner, who is a martha, is charged with capital punishment. It was Ofglen’s reproductive capacity that made her useful for the state, which saved her from the same sentence. She was then punished to see the execution of her beloved as a way of reinforcing the repercussions of such violations. The rationale for this punitive measure

is based on scriptural verses found in the Bible. The commander or judge in that scene says :

The accused stand charged with gender  
treachery, in violation of Romans,  
Chapter 1, Verse 26. By his word.  
(34:12)

According to King James version of the Bible the above mentioned verse states that for this cause God gave them up unto vile affections : for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature. Aunt Lydia punishes Offred for calling Ofglen gay out loud as the word is unlawful. In response to her being homosexual she replies to Offred, “That girl, that thing, was an offense to god.” (30:26)

Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949) discusses multiple arguments which logically explains the problematic portrayal of attitude towards the handmaids with the help of critically calling out patterns and ideologies prevalent in the society resulting in the marginalisation of women. According to her, it is a proven perception that men frequently consider women inferior to men and considers them non-autonomous. Moreover, men consider women’s existence in reference to their own. From this particular opinion, women are subjected as objects of sexual desire, with their sense of self being influenced by the male gaze. The dynamics of the society present male roles as dominant and influencing while women are relegated as the “Other”. The relationship between a woman’s identity and a man’s desires are reflected by the insights given by Michel Foucault into the dynamic relationship between power and sexuality. In this context characterised by male dominance, men exercise authoritative power and accordingly shape societal roles and conventions, as per their convenience and choices. These roles are correlated with established social and theological frameworks, enabling men to put their authority and alter the working of the society in accordance with their desires and requirements.

In Gilead, women are perceived as vessels solely designated for the purpose of reproduction, in which the ability of fertility becomes the bar of classification to determine their position in the society. The renaming of women translates to complete subjugation to the male figure and losing their identity as independent individuals. For instance, they are given names like “Of-fred” or “Of-glen,” these names include the

name of the commander they are about to serve and with the change of the commander, they are designated with a new name. This efficiently strip them of their personal identities and them to mere instruments within the prevailing patriarchal system.

Multiple instances showcase that the handmaid's relevance as a human being was completely limited to her conceiving the child for someone else. Serena Joy's behaviour towards Offred turns into admiration and care when she contemplates Offred as pregnant. The moment she gets her period, a violent drift in her behaviour is noticed. She is then beaten and abused by Serena as in this situation Offred seems like a punching bag for her on which she can put her aggression and frustration out. The idea of a "miracle" experiences a dramatic decline in its perceived value, resulting in Offred being subjected to highly disrespectful treatment. She experiences a state of seclusion where she is denied the liberty to exit, which suggests that her body is being held responsible for the lack of pregnancy.

The use of ceremonial practices in the series, particularly the planned intimate act with a Handmaid in the presence of the Commander's wife, is also referenced to the biblical story of Jacob and Rachel. The commencement of this ceremonial occasion involves Commander's reading of excerpts from the bible allegedly providing an explanation for the following actions.

As mentioned before, Rachel is shown as experiencing infertility and she implores her husband Jacob for the gift of progeny, expressing her desperation by stating, "Give me children, or I shall die." (Genesis, 30:1) This representation, in which the husband consents to the wife's request as a result of her apparent infertility, presents a critical view and puts only women in question of infertility, whereas male infertility appears to be implausible. It even appreciates the husband for understanding the burden and suffering of women and is presented as a moment of sacrifice he does for his family. The participation of both the wife and a Handmaid in this rite is motivated by their mutual aspiration to fulfil the religious obligation of reproduction.

Atwood as a co-producer of the series, utilises this scenario to present a satire on the society. It becomes rather clear when the doctor informs Offred that most of the commanders are sterile and it is not the

women but rather the men who cannot procreate. With this revelation, Offred is introduced to the complex web of deceit. Thus, Atwood uses the ceremonial practise as way to participate in a critical examination and satirical portrayal of societal dynamics, resulting in making the male vulnerability to manipulation evident in the regressive framework of Gilead.

In 1995, a research conducted by Martha Nussbaum, identified seven fundamental components that originates the concept of objectifying individuals. These include considering individuals as mere instruments to achieve specific objectives of the observer which concludes the negation of their autonomy and self-determination. Moreover, this conception involves regarding individuals as lacking agency and activity, leading them to be treated as interchangeable with objects, negating their personal boundaries, reducing them to objects of ownership that can be commodified, and disregarding their subjective experiences and emotions (257). In 2009, Rae Langton expanded this idea by introducing three additional dimensions. These dimensions involve the equating individuals to their physical bodily parts, importance of their appearances and their representation as silent entities with negative capability to communicate. These comprehensive perspectives jointly define objectification of individuals. (228-229) An article titled “Walking Wombs”: Loss Of Individuality And Self- Alienation In *The Handmaid's Tale*” expresses :

Exploiting parts of biblical scriptures aligning with its policies is the chief devastating power of the state to normalize and justify the new norms derogating and reducing woman to an object. (Gayret, 107)

Kant provides major contributions to moral ethics, particularly his exploration of the objectification of women. As per Kantian viewpoint, objectification refers to the devaluation of an individual who possesses inherent humanity, by reducing them to the position of an object. Humanity whereas is characterized by an individual’s logical essence and their ability to engage in conscious decision-making. This conscious engagement with constructive criticisms and analysis distinguishes mankind which allows them to actively pursue their objectives. The concept of humanity becomes a distinguishing factor between human beings and both animals and inanimate objects. According to Kant’ *Groundwork of the Metaphysics*

