



THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN THROUGH LANGUAGE IN OFFRED'S CHARACTER IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S THE HANDMAID'S TALE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the different forms of oppression experienced by women as portrayed through Offred's character in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The research explores how women are constructed as powerless individuals and how oppression becomes normalized within society. The analysis is grounded in Iris Marion Young's Five Faces of Oppression theory to identify the various dimensions of oppression depicted in the novel. The study employs a descriptive qualitative method using close reading techniques to examine the narrative and dialogues presented in the story. The findings reveal that oppression in the novel operates not only through individual actions but also through institutionalized injustice embedded within the social, religious, and legal systems of Gilead. Women's bodies are treated as instruments of state reproduction, freedom of expression is restricted, and personal identities are systematically erased. Nevertheless, Offred demonstrates several forms of resistance through her thoughts and storytelling, which function as strategies of survival and self-preservation. Ultimately, the study concludes that the oppression portrayed in the novel is structural and interconnected, reflecting a critical portrayal of patriarchal systems that remains relevant to contemporary social realities.

Keywords: Oppression, Violence, Women, Patriarchy, Resistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Oppression against women is a complex social problem that continues to attract global attention today. In reality, women still frequently experience injustice, such as limitations in expressing opinions, lack of control over their own bodies, unequal access to education, and limited economic opportunities (Muvidah, 2024; Yavorska et al., 2024). Gender inequality is not always visible through explicit acts of discrimination, but also through social and cultural norms that subtly normalize inequality and patriarchal domination (Sosa, 2021). Oppression against women is often manifested through gender-based violence, social discrimination, restrictions on women's rights, and

symbolic forms of exclusion that weaken women's positions in society (Gevers et al., 2020; Loot, 2020). These conditions not only result in physical suffering but also create deep psychological impacts such as trauma, fear, and loss of self-confidence. Women are often positioned as weak individuals who lack authority over their own choices and identities. Such situations are reinforced by deeply rooted patriarchal values that regulate women's behavior and limit their participation in public spaces (Hyronimus, 2023; Nuraeni & Lilin Suryono, 2021). Consequently, oppression becomes a collective social system that continuously reproduces domination and inequality.

Literary works frequently reflect these realities of oppression through the experiences of female characters. Research conducted by Kristami, Surya, and Lubis (2022) on the novel *Sold* demonstrates that the oppression experienced by Lakshmi emerges from the intersection of gender and social class, which positions women in subordinate roles. Similar findings are presented in Vergo et al. (2023), whose study of *God Help the Child* reveals that female characters are portrayed not only as victims of physical oppression but also as symbols of violence and social stigma rooted in gender bias. In addition, Afifatul and Nim (2024) explain that women's struggles in dystopian narratives often represent resistance against patriarchal systems that seek to erase female autonomy and identity. These findings indicate that oppression against women operates as a multidimensional phenomenon within social, cultural, political, and literary contexts.

The social reality of women's oppression has significant impacts on bodily autonomy, access to education, and participation in social life. Patriarchal systems continue to regulate women's identities through surveillance, social control, and the internalization of gender expectations (Goulart et al., 2021). Such systems influence not only women's behavior but also the way women perceive themselves and their social value. In modern society, patriarchal ideology utilizes social institutions, cultural narratives, and symbolic representations to maintain masculine dominance (You, 2021). This domination often appears through moral regulation of women's bodies, limitations on women's freedom, and pressures to conform to gender norms (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2022). Gender inequality is therefore not merely an individual issue but is structurally embedded within political, economic, and social institutions

(McKeown, 2021; Piromalli, 2025). Research by Rosa, Drew, and Canavan (2020) also demonstrates that institutional inequality continues to marginalize women in educational and professional environments. Similarly, Ismail et al. (2020) argue that gender inequality persists because social systems normalize unequal power relations between men and women.

Within literary studies, feminist literary criticism plays an important role in revealing and criticizing oppressive systems represented in narratives. Literary works often portray women's experiences of domination while simultaneously providing spaces for resistance and self-expression (Nafia & Dewi, 2022). Feminist discourse analysis also highlights how language and representation shape public perceptions of women and reinforce patriarchal ideology (Nartey, 2021). Literature therefore becomes a medium through which oppression can be exposed and challenged. In this context, social media and digital feminist movements also contribute to raising awareness regarding gender injustice and women's rights (Pasaribu, 2021; Sokowati, 2021). UN Women (2023) further emphasizes that gender equality remains a crucial global issue because women continue to face structural discrimination in various social sectors.

