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The Manifestation of Intra Gender Oppression in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as Results From Intentional Patriarchal Power Structures

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Abstract:

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* has long been studied for its cautionary warnings about sexist ideologies that exist between men and women; seldom has it been analyzed for instances of intra gender oppression. Intra gender oppression, which this thesis seeks to define and highlight through the novel's context, offers artificial forms of power to those in oppressed classes, enough to attract women themselves to participate in the indoctrination and policing of their own sex. This essay will highlight the ways in which Atwood's dystopia parallels sexist beliefs held by societies past and present.

Margaret Atwood's famous faux Latin slogan "Nolite te bastarades carborundorum," has come to represent equality and opportunity for modern day women across the United States and beyond. While it is not a direct translation, the phrase is loosely known to mean "don't let the bastards grind you down," a message that symbolizes hope and resilience for protagonist Offred in Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. With the looming promise of an ecological disaster that threatens humanity's existence, Atwood creates a society that tokenizes a woman's ability to reproduce while simultaneously upholding historic beliefs about women's inherent inferiority. However, men aren't the only group guilty of policing women according to sexist ideologies. Through Offred's experiences as a Handmaid, it is revealed that those who are victims of the system can also help perpetuate it.

As a widely renowned work of fiction, Atwood's novel features a near-future alternative to what is currently the New England region of the United States known as Gilead. Gilead has drawn attention from individuals in the Science Fiction (SF) field who have studied it as a manifestation of Atwood's own

observations about the world at large. This new regime is characterized by its extreme, right-wing, Christian fundamentalism, that restores a patriarchal form of society which limits the rights of women and restores "the sanctity of the home," forcing women back into positions of subservience.¹ With radiation and sexually transmitted infections causing a world-wide fertility crisis, Gilead found it necessary to divide women into specific categories of service, with the five most prominent being: Wives, Aunts, Marthas, Handmaids, and Unwomen, listed in the order that Gilead prioritizes them. The novel follows the Handmaid known as Offred, literally 'Of Fred'—Fred being the prominent male politician whom Offred is considered property of.

Each subset of women serves to further a specific function of society throughout the novel. The wives of Commanders (esteemed politicians) are responsible for the moral and social welfare of their household, while Marthas do all of the cooking and cleaning. Aunts enforce the will of Gilead by raising and indoctrinating Handmaids, whose sole purpose is to reproduce for the wives and Commanders who have been unable to bear children. Unwomen are the lowest class; they have been deemed threats to Gilead's society by the government (either because of infertility or treason) and spend their remaining life shoveling toxic waste. And while each of these classes are necessary within Gilead's oppressive regime, they are equally restricted in their freedoms outside of their performed duties.

Many critics have speculated that Atwood bases this class design on modern American society, showing how inequalities between women are often capitalized on. Separating women and defining them by different names helps to create dissent between different groups, who are prioritized and privileged according to their own feminine value. Wives provide

1. David Ketterer, "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: A Contextual Dystopia," *Science Fiction Studies* 16, no. 2 (July 1989): 210, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239936>.

social capital, Aunts provide obedience, Handmaids provide children, and Unwomen provide free labor—each performs a duty for the society which others cannot. Society in general, however, is built for the prosperity of men. Patriarchal by design, men are solely responsible for law making and have forbidden women to read or write and exclude them from any government dealings. But this kind of sex-based exclusion has historical roots. In the United States alone, a woman would not graduate with a bachelor's degree until 1840, and women were still considered property under the law until the Married Women's Property Act of 1848 truly separated the legal identity of women from that of their husbands and fathers.² Prevented from owning property or pursuing an education, women were historically dependent economically on men and forced to rely on sexist systems for livelihood.³ In an interview conducted in 1983, Atwood admits that “every writer writes out of his or her own backyard,”⁴ and that is especially true of *The Handmaid's Tale*—published two years later, which speculates on how a return to familiar sexist practices would have to be violently and rigidly enforced in a modern society to prevent resistance.

