

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

WOMEN ALIENATION AS A RESULT OF THE

PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S

***THE TESTAMENTS*: A STUDY OF MARXIST-FEMINISM**



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**Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Sarjana Degree
of English Department Faculty of Humanities Universitas Airlangga**

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DECLARATION

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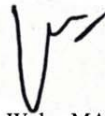
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*I dedicate this thesis to my father and my mother, who gave me endless support,
spirit, and love to finish this writing.*

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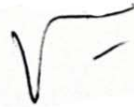
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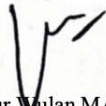
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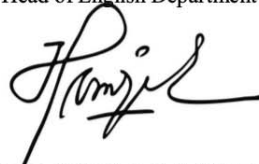
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The world breaks everyone, and afterward, many are strong at the broken places.

- *Ernest Hemingway*

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the patriarchal oppression that constructs women's alienation in the dystopian novel entitled *The Testaments* written by Margaret Atwood (2019). A qualitative descriptive method is employed in this study. In addition, Marxist-Feminist criticism is incorporated as the main theory to analyze the society and the government depicted in the Republic of Gilead as the setting of the story. Moreover, to elaborate on the result of women's oppression that leads to women's alienation, this study utilizes Alison Jaggar's women's alienation theory as the supporting theory, which is organized into three categories; sexuality, motherhood, and intellectuality. The primary data used as the main text is the novel, in which this study tries to ascertain evidence through reading the text thoroughly. This study's result reveals that economic classes and the patriarchal system have contributed to women's oppression in Gilead.

Keywords: Marxism, Marxist-Feminism, patriarchal, oppression, women alienation

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penindasan patriarki yang menyebabkan adanya alienasi perempuan dalam novel dystopian berjudul *The Testaments* karya Margaret Atwood (2019). Metode deskriptif kualitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Selain metode kualitatif, peneliti menggunakan kritik Marxisme-Feminisme untuk menganalisis masyarakat dan pemerintah yang digambarkan dalam Republik Gilead sebagai latar tempat cerita. Setelah mendapat tekanan dari lingkungan sekitarnya, perempuan mengalami alienasi. Maka dari itu, untuk menganalisis akibat dari penindasan perempuan yang berujung pada keterasingan perempuan, penelitian ini menggunakan teori alienasi perempuan dari Alison Jaggar sebagai teori pendukung. Jaggar membagi alienasi perempuan menjadi tiga kategori; seksualitas, keibuan, dan intelektualitas. Data primer yang digunakan untuk penelitian ini adalah teks utama adalah novel, dimana penelitian ini mencoba untuk mengumpulkan bukti melalui membaca teks secara menyeluruh. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kelas ekonomi dan sistem patriarki berkontribusi terhadap penindasan perempuan di Gilead.

Kata kunci: Marxisme, Marxist-Feminisme, patriarki, penindasan, alienasi perempuan

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The status of women, in general, is considered substandard than men in society, and this condition is named patriarchy. Patriarchy is still working through male control over females' sexuality and women's complicity inside this framework (Gangoli 2017, 133). Gangoli (2017, 133) further argued that among women themselves, is also oppression by women on other women. Patriarchy is a system that was created in which men controlled the labour of ladies and children in the family, and in this manner, men took in the procedures of various leveled hierarchical and control over them (Eisenstein 1979, 206). According to Lerner (1986, 421), patriarchy originates from Greek and Roman Law, meaning female and male family members rely on the male head of household, making him have absolute legal and financial control over them.

Consequently, women have continued to be excluded and look inferior in society. Therefore, in contemporary society, women are considered weak, passive, and emotional, leading them to be seen as irrational, illiterate, and submissive, on the contrary, men are considered rational, strong, inexpressive, and decisive (Jaggar 1983, 316). In other words, since the patriarchal system has already been rooted in society from ancient times, it drives the

misconception in society on how men and women understand and treat each other

However, women actually have an equal position with men. Lerner (1986, 23), argues that biologically, women and men are different, but the value and implications of both genders, an assumption that men are superior to women, result from social constructions. Lerner also explains in her book entitled *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Lerner 1986, 19) that historically, women have always been in the same position as men; women are and were actors and agents in history, whether it is written or not, and women also participated in constructing society and its civilization. Additionally, in American History, especially at the beginning of Western frontiers, women have an essential role in surviving in the wildlife. According to Datesman, Crandall, and Kearny (2005, 73), the deficiency of men implied how widows and single ladies were frequently expected to fill the roles of men. From the earliest colonial days, most American ladies have worked. Prior to the industrial revolution, most necessities of life were made at home, and ladies were relied upon to be as capable at crafted works as men (Datesman, Crandall, and Kearny 2005, 75).