The theory of the Five Faces of Oppression proposed by Iris Marion Young (1990) provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing structural oppression. According to Young, oppression consists of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. These forms of oppression demonstrate that injustice operates systematically through social structures, institutions, and dominant cultural norms. Young argues that justice is not merely the absence of discrimination, but the existence of equal opportunities for all individuals to

develop their capacities and participate fully in social life. Oppression, therefore, limits individuals' abilities to express their aspirations, identities, and experiences. Piromalli (2025) further explains that Young's theory remains highly relevant in analyzing structural inequality because oppression often operates invisibly through normalized systems of power. Fraser (2021) similarly emphasizes that structural injustice is maintained through institutional systems that privilege dominant groups while marginalizing vulnerable communities.

Several previous literary studies support the relevance of Young's theory in analyzing women's oppression. Huwae et al. (2022) found that women in *Jangan Pulang Jika Kamu Perempuan* experience oppression through restricted freedom, normalized violence, and silencing within family and social structures. Likewise, Dominilla et al. (2020) reveal that racial and social inequality intensify women's oppression in *The Help*. Pratiwi (2024) also argues that *The Handmaid's Tale* portrays gender discrimination through systematic restrictions on women's freedom and bodily autonomy. Furthermore, Muthukumar (2023) explains that oppressed individuals often develop subtle forms of resistance as strategies for survival within oppressive systems.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* portrays the oppression experienced by Offred, a Handmaid who lives under a totalitarian regime that controls women's bodies, sexuality, and identities. Women in Gilead are deprived of bodily autonomy and reduced to reproductive objects serving the interests of the ruling class. Offred's experiences reveal the contradiction between her desire to maintain her identity and the patriarchal ideology that seeks to erase women's rights through legal, religious, and social mechanisms. Such control reflects a form of structural domination that normalizes women's subordination.

Studies indicate that oppression in the novel operates both physically and psychologically through fear, guilt, and identity erasure (Taum, 2023; Gupta et al., 2023). Moreover, Fauzi (2022) emphasizes that language and narrative can function as forms of ideological control as well as tools of resistance. Offred's memories and personal narratives therefore become symbolic spaces of resistance against domination.

Based on the discussion above, this study formulates two research questions: (1) How are forms of oppression reflected in Offred's character? and (2) How does oppression influence Offred's struggles throughout the narrative? This study aims to reveal how patriarchal systems construct domination over women's bodies, identities, and social roles through structural mechanisms of oppression. Through a feminist framework, this research demonstrates that oppression not only places women in subordinate positions but also shapes women's self-awareness, survival strategies, and resistance within oppressive systems. Anderson and Kincaid (2022) explain that Young's five faces of oppression collectively illustrate how reproductive control and bodily repression function within authoritarian systems. Furthermore, Ahmed (2020) and Punter (2023) argue that feminist literary criticism remains essential for understanding contemporary struggles against systemic gender inequality. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to feminist literary criticism by examining how *The Handmaid's Tale* reflects women's struggles against patriarchal oppression in both literary and contemporary social contexts. To answer these questions, this study employs qualitative methods, which are explained further in the methodology section.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Review of research variable theory

This research focuses on two variables, namely the oppression of women and the reflection of oppression in the character of Offred, by using an approach to the theory of the five faces of oppression and feminist literary criticism to analyze. Feminist literary criticism has a function for how a literary work represents women, the patriarchal system, and gender relations. In feminist studies, subjectivity, voice, and experience are the most important things in analysis. This criticism also focuses on how the characters in the novel's narrative are portrayed as passive or passive individuals in carrying out resistance, or actually facing the oppressive system (Nur, 2026). In novels the political system is revealed to control women's bodies, making it a strong object of study from a feminist perspective. The oppression experienced is a structural injustice, which is not only discriminatory but also operates in a socio-political system that is structured towards the control of women's bodies (Sinaga, 2026). Oppression often arises through control over women that normalizes all injustices in the context of gender. The loss of safe space for victims, with all the regulations and norms that apply to justify inequality.