The plausibility of a future Gilead is grounded in the familiarity of certain components in the dystopia, one such familiarity being the mistreatment of women. In Gilead, women are sexually, emotionally, and physically abused at the benefit of the patriarchal society. Although it is predominantly men who are responsible for putting the laws into place that subjugate all women, women also participate in their own oppression by indoctrinating members of their own gender into subservient roles. While it is crucial to acknowledge Gilead's patriarchal design and the intentional ways women are socially, politically, and physically oppressed by men in Gilead, major scholarship around this novel fails to recognize how Gilead's class system restores existing forms of oppression against women of lower socio-political classes that are often

perpetuated by women themselves. Atwood uses *The Handmaid's Tale* to maintain that the foundations of Gilead are already pervasive in our modern societies that value women for their superficial ability to reproduce but believe that a woman's place is in the household.

Many critics have acknowledged the religious allusions presented throughout *The Handmaid's Tale* and the subsequent suggestion that religious texts are an extremely oppressive guideline for many sexist beliefs about women. Gilead's biblical roots, which are based almost entirely on section 30:1-13 of Genesis, tells the story of Jacob and his wives, Rachel and Leah.⁵ While Rachel is infertile, her sister, Leah, produces seven children for Jacob and is widely praised for it. In a fit of jealousy, Rachel turns to an unorthodox method of reproduction, modernly referred to as surrogacy. She asks Jacob to “Behold, my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; that she may bear upon my knees, and I also may obtain children by her,” and, “she gave him Bilhah her Handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her,”⁶ resulting in Bilhah bearing two children for Rachel, who claims the children as her own, naming them Dan and Naphtali. What is most notable about this narrative is that Bilhah, the woman serving as a vessel for Rachel's children, is silent in protest or agreement. It is unclear whether or not she consents to this arrangement and is a willing surrogate; however, Bilhah's silence may suggest to some readers that she complies with the request that is made of her without complaint, opening this section of biblical history to scrutiny and interpretation.

Bilhah's silent compliance, Rachel's obsession with bearing children, and Leah's faithful fulfillment of the feminine gender role become the prototype for women in Gilead, who are expected to fulfill their responsibilities for the betterment of the entire society. By reducing this religious tale to only a single interpretation, Gilead is able to build a narrative that women have been happily serving men since the creation

2. “Women's Oppression,” Workers World, <https://www.workers.org/womens-oppression/>.

3. “Women's Oppression.”

4. Margaret Atwood and Jo Brans, “Using What You're Given: An Interview with Margaret Atwood,” *Southwest Review* 68, no. 4 (Autumn 1983), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43469583>.

5. Dorota Filipczak, “Is There No Balm In Gilead? — Biblical Intertext In *The Handmaid's Tale*,” *Literature and Theology* 7, no. 2 (June 1993): 171–174, www.jstor.org/stable/23924862.

6. Gen. 30:1-12.

of man. If God were willing to give Bilhah a child for Rachel and Jacob, then the practice of surrogacy must be sanctioned by religious principles, and because Gilead claims that religion is the foundation of their new society, they are able to mask the oppression of women as a return to piousness. It is not coincidental that the home of Handmaids is named the Rachel and Leah Re-Education Center.⁷ Run by the Aunts, these centers are predominantly responsible for converting women into compliant Handmaids who are willing to accept their duty to Gilead. When women have been led astray from their original purpose in modern times, this center seeks to re-instill Rachel and Leah's legacy of servitude that rewards women for their devotion and desire to serve men. This suggests that the Red Center, as the Handmaids refer to it, ascribes to pedagogies deeply concerned with attitudes of submissiveness and docility. They are taught to believe that although Bilhah is also forced into this role, she is honored for serving both Rachel and Jacob by producing a child for them to further their family name, thus becoming the center's idol. Without a voice, Bilhah is unable to protest, which allows the Red Center's doctrine to lean into the single interpretation that women's identity is tied to servitude. This frames the acts of rape committed during the Ceremony as a fulfillment of that feminine role and an honorable contribution to society.

