

Acculturation in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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Abstract:

In this study, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood's cultural criticism is examined via the lens of acculturation theory. This research has a cross-sectional design and is theoretical. People from different backgrounds who come together experience cultural and psychological changes. Most of these groups have formed a variety of cultural, linguistic, and religious organizations since first coming together. When people are exposed to different cultures, both their own and those they visit, acculturation takes place. Due to issues with immigration, business, and other political issues, people migrate outside of their home nations to acclimate to new cultures, values, languages, and behaviours. Refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers are highlighted as a result. According to the finds, women are reduced to serving as child-bearing "vessels" to save the nation. This tale of a woman under oppression takes place in a world of dictatorship, constant watchfulness, and political manipulation. In both texts, writers depict a dystopia because a sizable section of the population is now infertile due to climate change and pollution.

Introduction

In John Berry's Theory of Acculturation, the concepts of marginalized, assimilation, and integration are distinguished. The Canadian novel that was analyzed was *The Handmaid's Tale* by Atwood (1985). (1992). This subject is recognized as having a novel, oriental, and various social situations, settings, and populations. The theoretical and cross-sectional nature of this investigation. According to John Berry's Theory of Acculturation, interactions between individuals from many cultures lead to cultural and psychological transformation (2006). Most of these

situations end with communities that contain residents from different cultural, linguistic, or religious backgrounds after the initial contact. In other words, acculturation happens when individuals interact with many cultures, whether they be their own or those of the host nation. People are compelled to leave their own countries and acclimate to other cultures, values, languages, and behaviours as a result of immigration, trade, communication between people of different cultures, and other political difficulties. The emphasis is therefore on immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who are thought to have established themselves permanently in their new nation.

The term "process of cultural change that occurs when people from different cultures contact for a long time" is another definition of acculturation (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). According to Berry (1994, 1997), it's crucial to retain one's original cultural identity and connections to other groups if one wants to avoid marginalization. The heroine, Offred, is seen in *The Handmaid's Tale* to be estranged from her family and to have a variety of behavioural and value patterns. It makes the immigrants feel even more alone. Offred rejects the culture and values of the colonizer due to the abuse and humiliation she has experienced in Gilead.

A colonial lady named Offred appears in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Just like Canadians, if she wants to live, she must reject patriarchy and traditional norms (Ashraf Zidan, 2013, p. 18). Offred's oppression and imprisonment force her to decide against having sexual relations with the colonizer, which makes her unhappiness, sense of loss, and loneliness worse (Atwood, 1985).

Marginalization happens when people stop pursuing other cultures and lose their sense of cultural identity. *The Handmaid's Tale* refers to Atwood's contention that political, religious, and social norms oppress and limit women in many of her works. Focus is placed on Offred's psychological state as a marginalized immigrant in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

When immigrants disregard their true backgrounds yet frequently interact with the host cultures, assimilation takes place.

Assimilation is defined by Park and Burgess (1921) as the preference of one culture over another. Offred is pleased with the commander's palace in *The Handmaid's Tale* and wants to assimilate. To combat her loneliness and get a better understanding of her surroundings, she also goes shopping with another handmaid. This is a dystopian society's method of mind control to stop the subject from rebelling.

Offred's commander is the target of her first assimilation efforts. This exposes the mistreatment and disregard for women. Simply put, they are sexual machines. Women are oppressed by men and the powerful. Reconstruction aids Offred in overcoming her feminist humiliation and repression. She then begins to make use of her friendship with the commander. She is asked to play games with him, kiss him, and bring her magazines.

As a result, the majority of immigrants come to terms with their original identities and take on those of the host nation. Legally or illegally, they change their economic, social, and cultural standing. Maintaining one's cultural identity while interacting with others from different cultures entails doing this. Despite lacking of desire for sex, love, or relationships, Offred attempts to abide by the commander's household customs and rules, unlike the other handmaids. She prefers to comply with the commander's requests above palace laws to maintain her calm. She finally rebels to preserve her life and her identity. To protect their dignity as human beings, women resist oppression and injustice. She accomplishes this by recording her story on thirty tapes.