2.2 Review of Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined the theme of oppression in feminist literary works using Young's theoretical approach. For example, in Dominilla (2020), the novel *The Help* is a case in point. Additional recent studies, although many, discuss forms of oppression through Young's five faces. Meanwhile, although various studies have discussed oppression in literary works, none of these studies have focused specifically on analyzing the reflection of Iris Marion Young's five forms of oppression in Offred's character and their influence on self-awareness and survival strategies amidst a system that pressures her to comply.

3. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the representation of women's oppression in *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. This method is

appropriate because it focuses on narrative, symbolic, and contextual interpretation to reveal social realities, power relations, and patriarchal ideology reflected in literary texts (Adlini et al., 2022; Given, 2023; Braun & Clarke, 2012). Feminist literary criticism is applied to examine how women's experiences, identities, and struggles are constructed within oppressive systems (Nafia & Dewi, 2022; Dominilla et al., 2020). The novel was chosen because it portrays the control of women's bodies, sexuality, and identities through legal, religious, and social mechanisms in the state of Gilead, reflecting structural gender inequality and patriarchal domination (Gupta et al., 2023; Kaur & Khanna, 2023; Pratiwi, 2024).

This research applies Iris Marion Young's Five Faces of Oppression theory, which includes exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 1990). The theory is used to analyze how oppression operates structurally through social norms, institutions, and political power (Piromalli, 2025; Muthukumar, 2023). Data were collected through close reading techniques by identifying narrative evidence related to body control, violence, restriction of rights, and resistance. The findings were then categorized based on Young's framework to examine how oppression shapes Offred's psychological condition, survival strategies, and resistance within a patriarchal system (Huwae et al., 2022; Vergo et al., 2023).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate oppression highlights the structural injustice inherent in Gilead's legal system, religion, and social norms. This structural injustice occurs because it is systematically embedded in society, particularly in the social, economic, and political systems, making it seem normal and unquestionable. In this context, Offred's experience in the novel represents the division of oppression referred to as the five faces of oppression by Iris Marion Young: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 1990). Oppression does not present itself as an actual act of violence but rather operates as a mechanism of power

institutionalized through law, religion, and daily customs that must be obeyed. In this context, the injustice experienced by Offred aligns with what is referred to as structural injustice (McKeown, 2021), namely a situation where social processes systematically place certain groups in a disadvantaged position without a single perpetrator to blame. These five forms of oppression do not operate separately. Still,

they are intertwined and reinforce each other, forming a patriarchal system that controls women's bodies, identities, and space for movement through dominant discourse. As the results of this study are systematically compiled, each form of structural oppression is described as mutually reinforcing. Thus, the forms of oppression are summarized below in the following figure:

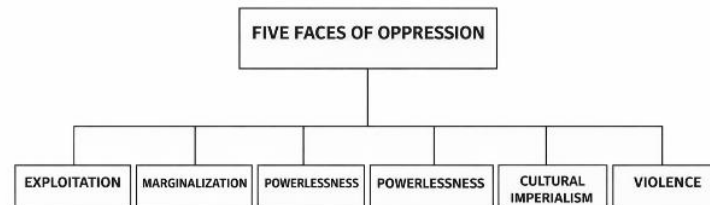


Figure 1. Psychological Confluct Determinant

4.1 Forms of Oppression Reflected in Offred Based on Young’s Framework (Young, 1990)

4.1.1 Exploitation

The exploitation is most evident in Offred's reduction of her body to the state's reproductive apparatus. Gilead systematically exploits women's bodies as reproductive resources, completely controlled by the state and legitimized through religious ideology. Women are no longer recognized as individuals in control of themselves, but are

treated merely as biological tools whose bodies are exploited by an oppressive patriarchal system. Women's sexuality is reduced to a systematic institutionalized practice, reinforced by forms of discomfort legitimized by state ideology and social norms. Offred's narrative demonstrates the separation of self-awareness and body as a strategy for self-defense. This condition indicates that the exploitation women experience damages their physical, psychological, and human nature as individuals.