The religious allusion that best illustrates the oppressive tendencies of the biblical patriarchy is the "Ceremony," a euphemism which Gilead employs to describe the organized and sanctioned rape of Handmaids, though Atwood herself does not use the term in the text. In Atwood's novel, we experience the Ceremony from the perspective of Offred, the Handmaid of a wealthy and important Commander, Fred Waterford. The Ceremony begins with the Commanders reading Genesis 30:1-13, the story previously described. At the conclusion of the passage, the Commander, the Wife, and the Handmaid move into the wife's bedroom to perform the Ceremony, which Offred describes as the following:

I lie on my back, fully clothed except for the healthy white cotton underwear... Above me, towards the head of the bed, Serena Joy [the wife] is arranged, outspread. Her legs apart, I lied between them. My head on her stomach... her thighs on either side of me. She too is fully clothed. My arms are raised; she holds my hands... This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh... My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking.⁸

Offred's experience in the Ceremony acts as a more detailed description of the same experience Bilhah endures in Genesis, as she acts as the surrogate carrier of the Commander's child on behalf of the Wife.

It is no wonder that this novel has led many to recognize that "the Bible [is] an accomplice in the patriarchal strategy of marginalizing and victimizing women."⁹ It is necessary, then, for Gilead to ascribe a certain level of honor to the duty of a Handmaid, just as God has done to Bilhah, in order to disguise sexual assault and rape within the society and prevent resistance. One way Gilead seeks to further this is by coining the term "biological destiny," which frames a woman's ability to reproduce as a necessity. In order to be fully recognized as women, they must produce children at some point. The story of Genesis sets forth this interpretation by portraying women only as mothers, wives, and servants rather than complex individuals who have a purpose outside of serving men. Atwood's Gilead silences women the same way they were silenced in the Bible, meaning that the patriarchy of Gilead is just a reconstruction of the oppressive biblical patriarchy preceding it. While the biblical version softens the implications of Rachel's demands, Atwood exposes the reality of forcing a woman into surrogacy.

The levels of powerlessness faced by women are not equal depending on their status within the society's hierarchy. There is a clear manifestation of the Handmaid's dual inferiority where they are oppressed both by men because they are women and by Wives and Aunts because they possess a lower social status. The Ceremony takes place in the bedroom of the Wife,

7. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 96.

8. Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 94.

9. Filipczak, "Is There No Balm In Gilead?," 182.

Offred referring to it as the Wives' "territory,"¹⁰ a word meaning that the Wife is supposed to have ownership and control over what happens in this domain. While the structure of Gilead is such that a woman could never exercise control over a man, in these spaces the Wives are able to exercise complete control over the Handmaid, as they are like prey who have stumbled into the "territory" of their predators. This control is reflected in the way in which the Handmaids are spread like carcasses across the bed, back and legs down but outspread, eyes focused on the ceiling above, a position that allows full access to their body, leaving Handmaids completely vulnerable to the will of those over them. The Wife sits above the Handmaid in an upright position, a firm grip on their hands. If a Handmaid looks up, they would be able to see the Wife's face as they sit above them, an indication that Wives have more autonomy over their own bodies and power over the Handmaid's; however, there is intentional contact between the Wife and Handmaid. While it is necessary for a Commander to penetrate, and therefore touch, the Handmaid during the Ceremony, it appears to be a creative design that wives would hold down the hands of the Handmaid.

Offred's explanation that the holding of hands is meant to symbolize the unity of the women may be true in a sense that their gender causes them both to be victims of the patriarchy's oppressive laws, but the pressure of the Wife pushing down on the Handmaid's hands is a built in reminder that a Handmaid is serving the maternal needs of the Wives as well. If there is a Handmaid present in a Commander's household, it's because his wife was barren and the two were unable to have children. If the Handmaid becomes pregnant after the ceremony, it is the Wife who will eventually get to raise and name the child, so she benefits from partaking in this act of organized rape. The detached, robotic way the Ceremony is described emulates the duty driven tone of the original biblical event which it was modeled after. That is, Bilhah (the Handmaid) had a duty to serve Rachel, (the Wife) and together they fulfill their marital duty to Jacob (the Commander) by producing a child. The Wife's willingness to participate in the degradation of Handmaids is a manifestation of intra gender oppression, a concept that I use to describe the phenomenon that causes members of an

already oppressed class to further oppress others within the class to create unequal power dynamics that favor one group over another. In this case, although both Wives and Handmaids are considered powerless in relation to the Commander, the Wives possess certain built in degrees of power over Handmaids that reveal themselves organically and model historical forms of patriarchal systems.