John Berry's Theory of Acculturation: Definitions and Strategies

Empirical research was done by Berry and his colleagues in 1994 to evaluate the acculturation strategies of diverse immigrant groups. These immigrant groups provide evidence that the majority of those who want to preserve their cultural identity favour integration over marginalization. According to the research, inclusion is the type that immigrants and international students find

to be the most resilient, whereas marginalization is the least resilient. They discovered that in a variety of societies and cultural groupings, integration is the sort of marginalization that affects immigrants and international students the least. Additionally, it is encouraged that refugees and citizens of different communities adopting integration initiatives increase their psychological adaptation.

Berry and his colleagues researched factors such as language proficiency, nationality, mental stress, and the acculturation of various minorities to discover the best acculturation strategy. Berry investigates how well-educated South Koreans who relocated to Toronto's urban areas assimilated. Key components of the integration process include accessibility to additional Canadian journals, an English questionnaire, a direct flight to Canada, and involvement in a variety of host country communities. There are fewer national magazines, TV channels, and friends when choosing integration. According to some studies, the primary cause of marginalization and separation is poor education. Of course, other factors like poverty and parenthood also have an impact on Canadians.

Finally, different levels of preference can be found by looking at all four possibilities. Integration and separation, for instance, both protect a person's cultural heritage and identity. Both strategies are opposed because of how they relate to other people. Additionally, although assimilation and separation are two different concepts, they can be favourably associated when both are refused (e.g., integration). These four strategies have some theoretical and empirical connections. For instance, it is only plausible to account for the degree or level of support in each of these four strategies once these four techniques are acknowledged as acceptable ways to analyze how people acculturate. Assimilation level is typically meant by "acculturation level." Groups and people from many cultures interact regularly in multicultural societies through a variety of acculturation processes. There are several ways to explain acculturation.

Berry's theory of acculturation might be applied in a variety of situations and eras (assimilation, separation, or inclusion). All of this may be considered an acculturation approach. Acculturation, therefore, depends on a person's inner qualities (psychological), such as stress-reduction techniques and cultural evaluations. However, immigration policies and the degree of discrimination against immigrants in the host society may have an impact. So, variables are employed (e.g., cultures of origin and settlement). The results of each group's acculturation can then be properly discussed. Therefore, how people socialize is impacted by how various components are interconnected. The four acculturation strategies—integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization—are based on Berry's (1997) paradigm. Acculturation is hence extremely diverse and has a variety of effects.

Then there is cultural criticism, which is similar to social criticism. Although it is a necessary component of cultural self-awareness, the social values and media preferences of critics are very different. This method of analysis looks at how texts influence people's political viewpoints, social ethnicities, faiths, and personal attitudes. Our comprehension of literature is influenced by our place in a society or group. Thus, to comprehend the researched texts and apply modern cultural ideas to their analysis, cultural criticism and Berry's concept of acculturation are essential.

Separation and Marginalization in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

The primary cause of this work, which separates and marginalizes people, is colonialism. When people become estranged from the host culture and withdraw from society, separation occurs. They favour socializing with members of their own culture. Marginalized people become alienated from both their own and their host societies (Culhane, 2004, p.50).

According to Berry (1974, 1980), when participating in intercultural dialogue, non-dominant ethnocultural groups must

answer two questions. Four acculturation tactics are put out by Berry (1989): assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (p.46). The four approaches presuppose that immigrants can select their acculturation strategies (Horenczyk, 1996, p. 241) but that they might be compelled to use a certain approach in situations when there are significant cultural differences.

Separation is recommended by immigrants who simply want to maintain their native identities. Separation and acculturation stress are linked by Berry, Kim, Mink, and Mok (1987, pp. 491-511). Those who opt to leave could experience panic, isolation, and a loss of identity (Berry & Co., 1989, p.206).