Table 1. Forms of Exploitation of Offred

| Category | Tekstual Evidence | Interpretation | Theoretical Framework |
|---------------------------|--|--|-----------------------|
| Reproductive Exploitation | “We are for breeding purposes: we aren’t concubines, geisha girls, or courtesans.” p.128 | In this part, women in Gilead are clearly seen only as individuals with biological roles. Women's identities are assigned and viewed as mere tools of state production, not as fully formed human subjects. Women's bodies are exploited for specific purposes without compensation, choice, or recognition of their humanity. | Exploitation (Young) |
| Sexual Exploitation | “My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking.” p. 89 | Offred's own sexuality is used as part of a state-mandated, physically and psychologically destructive system of production, where her body is used while she has no control over it. | Exploitation (Young) |

| | | | |
|-------------------|--|--|----------------------|
| Body Exploitation | "We are containers, it's only the insides of our bodies that are important." p. 92 | This statement demonstrates how women's bodies are viewed solely as biological vessels. While emotional, intellectual, and personal identity elements are devalued, a woman's value is based solely on her reproductive capacity. This demonstrates clear structural exploitation with ideological legitimacy. | Exploitation (Young) |
|-------------------|--|--|----------------------|

The most obvious exploitation is Offred's experience through the reduction of her body to the state's reproductive organs. This is emphasized through Offred's reflection: "We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, or courtesans" (Atwood, 1985; 128). This quote demonstrates how Offred's identity is dissolved into her biological functions and obligations. A woman's body is no longer seen as her own, but rather as the property of the state. Exploitation also occurs through the separation of her bodily awareness, as expressed in the quote, "My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it, the Commander is fucking" (Atwood, 1985; 89). This separation between body and mind demonstrates that exploitation targets not only the physical aspects, but also the mental capacities of the women who face

it. Demeaning language serves to reinforce and normalize this form of oppression, so that in practice it appears unproblematic (Felmlee, 2020).

This experience reflects the concept of exploitation according to (Young, 1990). Exploitation is defined as when a group is exploited for the benefit of a more dominant

group without receiving an equivalent reward. The exploitation of women's bodies is the beginning of other forms of oppression. Women are deprived of their basic rights to themselves, and their bodies are reduced to reproductive instruments controlled by the state. This practice illustrates the loss of women's rights to their bodies and normalizes sexual violence as a moral obligation. Exploitation is clearly depicted through the state's control over women's bodies, which experiences injustice. The exploitation of women's bodies is legitimized through religious and moral discourse, thus perceived as an ethical obligation based on existing control (Rebolledo, 2023; Shabira, 2022).

4.1.2 Marginalization

Marginalization here serves as a further mechanism that reinforces oppression beyond exploitation by excluding women from the social space and their basic rights. Women in Gilead are prohibited from engaging in social activities and building meaningful social relationships. This isolation aims to prevent collective consciousness and the potential for resistance.

Table 2. Form of Marginalization of Women

| Category | Tekstual Evidence | Interpretation | Theoretical Framework |
|-----------|---|---|-------------------------|
| Silencing | "We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semi-darkness 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." p.9 | Communication restrictions demonstrate how marginalization controls social interaction. Women are forced to adapt to highly isolated circumstances, which diminishes their ability to communicate | Marginalization (Young) |

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Offred's marginalization in Gilead manifests itself through restrictions on social relationships, denial of access to public spaces, and disconnection from knowledge. The prohibition on building social relationships is evident in Offred's statement, "We are not supposed to have friendships, loyalties, with each other" (Atwood, 1985; 260). This isolation appears to minimize the potential for resistance. Marginalization is also depicted through forced silence, reflected in the statement, "We walk in silence" (Atwood, 1985; 205). The freedom granted by the state is merely a facade, meaning freedom from punishment, not the freedom to make life choices. Young (1990) states that freedom refers to marginalization, which is a dangerous oppression that involves systematic exclusion and deprivation of material access. The prohibition on building social solidarity severely limits women's freedom and also exacerbates more extreme social exclusion. This marginalization is evident in the exclusion of broader social structures (Agates, 2022). As a result, women lose access to social participation and become increasingly isolated within an oppressive system. People experiencing anxiety, fear, or discomfort may

avoid social interactions (Intarini & Thohiriyah, 2025). Offred's experience reflects feelings of worthlessness that reinforce marginalization. Although the rights of marginalized people are recognized, the injustice of marginalization persists (Koten, 2025). Marginalization here is reinforced by the prohibition on access to various things, which directly cuts off connections through the prohibition on reading and writing, which directly cuts off women's connection to existing knowledge. In line with (Kristami, 2022), the literature shows that one of the main ways to maintain dominance is by eliminating access to language and narrative.