The varying degrees of respect and freedom for women within the dystopian society ultimately contributes to a sense of envy between the classes of women, especially between Wives and Handmaids. Offred is unable to regard Serena Joy without hatred, both as a result of her participation in the Handmaid's rape and the reward of getting to parent the child that would result. Eventually, Offred reveals that "Partly I was jealous of her...You can only be jealous of someone who has something you think you ought to have yourself. Nevertheless I was jealous,"¹¹ which is a universal representation of the intrinsic feeling of separation or otherness that women feel in relation to each other. Part of Offred's jealousy is also rooted in hatred for Serena Joy, which is warranted in that she is physically abused at the hands of the woman who also forces her into unwanted intercourse for another's benefit. However, nuance stems from Offred's apparent discontent in her assigned class. Offred is constantly violated and assaulted because she is a fertile woman, a characteristic she had no control over. She is not afforded the same leniency as the Wives; she is always threatened by the reality that anyone can strike her if she misbehaves because a Handmaid's cooperation in society is an integral part of the society's goal of increasing the birth rate in the United States. Compared to the Wives, who are able to raise families and are protected from the sexual violence that Handmaids are subjected to, Offred's quality of life is low.

However, despite Offred and the other Handmaids being subjected to violence and contempt, the Handmaids are vital to the society as a whole. Handmaids are the only group of women who are guaranteed to have viable ovaries, meaning that they have the ability to reproduce. In a society that proposes women return back to historically domestic roles in order to prevent human extinction, Gilead needs women who can have babies and populate the country. In the same

10. Atwood, 86.

11. Atwood, 161.

way the Wives are responsible for the social and political longevity of the country, Handmaids are physically responsible for the continuation of Gilead's people, which allots them a certain level of importance. Although they are not treated with the respect of someone who is necessary, there is an understanding that without Handmaids, Gilead would not be possible. The Handmaid's "position of honor,"¹² as described by the Aunts, is envied by the Wives, who are physically unable to fulfill this need for their country, as shown by the necessity of the Handmaid's presence in their home.

Thus, the Handmaids are subjected to lives of sexual violence at the hands of both men and women who seek to profit from them. Handmaids are taught to fear the Wives early in their indoctrination, as Offred vividly recalls Aunt Lydia's reminder at the Rachel and Leah center that "It's not the husbands you have to watch out for... it's the Wives. You should always try to imagine what they must be feeling. Of course they will resent you. It is only natural."¹³ If the Wives' resentment is natural, it is because it comes from a place of envy. This is the intentionality this paper references—Gilead managed to create a system where women simultaneously need each other but are bred to dislike and envy another. Distracted by their intra gender disputes and struggles, it becomes easier for the patriarchy to systematically reduce the independence of the female sex as a whole. By allowing certain groups of women more freedom than others, the patriarchy turns the hate and envy of women in lower socio-economic positions to the women in positions of artificial power rather than the men who organized the power structure itself. Both women are victims of Gilead's patriarchy which was designed to belittle women, but the built in power dynamics of Gilead maintain a certain complacency by allowing intra gender oppression to make certain groups of women feel like they have power over another class. This is a comfort to women in Gilead because it creates the illusion that they are not as deeply subjected to oppressive laws as other women are.

The Aunts are a particular fascinating design of Gilead. Modeled after nuns, Aunts are those who have subscribed to Gilead's sexist beliefs about a woman's inferiority and who are sanctioned to commit acts of violence against women in the interest of maintaining order. Aunts are responsible for the indoctrination of Handmaids by teaching the religious propaganda of Gilead, such as the belief that serving as a Handmaid to a Commander is an act of honor. The Aunts seek to foster cooperation and complicity among Handmaids and are responsible for preventing uprisings among the separate facets of women in the belief that they are creating a utopian society that actually protects women from forms of violence. Part of what makes Gilead a dystopian society is that it is a result of this utopian dream.¹⁴ Aunt Lydia, however brutally she acts in the novel, has good intentions by training Handmaids so harshly. She explains that there are multiple kinds of freedom, including "[f]reedom to and freedom from."¹⁵ The idea is that while women in the novel may not have the freedom to choose their own partners, express their true sexual orientation, or decide whether or not they want to have children, they no longer run the risk of experiencing rejection, loneliness, or purposelessness. The Aunt's true belief is that Gilead has built a society that protects women from experiencing violent forms of sexual assault as well, but that belief does not consider the Ceremony a form of rape. Nonetheless, Aunt Lydia suggests in this statement that perhaps the Aunts believe they are doing a service for the women forced to be Handmaids. Rather than being beaten into submission by men, at least they have the opportunity to be trained and taught to accept the task they are expected to perform.