*of Morals* (1785), this differentiation allows human beings to be designated as special dignity, occupied by an inherent value that is not contingent upon comparison. According to Kant, the notion of objectification is closely associated with instrumental treatment, which is perceiving an individual only as a means to fulfil someone else's objectives. Within the framework of *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-22), this concept can be understood by examining the forceful engagement of Handmaids in sexual encounters with the objective of procreation. The handmaids are directed to partake in these activities, highlighting their utilitarian function in the government's endeavour to achieve a specific result, mirroring the fundamental essence of Kant's notion of objectification.

A similar view may be discerned in the television series whereby the Commanders engage in informal gatherings in a brothel alongside other high-ranking men. In this place, women who are identified as infertile, rebels, have violated the systemic norms of the state or have formerly held esteemed positions such as teachers and philosophers, are compelled into engaging in prostitution under duress. In a particular occurrence, Commander Fred escorts Offred to the same setting, directing her to put on an attire that stands out by its revealing style and silvery shades of grey. The modification of clothing in question results in a shift in Offred's persona, transitioning her from the role of a Handmaid to that of a prostitute, yet her behaviours and actions remain fundamentally unaltered. In episode 8 of season 1, on the way to Jezebel's Commander Fred says to Offred,

Fred: "but tonight you aren't you" (15:30)

This change highlights the sexual objectification of the protagonist's character, serving as a representation of how individuals in positions of authority in the fictional society of Gilead manipulate and exploit women based on their own personal gratification. This narrative serves to underscore the extent to which influential males in Gilead exercise manipulation and dominance over women's bodies and agency. Catherine Mackinnon agrees with Kant and further elaborates in relation to pornography and its potential threats to treating women as objects that

Pornography defines women by how we  
look according to how we can be

sexually used.... Pornography participates in its audience's eroticism through creating an accessible sexual object, the possession and consumption of which is male sexuality, as socially constructed; to be consumed and possessed as which, is female sexuality, as socially constructed (Mackinnon, 173)

During an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, Kyra Synder, the writer of Season 1, elaborated on the deliberate depiction of "Jezebels" club. She noted,

We were interested in exploring the duality of what the power structure of Gilead would create for themselves in the visible spaces and then what the women would experience privately in the private spaces. The dorm and the ladies room where Offred meets with Moira are those private women's spaces. They're a little sadder, a little tattier. We looked at representing things like refugee camps and places where women are sexually trafficked. But the men don't see that. For them it's prettier, glossier. It's a fantasy that they're building for themselves. (Interview)

During the latter episodes of the initial season, *The Handmaid's Tale* reveals the background of Nick, shedding light on his evolution into Commander Fred's chauffeur and his assimilation into the secretive organization known as "the eyes." The covert organization called as "Sons of Jacob", which played a crucial role in the development of Gilead's philosophy, is disclosed to have been introduced to Nick by Commander Pryce. Taking advantage of Nick's unemployment, Commander Pryce gives him an invitation to join this clandestine group. Following this, the episode explores the dynamics between Commander Pryce, Commander Fred and Commander Guthrie during the early development of Gilead, a period characterized by its infancy and the establishment of regulations. The entirety of this undertaking, which falls under the category of adultery, is consistent with biblical ideas that categorize such behaviours as wrong.

These individuals adeptly exploit a specific story-line in order to persuade their spouses to adopt this framework. In order to imbue an aura of holiness, this practice is designated as the “ceremony,” invoking religious associations. In order to augment its ethical approval among the spouses, a determination is reached for this “ritual” to take place alone in their presence. Despite being explicitly outlawed under Gilead’s laws, sites like as Jezebels serve as an example. Paradoxically, the men who formed the state by distorting biblical doctrines misuse those very values to satisfy their selfish desires.

During a BBC interview with host Kristy Wark, Margaret Atwood elucidated the underlying concept of *The Handmaid’s Tale* :

when they wanted to build a new  
pyramid they didn’t tear down the old  
one they just built another one on top of  
the one that was already (05:07)

During the conversation, Atwood expresses the notion that societal systems undergo a process of evolution and transformation, analogous to the gradual accumulation of layers upon pre-existing foundations. The author underscores the notion that although conditions may undergo alterations due to the process of modernization, the underlying structures persist unaltered. The aforementioned concept functions as a fundamental motif throughout the discourse.

In the current global landscape, characterised by significant technical progress that has expanded individual liberties, it is worth acknowledging the persistent expectation for women to surrender their autonomy and self-determination in order to preserve the perceived sanctity of some religious doctrines. The persistence of this phenomenon can be attributed to the substantial influence that religion exerts within society structures.

To conclude, even though the advancements in technology and modernization of culture is prevailing, women face limitations imposed by ideological forces like religion which is hardly questioned as it is deeply engraved in the social fabric. The practices are conducted in the name of safekeeping women against the impure. By limiting their roles are independent individuals in the name of upholding perceived moral standards, women are dismissed of their agency and human rights. The

analysis puts light on the intricate relationship between patriarchy and deeply rooted religious customs, which can contribute to the persistence of gender disparities.

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