4.1.3 Powerlessness

The powerlessness Offred experiences can be understood as a consequence of exploitation and marginalization. The state regulates every aspect of women's lives, including their identities, bodies, and restrictions on expressing opinions. In this context, the erasure of Offred's real name signifies the loss of recognition of her identity and existence as an individual.

Table 3. Women's Powerlessness

| Category | Tekstual Evidence | Interpretation | Theoretical Framework |
|-------------------|---|--|-----------------------|
| Identity Deletion | "I have another name, which Nobody uses now." <i>p.80</i> | The absence of a name signifies a loss of personal identity. Offred loses the ability to name himself because it is replaced by a new identity, indicating his lack of control and powerlessness over his own existence. | Powerlessness (Young) |
| Awareness | "I am a national resource." <i>p.65</i> | Offred realizes that she is considered a political asset whose value is determined by the function of the state, not the individual. | Powerlessness (Young) |
| Supervision | "I say. There's no one near, we can speak more freely, but out of habit we keep our voices low." <i>p.185</i> | This silencing has become a habit, demonstrating that state power can control women even without their consent. Fear has become a part of everyday life. | Powerlessness (Young) |

Offred's powerlessness is reflected in the loss of her identity, her right to express her opinion, and her ability to determine her own path. The statement, "I have another name, which nobody uses now" (Atwood, 1985; 80). Demonstrates that the state's

erasure of identity is not simply a change in social status. The name itself symbolizes a loss of self-control. Her habit of speaking in a low voice, "I say, 'There's no one near, we can speak more freely, but out of habit we keep our voices low'" (Atwood, 1985; 185).

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Demonstrates the state's control over women fear has become a part of everyday life.

Women who feel powerless due to the loss of power also experience psychological submission and self-restraint to the controlling system. Offred's constant surveillance demonstrates how submission no longer requires direct physical violence but also takes the form of surveillance that creates a sense of powerlessness. Powerlessness is exacerbated by other factors and gender, for example, when women must work harder to gain respect, recognition, and control over their daily lives (Young, 1990). Submission arises because all of this is not the result of one's own life choices, but rather a form of adaptation to a repressive system. (Abdullah, 2023) states that power elicits

respect and obedience rather than direct authority. Men, regardless of how powerful a woman is, are those who believe in their power to the end (Thohiriyah, 2020). In Offred's life, constant surveillance makes her depressed and feels powerless over the discomfort that exists, and forces her to obey.

4.1.3 Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism works by normalizing patriarchal and religious values as the prevailing moral standards in the social environment. Through the use of language and religious symbols, oppression is not only legitimate but also seen as something sacred, natural, and unquestionable divine will.

Table 4. Cultural Imperialism in Gilead

| Category | Tekstual Evidence | Interpretation | Theoretical Framework |
|------------------|---|--|-------------------------|
| Habituation | "We lived, as usual, by ignoring." p.57 | This part demonstrates that marginalization is not only imposed from above but also normalized in everyday life. Women are forced to adapt to injustice through neglect, ultimately making such social practices seem normal and unquestioned. | Marginalization (Young) |
| Social Isolation | "We walk in silence." p.205 | Women are excluded from public spaces and social conversations, rendering them invisible and unheard. | Marginalization (Young) |
| Social Isolation | "We aren't supposed to form friendships, loyalties, among one another."p. 260 | Women are systematically isolated to prevent them from building social and support networks that could fuel resistance and reinforce their marginalization by severing collective solidarity | Marginalization (Young) |

Cultural imperialism operates through the normalization of patriarchal values, which serve as the sole moral and social standard. Language, religious values, and culture, such as expressions like "Blessed be the fruit," she says to me, "the accepted

greeting among us" (Atwood, 1985; 22). Show how ritual language is used as a sacred image of something and cannot be disputed. (Young, 1990) Cultural imperialism is a term that refers to the culture of a dominant group universally, which is considered the norm

and standard of rules. This seems to show something normal through existing habits. Ritual language and religious symbols are used as a rejection of resistance criticism and justify gender inequality like this. Cultural imperialism functions as a mechanism that maintains the power of the dominant group (Koten, 2025). Cultural imperialism not only oppresses women but also shapes the way they understand themselves. This cultural imperialism, where violence and even harassment against women are often

normalized in patriarchal societies, is a problem.

4.1.5 Violence

Violence is the culmination of all oppression in Gilead. Violent practices are officially sanctioned through law, thus serving as a tool of social discipline. By normalizing violence, it is hoped that fear and obedience will be instilled, requiring individuals, especially women, to obey the rules.