The marginalization acculturation strategy, on the other hand, connotes ambiguity, loss of ethnic identity, and alienation. According to Duarte (2009), cultural tension is anticipated. Marginalization happens when people stop interacting with their home nation while losing touch with their cultural roots. This acculturation approach is regarded as the least advantageous and fruitful (Sam and Berry 2006, p.354).

The Handmaid's Tale by Atwood should be studied to demonstrate Atwood's understanding of ethnic and cultural identity. When characters travel, Atwood depicts how their national or cultural identities shift and become more stressful.

Atwood, a significant poet and novelist of the 20th century, is renowned for her concerns for the environment and humanitarian causes. *The Handmaid's Tale*, a work of dissident feminist fiction, has sold over a million copies in the United States alone and is a groundbreaking examination of people—particularly women—who reject being used as sexual or political props. The book was chosen by *Woman of the Year Magazine* and received the Ritz-Paris Hemingway Award, Second General Governor Award, and Los Angeles Times Book Prize. This is how *The Handmaid's Tale* portrays a dystopian Gilead in actuality.

No woman, much less a group of women, is thought to be capable of having the form and power of the commander. The world of Gilead is designed to be a feudal monarchy to highlight men's supremacy over women. A strict social hierarchy that is based on each person's social standing also governs Gilead's power structure.

The Handmaid's Tale makes use of the idea of separation to highlight how the protagonist (Offred) opposes the cultural standards of the colonized nation while also being separated from her family. Offred and Luke attempt to flee to Canada with their daughter after the Gilead takeover. The main character and narrator of Gilead's past is Offred. Because Gilead wed a divorced man, she is referred to as a "wanton woman." The new administration bans divorces. Offred's spouse continues to believe she is an adulteress as a result. As she sought to leave Gilead, she severed her ties with her husband and child. It is a woman from Gilead's first generation who lived before Gilead. Serena Joy is chosen as a valuable asset and given the task of bearing a child for the "commander's family" and Serena Joy's aunt.

Despite being prohibited from speaking, the women practice whispering in their beds at night. It reads: "Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June." Additionally, one of the tales advises against mooning and June training. Writers have assumed her middle name to be "June" due to this and other sources. The epilogue for Nunavut is scheduled for June. Only to make Offred more relatable to the other Handmaids is her real identity made public.

Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* is a colonized individual who, like Canada, must resist surviving, according to Zidan (2013): It is time for Canada to combat both patriarchal and cultural norms (p.8). According to Atwood, women are constrained by two types of authorities: norms and physical and cultural colonialism. She refers to their also-incarcerated executioners, whether they be men or women. Women are constrained by political, religious, and social standards in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Social feminist, separatist, materialist, and progressive feminist themes are investigated in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Feminist researcher Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner (2004) describes each organization as "representative of the rifts of the moment" in the broader cultural discussion of women's issues (p. 27). Second-wave feminists typically take separate, occasionally opposing paths rather than cooperating. Atwood is not pulled to any of these views because each group is competing for dominance and credibility.

Atwood, a human rights advocate since the early 1960s, lacks a distinct political agenda or goal in this setting. This subgroup focuses on the revival of feminine creative and cultural heritage. To support female viewpoints and expectations, cultural feminists often neglect the roles and values that men predominate.

Professor Warren Hedges asks, "How to create a gyno-centred civilization without universally eradicating some women?" (1996). (p. 67). This gynocentric culture assumes that women are inherently softer and kinder than men. Atwood challenges the idea that women's cruelty to one another protects a woman's individuality in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Therefore, women themselves are also oppressing and demeaning women in addition to males.

Creating spaces and interactions that are exclusively for women, in Atwood's opinion, will help women take better care of and/or support one another and fight the patriarchy. It may be challenging to create spaces for women because they tend to withdraw from society rather than educate and change it. Aggression is seen as a healthy way to solve problems, power is equated with power over others, and these beliefs all contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal regimes (Pollock, 1972).