Moreover, Tong (2014, 101-103) also explained that according to Engels in his book entitled *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1972), women were the ones who steered the economy in the past, therefore making women and men as equals. In the event of getting married, the husband was found to move to the wife's house, and the women's work was seen as essential for the tribe's survival; they were the ones who produced clothes, bedding, cookware, and tools. Then, Engels explains, this situation experienced change when men discovered economic activities outside the household; herds'

breeding and animals' domestication (Tong 2014, 101). In other words, the change in women's and men's values in society is caused by economic power. At first, when women managed to produce daily necessities at home, they were the ones seen to hold power, but as men produced more money than women, they took over this power. This belief continues to exist until this day, encouraging the idea of men being superior to women.

It can be said that a male-centric society has been established due to the shifting labour system; the previous one started at home and was managed by women, then changed to be more focused outside the home and led by men. Since the ways individuals earn resources are different, it creates an imbalance between males and females. Hence, the capitalist society worsens women's condition by exploiting them because they are no longer working; therefore, they have no resource of income, and men exploit them through sexual activity (Eisenstein 1979, 23).

Cudd (2015) argues that, originally, capitalism does not produce oppression towards specific groups, such as men, females, class, or race, but created an imbalance between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Therefore, capitalism creates an imbalance of power among those groups due to their economic power. In addition, Eisenstein, in her book entitled *Socialist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (1979, 23), argues that the capitalist patriarchy established in England started around the 18th century and continued to develop a century later in America. Eisenstein (1979, 23), defines capitalist patriarchy as a system that gets through dichotomies between class

and sex, private and civil areas, household and wage work, family and financial state, individual and political, philosophy, and material form. In other words, the capitalist patriarchy is a complex structure that weakens women's position in society due to the different economic power of men. The male dominance of culture, therefore, leads to women's alienation. Alienation refers to an individual's feelings of being an outsider, a sense of loneliness, or being unwanted (Jaggar 1983, 307). Therefore, women's alienation is a situation where women feel like an outsider, lonely, or unwanted by others.

The world has already advanced in its technology, education, and internet, which also helps spread the idea of Feminism to reach broad audiences with expectations that patriarchal oppression will be erased in society. However, in reality, pressure towards women, mainly from the lower classes, is still abundant. The writer argues that women's oppression is still abundant in society. There are still many news reports regarding rape or sexual harassment, children's marriages, physical or sexual violence in marriages, in which almost all of the victims are female. These issues can be found everywhere, such as in the United States. According to The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), stalking and sexual harassment by strangers, partners, or spouses are essential issues. Those traumatic situations affect a huge number of individuals in the United States. NSVRC further stated that, based on a 2015 survey on individuals in America, 43.6% of women or approximately 52.2 million became victims of sexual violence.

Furthermore, across the globe, UNICEF stated that approximately 650 million females who are living today married when they were children, and developing countries contribute a significant number in this issue (Efevbera and Bhabha 2020). In addition, an individual who marries before they reach 18 years old is considered child marriage, and this condition is allowed in the United States based on some needs (Koski and Heymann 2018). Koski and Heymann (2018) further explain that the data shows child marriages occurred more frequently with girls rather than boys. Additionally, as one of the many developing countries, Indonesia records a high number of children's marriages. According to *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS) and UNICEF (Statistik 2020, 7), more than 1 million girls get married before they reach the age of 18, and child marriages are susceptible to happen to girls that come from lower-class families, live in a village, and have lower education. In other words, no matter how advanced human civilization is, the idea that society views women as substandard to men is still present.