Table 5. Violence against Women

| Category | Tekstual Evidence | Interpretation | Theoretical Framework |
|----------|--|--|-----------------------|
| Afraid | "But then what happens? I know I lost time." p.40 | The long-term effects of normalized violence are manifested by memory loss and disorientation. Women often experience trauma in their daily lives. | Violence (Young) |
| Threat | "The penalty is death." p.62 | The death penalty is an example of a threat that shows how violence is used as a state tool. Fear helps maintain collective obedience. | Violence (Young) |
| Afraid | "Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure." p. 72 | Violence has both psychological and physical impacts. Over the years, fear becomes a control mechanism that continues to haunt women's bodies and minds. | Violence (Young) |

Violence serves as a tool social discipline that continues to haunt Offred's life. "The penalty is death" (Atwood, 1985; 62). Demonstrates that the threat of violence against oppressed groups is systemic, driven by existing power structures. (Young, 1990) emphasizes that violence against oppressed groups can occur at any time due to deeply ingrained societal prejudices against them. Violence is the ultimate form of discipline in a system of oppression. The threat of the death penalty and public execution creates effective fear in preventing any form of deviation within it. This violence is not only physical but also continuously reminds women of the severe consequences if they violate existing rules. Violence manifests not only in the form of physical punishment, such as against women who experience oppression, but also in symbolic threats, such as public executions. (Elindawati, 2021) emphasizes that public awareness of violence does not necessarily eradicate existing

structures and perpetuate them. Control over women's reproductive rights always involves symbolic and political violence (Coen-Sanchez, 2022)

4.2 *Oppression impacts Offred's struggles throughout the narrative*

4.2.1 *Oppression shapes Offred's psychological state, actions, and resistance*

Offred's experiences of various forms of oppression create a highly complex psychological state. The Gilead system controls not only her body but also her entire mind and even her identity. The trauma and fear Offred experiences over everything make her feel alienated from herself. The erasure of her true identity also demonstrates the systematic erasure of women's autonomy. This psychological pressure is exacerbated by institutionalized violence, such as intense surveillance and public punishment. This violence is not always physical, but also

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symbolic and ideological. (Kalofonos, 2023) states that some of women's suffering is exacerbated by psychological responses to experiences within their environment. Offred lives in a constant state of vigilance, suppressing her thoughts and emotions for the sake of survival.

This pressure creates an inner conflict between obedience and the desire to resist. Thus, oppression shapes Offred's psychological space as a battleground between fear and self-awareness. Because it is considered a moral obligation and divine will, women find it difficult to understand the oppression they experience as an injustice. This condition contradicts the concept of gender equality, which requires all individuals, both women and men, to receive fair treatment (Smith, 2022). Despite the pressures, memories of her former life with her family and the freedom she once enjoyed become a form of inner resistance against a life that seeks to erase her personal history. In this context, symbolic resistance is demonstrated through acts of remembrance and storytelling, not simply as a form of self-reflection.

These forms of resistance and survival strategies are interwoven into Offred's experiences throughout the narrative. By recounting her experiences, she reveals herself not simply as an object of oppression but as an individual capable of interpreting her own lived reality. (Modise, 2023) states that when a sense of security is not fulfilled, a person's ability to function within the family, community, and society becomes severely limited. Her resistance may seem revolutionary or open, but it is actually more internal and reflective. This demonstrates the existence of space for awareness and resistance, demonstrating that oppression cannot forever dominate an individual's inner space and movement. The accumulation of oppression fills Offred with fear and trauma, but also fosters a form of resistance. As Kristami (2022) states, literature reflects how individuals understand and resist oppression. Offred's narrative serves as a symbolic form of resistance that rejects the erasure of identity. Dominilla (2020) emphasizes that literature is often used as a tool for women to voice silenced experiences.

4.2.2 Representation of the Complexity of Female Resilience amidst Oppression

Offred's resilience in the face of oppression is depicted through a subtle struggle to reclaim her rights. She persists amidst an oppressive and structured system and slowly develops strategies to challenge it. This representation illustrates that women's resilience often takes subtle yet meaningful forms, such as how they remain conscious, able to think, and maintain their authentic identities. Small actions such as demonstrating composure, building emotional connections, or silently breaking rules demonstrate complex resistance. Offred's resilience in the face of oppression is not presented as heroic resistance, but rather as a subtle form of struggle in the face of complex oppression. She is not portrayed as a passive victim experiencing a form of injustice. (Kaur, 2023) states that female characters in Atwood's works serve as a beacon of hope for resistance and survival. Although seemingly trivial, these actions weaken the control maintained by the system. Thus, women's resilience, expressed in strategies, enables them to maintain their dignity.