Rejected women established explanations for female conduct, agreeing with other feminists that women's behaviour is not the consequence of intrinsic psychological qualities" as separatists by Hole and Levine (1971).

Materialist feminism has a strong concern for class. Atwood is opposed to the materialist feminist viewpoint despite being first lured to this branch by its liberal political leanings. According to materialists, destroying the defective economic system that inevitably favours men over women and places women in a subordinate position is the only way to achieve liberty and equality. Materialistic feminists, according to Hole and Levine, "viewed women's battles as part of the larger socialist transformation conflict." This frequently meant that social, economic, and political progress was closely related to women's issues. At every level, women face discrimination and persecution. Offred has a strong distaste for Serena Joy because of "her complicity in what was being done to her" (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985, p. 161). Serena, a proponent of a traditional culture that would send women back to their homes, is a significant participant in the invasion of Gilead. Offred dislikes Serena personally because, according to *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), p. 161, "she would raise my child, should I be allowed to have one after all." We devote an excessive amount of time to infants while ignoring the rewards of parenting. As she waits for Gilead's future, Offred does not find any grandeur in her sexual servitude.

Daniels and Heather (2003) provide an example of how they live in this regard: "They have no control over the treatment of their bodies; no authority to select the people with whom they pass the time; [they have] no control over their life" (p. 428). (p.428). Offred desperately wants to rebel and reaffirm her organization, but the patriarchy keeps her and the other handmaids separated and powerless within the household hierarchy. This illustrates the cruellest effect that women have experienced when they have prioritized the loyalty of men over their own, and how the decline of feminine identity has led to women's disunity. *The Handmaid's Tale* ends with a metafictional epilogue that is presented as a portion of a 2195 international historical association convention transcript. The keynote speaker claims that Offred's account of the events in the book was recorded onto cassette tapes, which historians later discovered and transcribed while researching what

is now known as "The Gilead Period." In "Historical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*," Peixoto states. Offred recorded her material after erasing the majority of the original information on thirty cassette tapes. According to *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985, p. 314), "In general, each tape opens with two or three songs, as camouflage no doubt, then the music is broken off, and the speaking voice takes over."

Assimilation VS Integration in The Handmaid's Tale

People assimilate when they lose their cultural identity but frequently interact with different cultures. Assimilation is described by Park and Burgess (1921) as a process of interpenetration and fusion in which people and communities take on the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of others and incorporate them into a common cultural life (p. 735). Assimilation is characterized by adopting mainstream attitudes and views, belonging to social groups and institutions, and separating one's political and ethnic identity. Assimilation, then, describes those who neglect their own culture's customs and traditions in favour of blending in with other civilizations. The analysis that follows demonstrates how the characters of the two novels either assimilate and reject their own unique identities and aspirations or integrate and maintain their unique selves despite the dreadful circumstances and constraints.

Atwood aims to draw attention to current problems that women may be experiencing, including oppression, sexual authority, and patriarchal domination that reduces women to simple objects. Women's function as a womb for childbearing may be diminished by a social and cultural critique of ingrained customs and traditions, parenthood, and present female employment. Men's incapacity to procreate limits their ability to be mothers despite the diminished position of women. Men's inadequacy refers to the inaccurate stereotypes of women held by American society. This chapter discusses how assimilation and integration are portrayed in Atwood's book and predicts which idea will prevail in the end. Offred, the main character of the book, is a prime example of

assimilation and integration in the commander's palace. You have two options if you want to protect your legacy and identity: either erase it and adopt alien customs and civilizations, or save it. The main objective of such cultural theories is to enable communication with individuals from different cultures.

In the first few chapters of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred makes an effort to blend in and like her new work. She looks for love and sexual encounters with the commander so she may deal with the disasters happening around her. To aid in her recovery, Offred, for instance, pretends to be interested in the commander sexually. She, therefore, views assimilation as a means of taking back her feminism and her right to live. In this scenario, Gilead authorities hope to persuade women that life is better under their control. The authority asks, "Do you remember the horrible division between those who can easily obtain a guy and those who cannot?" (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985, p.231)

They claim that it will benefit both the current and upcoming generations (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985, p. 43). Therefore, the handmaids should accept their sad circumstances and react to men's and women's shame.