How women are treated as men's substandard can be seen in dystopian novels. A dystopian novel is a literary form inspired by an unfortunate reality compared to utopian literature (Seeger and Davison-Vecchione 2019). *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood (2019) is a dystopian novel that portrays women's substandard position. The story is narrated from three different points of view, specifically from women in different generations and positions. These three women are Aunt Lydia, one of the leaders in the Republic of Gilead; Agnes, the girl from a high-class society in Gilead; and Daisy, an outsider who

lives in Toronto. The book was first published in 2019 and won the 2019 Booker Prize. *The Testaments* is a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and depicts Gilead to be set 15 years from the first book. Gilead is a city that used to be the United States but is now transformed to be directed by a totalitarian government, which gives no freedom to its female citizens and fully controls them. The story reveals testimonies from three different perspectives regarding the abuse and immoral things Gilead's government does towards their female citizens and the history of Gilead.

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian author whose work has been published in multiple languages, more than forty-five countries, and has published various works, such as poems, novels, short fiction, children's books, graphic novels, television scripts, radio scripts, and a theatre script ("Biography - Margaret Atwood" n.d.) From her works, she managed to be nominated for and earn many prestigious awards; she already won the Booker Prize two times in 2000 and 2019, receiving multiple shortlisted nominations for the Booker Prize in 1987, 1989, 1996, 2003, 2004, and 2007 ("Full Bibliography - Margaret Atwood," n.d.). She also received honorary degrees from various universities and numerous awards from many countries' governments, universities, and other institutions. Lastly, *The Handmaid's Tale* was also adapted into a television series, managing to win awards for the show ("Awards & Recognitions - Margaret Atwood" n.d.). These achievements proved how influential Atwood as a woman writer in producing literary works and getting recognition from numerous institutions.

Pratama explains in his study entitled *Analysis of Marxist-Feminism on the Oppression Women As Breeding Apparatus in the Handmaid's Tale Novel* how Margaret Atwood is an individual who portrays her works regarding practical societal issues, such as gender and class issues (Pratama 2018). Gilead is a totalitarian country led by a male-centric government that treats women as their breeding apparatus. Women are divided into five classes; the Aunts, the Pearl Girls, the Wives, the Marthas, and the Handmaids; some having a prescribed amount of power, while others are treated as slaves by being the country's reproduction tool. Hence, the brutality and those social issues depicted within the novel are considered damaging to the women, leading to their alienation.

This study applies a Marxist feminist theory as explained by Rosemarie Tong in her book entitled *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. The book consists of an overview of feminist critics, such as Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist and Socialist Feminism, Ecofeminism, and others. She is an American feminist philosopher, an Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Health Care Ethics in the Philosophy's Department at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. In addition, Allison Jaggar's theory regarding women's oppression is also utilized in this study. Therefore, Tong and Jaggar's books and statements, especially about Marxist-Feminism, women's oppression, and alienation, fit to be applied as the theories in this study.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the background of the issue, this study proposes a principal focus on research questions on Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* as follows:

1. How is the society within Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* portrayed through a Marxist-Feminist lens?
2. How does the society within Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* reinforce a patriarchal system that alienates women?

1.3 Objective of the Study

In view of assertion and fulfillment of the previously mentioned issues, this study aims to:

1. To discover the societal conditions that are depicted in Gilead's society.
2. To discover the patriarchal oppression that causes women alienation that is experienced by the female protagonists in the novel.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study of Marxist-Feminism on *The Testaments* is expected to aid readers in understanding that classism has contributed to women's oppression as it is portrayed in the story. It tries to prove that it is a study against a patriarchal society in the fight for gender equality between men and women, not a campaign of anti-men belief or oppression for any gender. As a result, the readers are expected to acknowledge and understand the moral values of the significant characters of the story to fight for equality in society. In addition, the readers are expected to respect

their opposite gender and not look at women or men as their subordinates. Therefore, this analysis is expected to raise individuals' awareness regarding women's oppression.

In addition, this study is also expected to contribute to students in the English Department Universitas Airlangga discussing and conducting research on similar topics of Marxist - feminism and women's oppression.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Marxist-Feminism: A concept that understands that classism is the primary reason for women's oppression occurring in society (Tong 2014, 93).

Patriarchy: An ideology that manifests and systematizes male dominance over women and children in the family and the expansion of male predominance over women in the public eye (Lerner 1986, 515).

Women Oppression: The beating of women- who are powerless to beat their oppressed condition, mentally, physically, and spiritually in daily life (Bell Hooks 1984, 1).

Alienation: Individual's feelings of being an outsider, a sense of loneliness, or being unwanted (Jaggar 1983, 307).