Despite these possible good intentions, it is too often in the novel that the Aunts rely on violence to instill collective fear in the Handmaids. The Aunts wear "electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts"¹⁶ that are intended to be used as weapons to punish Handmaids who misbehave. The cattle prods come to symbolize the constant threat of violence faced by the Handmaids, though the Aunts

12. Atwood, 13.

13. Atwood, 46.

14. Stillman, Peter G. "Dystopian Critiques, Utopian Possibilities, and Human Purposes in Octavia Butler's Parables." *Utopian Studies* 14, no. 1 (2003): 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20718544>.

15. Atwood, 24.

16. Atwood, 4.

have invented far more creative means of inflicting punishment. One example that seems to have a profound effect on Offred is a memory of her close friend Moira, who faked an illness in an attempt to escape the Rachel and Leah center. When the Aunts discovered her plot

They took her into the room that used to be the Science Lab. It was a room where [no Handmaid] ever went willingly. Afterwards she could not walk for a week, her feet would not fit into her shoes, they were too swollen. It was the feet they'd do, for a first offense. They used steel cables, frayed at the ends. After that the hands. They didn't care what they did to your feet or your hands, even if it was permanent.¹⁷

In this instance, Moira is punished for her attempted escape from the Red Center, revealing that at least some, if not all of the Handmaids are being held against their will by Gilead's government. Using an electric shock to the feet, which are known to have the most nerve endings in the body, is more correctly identified as torture, especially because these punishments sometimes result in permanent physical disfiguration. Offred's tone is unemotional; there is no indication that she is surprised by the Aunts' choice of punishment for Moira, suggesting that torture is a common occurrence in Handmaid centers.

In the previous example of Moira's feet being shocked, the focus was on Offred's unemotional and detached tone; however, there is still a lingering sense of fear that Offred experiences as a result of Moira's pain. When Offred returns to the memory of Moira's punishment, she recalls "the way they looked after they'd brought her back... They looked like drowned feet, swollen and boneless."¹⁸ The grotesque description of Moira's feet, "like lungs,"¹⁹ reveals Offred's level of uneasiness, probably due to the realization that these forms of torture are sanctioned by Gilead's officials. Essentially, Handmaids are property of the government, and as property they have no autonomy over their bodies or the ability to protect themselves

from the physical and mental abuses meant to indoctrinate them.

While the physical torture experienced by the Handmaids affects their sense of safety and comfort within Gilead's society, the Aunts rely more heavily on forms of physiological torment to maintain cooperation. While physical punishment is used to make singular examples of the potential consequences for violations, it would be difficult to punish every misdemeanor made by rebellious women, so the Aunts rely on grandeur examples to send messages. Aunt Lydia reminds the Handmaids that, "for our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential,"²⁰ leading Offred to conclude that Handmaids "are containers, it's only the in-sides of [their] bodies that are important."²¹ Because the Handmaids are treated as objects and reminded as much during their indoctrination process, they are taught to believe that they could be brutally maimed or disfigured anytime they violate their restrictions, creating a collective fear in the women who are in subservient positions. If Handmaids are afraid to have their feet shocked, their hands burned, or their faces maimed, they are more likely to follow the rules laid forth by Gilead and perform their duty without complaint.

Atwood herself largely answers any speculations about the Aunts' participation in the dystopian society within the 'Historical Notes' section of the novel, where she provides insights on Gilead's creation and proves that Offred's experiences were not singular. This section of the novel makes it clear that the Republic of Gilead eventually fell because of the flawed power structure that sought to enforce rigid gender norms for only certain groups of people. This chapter is a transcribed speech delivered at a Gileadean Studies Symposium, which analyzes Offred's memoir as another primary document from the time period. While this section covers a large variety of Gilead's components, it pays close attention to women's experiences under the oppressive regime, including the perspective of those who served as Aunts. The Gilead historian speaking at the conference, Professor James Pieixoto, explains the Aunt's inclination to indoctri-