Offred, however, has a special bond with Nick since she genuinely loves him and wants to rediscover who she is as a strong woman. According to *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead's rule is threatened by the love story, notably that involving Offred and Nick. Offred and Nick the Guardian's covert romance is the most romantic aspect. Offred enjoys spending time with Nick even if her connection with the commander can be unpleasant and nonconsensual at times. She wants to reclaim her femininity and dignity, in other words, through her relationship with Nick.

Love is portrayed in *The Handmaid's Tale* as a force that overthrows Gilead's authority, particularly Offred and Nick's union. Love appears to be the only revolutionary force, according to Barbara Ehrenreich (1984). (P.34). Some observers, like Ehrenreich, hold that Offred's relationship with Nick is what has

allowed her to remain free and that it has helped to challenge Gilead's oppressive authority.

Stillman and Johnson (1994) contend in Offred's Passivity that she is battling for her identity under a system that wants her to forget her past while also attempting to covertly defy her oppressors, letting her survive and proving that Gilead does not have complete control over her.

Offred's actions have been defended by authors, who call her covert uprising courageous. Melodie Roschman (2016) challenges Stillman and Johnson's (1994) evaluation of Offred in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Lai's *Salt Fish Woman* by holding her memories, telling her tale, and using her creativity. These critical responses that aren't impartial reveal the readers' strong (both positive and negative) political and ideological feelings (p.8).

To maintain their standing as respected human beings, women revolt against oppression and injustice. They struggle, persevere, and preserve their uniqueness. Offred escapes from her captors and survives, in contrast to other characters who openly defy the government, by subtly complying with Gilead's demands while secretly disobeying them. Offred's ability to blend into Gilead's culture and her resolve to keep her position in the commander's palace while preserving her freedom and femininity are all evident in this.

She so defends her rights and declines to serve as a plaything for colonizers. She is a wonderful illustration of integration that demonstrates a woman's tenacious spirit. She experienced colonialism, humiliation, and oppression at first, but she now understands her rights as a free woman who can reject the strict standards imposed on her and keep her feminine dignity. She eventually exploits her kidnapping, using it as a metaphor for all oppressed and persecuted women. This is a powerful warning to humanity to defend its own identities, freedom, and culture against rulers who might not appreciate such priceless or unique things.

Conclusion

John Berry's Acculturation Theory, with its four categories, helps understand post-colonial literature from a cultural perspective. The use of this notion in two Canadian books has improved comprehension of the colonizer-colonized connection in popular culture. This research reveals two authors with different personalities who were raised together. The circumstances of immigrants and the various forms of oppression they experience in their host countries are depicted in this piece of postmodernist literature.

The writings of Atwood are dystopian novels about the reversal of women's rights. The main characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* are colonized by patriarchy, cultural imperialism, and geographic colonization. They move and disconnect as a result. This study provides examples of both physical and psychological types of settlement. Women could suffer the colonization of their bodies and psyches at the same time.

The analysis of Atwood's book has led to the following as well. Feminism and postcolonialism both fight injustice and oppression, especially colonial, societal, and patriarchal subjugation. Additionally, women cannot be liberated from patriarchal restrictions unless they develop self-awareness and self-identification. Therefore, Atwood asserts that women achieve peace, equality, and independence by making peace with themselves and their past. Women can self-colonize or become prisoners. They bear responsibility for their misery because of their dependencies, naiveté, and passivity. Life must eventually be altered to allow women to adapt to a changing environment.

As a result, Atwood's work emphasizes both national and female identities (in general). It takes the inner voice of the oppressed, repressed, and silent person into account, regardless of gender. Atwood's female characters fight to live, resist, and recover their identities within the patriarchal and colonial framework.

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