Furthermore, this novel emphasizes that oppression is not a natural destiny, but is structured through an organized political and social system. This study confirms that oppression is not the result of a structured and continuous social system, but rather a standalone event. This pattern aligns with the idea that the views of more dominant groups are often considered universally true, while women are marginalized, demonstrating inequality (Fouani & Grytsenko, 2021; Rosa, 2022). The patriarchal structure legitimized through deviant and rigid social rules illustrates that this work provides a critique of how power can control women's bodies and identities. In this context, women's bodies lose their rights and identity, systematically treated as state property (Gupta, 2023). This condition reflects women who are seen as slaves, even those considered intellectually and physically weak and unworthy of control over life decisions (Rinaldi, 2024). Offred's experience demonstrates that this injustice against women stems from an oppressive

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social system, not simply an individual phenomenon.

Ultimately, Offred's portrayal of resilience reflects how women's struggles remain a relevant issue. Her resilience in facing challenges and her acceptance of what she experiences, portrayed as a strong individual, demonstrates the presence of a voice amidst a system that seeks to silence it. Acceptance is about accepting the present and shaping the future, not denying the existing reality (Syamira & Thohiriyah, 2025). Through Offred's character, the novel emphasizes that even amidst an oppressive system, women have the space to defend their lives. *The Handmaid's Tale* emphasizes that oppression against women is a structured system. Offred's experiences provide a sharp critique of the injustices of patriarchal culture and also reflect how the struggle for women's equality remains relevant today.

5. CONCLUSION

The oppression of women shows various forms of oppression based on the concept of Five Faces of Oppression by Iris Marion Young which is reflected through the character of Offred in the novel. Women are depicted living in a social system that systematically robs them of their rights, bodily autonomy, and identity. Offred's body is positioned solely as a reproductive organ of the state, so that only its biological function is visible and loses its human value. This depiction emphasizes that gender issues are not only related to biological differences, but also concerns efforts to realize equal roles and rights between women and men without discrimination. (Ismail, 2020) states that gender and the problems within it do not discuss the sexes of women and men, but how to produce equality without differences. In addition, the representation of body objectification and also the limitation of rights show that patriarchal society is in a continuous struggle to realize equality (Alwan, 2023).

Furthermore, the oppression Offred experiences stems not only from men but also from social and cultural systems that place women in subordinate positions. Men demonstrate their dominance and promote

patriarchal politics in the form of power (Thohiriyah, 2020). In the context of Gilead, the state, religion, and social norms collaborate to legitimize patriarchal domination and construct injustice as something that appears normal and unquestionable. This condition shows that a strong and structured social order demonstrates and shapes inequality. Gender equality means that women and men have equality in various areas of life without being limited by rigid roles. (Sari & Ismail, 2021). Institutional and cultural practices still function to keep women in a subordinate position in the social order (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2020; 2021). Thus, the oppression of women in this novel is structural and continues to be reproduced by the culture and social system itself.

In conclusion, *The Handmaid's Tale* not only presents a depiction of women's oppression, but also the results of social system phenomena that provide a critical review to raise awareness of the importance of resistance against systems that normalize injustice. Through Offred's experiences, readers are invited to understand how political power and the patriarchal system control women's bodies, sexuality, reproduction, and identity. However, this novel also presents meaningful forms of resistance, such as self-awareness and past memories, as well as Offred's personal narrative that functions as a defense strategy as well as a form of rejection of domination. This resistance is not only physical, but also shows that space for resistance remains even in repressive conditions, and small actions such as this retain a significant voice. Such critical awareness is crucial to support collective efforts in fighting for desired justice. Recognizing gender issues is crucial to presenting alternatives in legal, political, and social contexts if we understand that these problems are related to social and cultural structures (Tongue, 2022). Therefore not only has literary value, but is also a feminist text that calls for the importance of resistance to the patriarchal system and a continued commitment to realizing justice and equality that has strong political and ideological values.

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