17. Atwood, 91.

18. Atwood, 91.

19. Atwood, 91.

20. Atwood, 91.

21. Atwood, 96.

nate and oppress another class of women as follows:

In this connection a few comments upon the crack female control agency known as the 'Aunts' is perhaps in order. The opinion from the outset that the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves. For this there were many historical precedents; in fact, no empire imposed by force or otherwise has ever been without this feature: control of the indigenous by members of their own group. In the case of Gilead, there were many women willing to serve as Aunts, either because of a genuine belief in what they called 'traditional values,' or for the benefits they might thereby acquire. When power is scarce, a little of it is tempting.²²

This is, perhaps, the most important insight offered by Atwood concerning her inspiration for the class divide in Gilead. In a society that is patriarchal at its core, meaning women are meant to abide by the male interpretation of how femininity should be performed, it is suggested that women are willing to compromise their own sense of identity (being the shared experience of the female sex, especially under a new oppressive regime) in order to obtain any semblance of autonomy. It could be argued that the Aunts chose a lesser of evils, rather than be subjected to organized rape or be sent to the colonies because they were infertile, they chose to uphold and champion sexist values (or inflict intra gender oppression) in order to protect themselves. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to villainize these women who are subject to the same fear as the Handmaids that they abuse.

The 'Historical Notes' Section, which frames Gilead and Offred's experiences, uses a pseudo-documentary convention to invite readers to accept that the events that have taken place in the narrative as historically accurate by providing evidence to their validity.²³ By proving Offred's experiences actually occurred, Atwood further proves the plausibility of a Gileadean-esque regime in our society's future. This section helps affirm Atwood's belief that Gilead is an extrapolation

of trends already present in our daily lives. Upon the release of the novel, many critics viewed this as a cautionary tale that lacked familiarity for readers, especially Mary McCarthy, who published a review in the *New York Times* that claimed Gilead was a "women's world," that was only policed by men. She believed that Gilead truly values the duties that women were able to perform, and while she recognized the need society exhibited for women, she seems to ignore the way that women are forced into fulfilling that need. By claiming that there were no overt indicators that the values prominent in Gilead existed in our own modern world, McCarthy dismissed the book's suggestion that there was a looming threat against women's autonomy.

In light of recent political developments, time has actually favored Atwood's interpretation of the future more kindly than McCarthy suggested. Legislation is beginning to sweep the United States, banning women's access to safe abortions and restricting access to reproductive healthcare, slowly chipping away at any comfort women were afforded after the *Roe V. Wade* Supreme court ruling in 1973 that initially protected women who wished to have an abortion. While this is not an outwardly alarming development for some, there are certainly parallels between the world we are experiencing today and the world that Atwood has built; the ability for predominantly male lawmakers and legislators to make decisions regarding women's bodies and reproductive needs, for one. In the novel, a fertile woman is forced to become pregnant and bear a child regardless of her own wishes. Similarly, laws that restrict women's abilities to abort an unwanted pregnancy forces women into having children regardless of their financial, emotional, or physical ability to do so. I don't pretend that similarities in government policies suggests that Gilead is imminent, but it would be remiss to dismiss the danger that threatens the sanctity of a woman's body.

The question that must be considered in regards to Gilead's existence is one of advantage: who benefits from the power structures established in the novel? Men may be the easiest and most obvious response, but I would challenge that initial conclusion. The truth is, anyone who is given a scrap of authority in an oppressive regime is benefiting in

22. Atwood, 308.

23. Dominic M Grace. "The Handmaid's Tale: 'Historical Notes' and Documentary Subversion." *Science Fiction Studies* 25, no. 3 (November 1998): 482. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240726>.

some way from the exploited class. Wives, Aunts, and Commanders all benefit from the existence of the Handmaids, though not equally. That's why the threat of Gileadean society is far more familiar than many would care to admit: it has always existed in some form. From historical forms of patriarchal societies to future ones, our modern society falls on some spectrum already, enabled by the deceitful nature of power dynamics between existing classes. The structure of Gilead provides even the undesirables with artificial forms of power to pacify them, disguising the scope of the true oppressive beliefs that disenfranchise them and prevent the entirety of the oppressed group from uniting to fight their oppressor. Let us not be deceived by the presence of sexist values in our own societies. Because wherever the seeds of sexism exist, so too does the threat of oppression and degradation.

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