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**WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN LENİ ZUMAS’S *RED CLOCKS*
AND CHRISTINA DALCHER’S *VOX***

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ÖZET

Meltem Bilir Aşlar, Leni Zumas'ın *Red Clocks* ve Christina Dalcher'in *Vox* Eserlerinde Kadınların Güçlenmesinin İncelenmesi, Başkent Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı, 2023.

21. yüzyıl, kadın haklarına ilişkin endişeleri inceleyen feminist yazarların yolunu açan sosyal, kültürel ve siyasi hareketlerin etkisiyle feminist distopik eserlerin patlamasıyla dikkat çekmiştir. Feminist distopik tür, kadınların baskı altında olduğu bir toplumu tasvir ederek, toplumda eşitlik ve dayanışmayı sağlamak için devam eden çabaların önemini vurgular. Kadınların üreme haklarına ve özerkliğine odaklanan bu anlatılar, annelerin değersizleştirilmiş rollerini ve ataerkil toplumdaki süregelen mücadelelerini derinlemesine araştırır. Leni Zumas'ın *Red Clocks* (2018) ve Christina Dalcher'in *Vox* (2018) romanları, kadınların toplumdaki kısıtlı rollerini ve kadınların kendi bedenleri üzerindeki kontrollerini kaybetmelerini konu alır. Her iki yazar da kadınların değerinin çocuk doğurma yeteneklerine indirgendiği ve kadınların zorunlu gebelik ve üreme gözetimi gibi baskılara maruz kaldığı bir dünya sunuyor. Her iki roman da annelerin toplumsal olarak inşa edilmiş rollerini, kadınların ataerkil toplumda çektiği baskıyı, kadınların marjinalleşmeye karşı direnişini ve güçlenmesini distopik bir bağlamda araştırır. Zumas'ın *Red Clocks* romanı, olay örgüsünün küçük bir Oregon kasabasında yaşayan beş farklı kadının etrafında döndüğü ve “Personhood Amendment” kanunu ile kürtaj ve döllenmenin yasaklanmasıyla, başka seçeneği olmayan kadınların ülkeden kaçmaya veya gizlice yasadışı ve ölümcül kürtaj işlemleri yaptırmaya çalıştığı örgütlü ve parçalanmış bir anlatıdır. Dalcher'in *Vox* romanı da aynı şekilde kadınların dini, totaliter bir rejimdeki kısıtlı rollerine odaklanır. Romandaki kadınlar evlerinin sınırları içine hapsedilir ve iş sahibi olma, seyahat etme, İncil dışında herhangi bir kitap okuma gibi temel hakları kısa bir süre içinde ellerinden alınır. Kadınlara ayrıca günde 100 kelimeden fazla kullanmalarını engelleyen bilezikler zorla taktırılır. Ancak, kadınları cinsiyet rollerine hapseden ideolojilere karşın, her iki romanda da kadınlar anneliklerini alternatif bir şekilde deneyimlemenin ve annelik rollerini erkek egemen topluma karşın bir direniş olarak kullanmanın yolunu bulurlar. Ayrıca, her iki roman da kadınlar ve erkekler arasındaki dayanışma ve birlik sayesinde ataerkil sisteme meydan okuma gücünün elde edilebileceğini gösterir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Annelik, Anne Merkezli Feminizm, Feminist Distopik Eser, Direniş

ABSTRACT

Meltem Bilir Aşlar, Women's Empowerment in Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* and Christina Dalcher's *Vox*, Başkent University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master's of American Culture and Literature with Thesis, 2023.

The 21st century is marked by the boom of feminist dystopian writing because of the social, cultural, and political movements which paved the way for feminist writers' exploring the concerns for women's rights. Feminist dystopian writing, which portrays a society where women are suppressed, stresses the importance of ongoing efforts to achieve equality and solidarity in society. By focusing on women's reproductive rights and autonomy, these narratives delve into mothers' devalued roles and ongoing struggles in patriarchal society. Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* (2018) and Christina Dalcher's *Vox* (2018) deal with women's restricted role in society and the loss of control over their bodies. Both authors present a world where women's worth is reduced to their ability to bear children. Women characters in both novels are subjected to oppression such as forced pregnancies and reproductive surveillance. Both novels explore socially constructed roles of mothers, the patriarchal oppression women suffer from, women's resilience and empowerment against marginalization within a dystopian context. Zumas's *Red Clocks* is a networked and fragmented narrative where the plot revolves around five different women living in a small Oregon town and with the outlaw of abortion and fertilization by the Personhood Amendment. Since women have no options, they try to flee the country or follow illegal and lethal abortion procedures in secret. Dalcher's *Vox*, in the same way, focuses on women's restricted roles in a religious, totalitarian regime. Women are confined within the realm of their houses, and they lose most of their rights in a very short time such as working, travelling, and reading books except Bible. Women are also fitted, with bracelets that prevent them from speaking more than 100 words a day. However, contrary to the essentialist ideology that imprisons women within gender roles, women in both novels find an alternative way of experiencing their motherhood and employ their maternal roles as an act of resistance against the male-dominated society. In addition, both novels show that through solidarity and unity between women and men, the power to challenge the patriarchal order may be attained.

Keywords: Motherhood, Matricentric Feminism, Feminist Dystopian Writing, Resistance

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Aim of the Study

The aim of this thesis is to explore socially constructed roles of mothers, the oppression they suffer from in the patriarchal society, women's resilience and empowerment against marginalization as is represented in Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* (2018) and Christina Dalcher's *Vox* (2018) with a dystopian context. This thesis focuses on these novels because all female characters are marginalized, oppressed and abused in the male-dominated society. In addition, some of these characters have internalized the patriarchal ideology and are not aware of the patriarchal surveillance of their female bodies. Women in these novels are controlled and silenced by a theocratic government. In *Red Clocks*, women are sentenced if they try to have abortion or leave the country, and in *Vox*, women are devoid of economic freedom and education rights. Accordingly, this thesis argues that contrary to the essentialist ideology that imprisons women within gender roles, women characters in both novels find an alternative way of experiencing their motherhood and employ their maternal roles as an act of resistance against the male-dominated society. In addition, this thesis also argues that through solidarity, equality, unity and alliance, not only emphasized by the bonding between women but also between women and men, the power to challenge the patriarchal system may be attained.

Leni Zumas is an American writer from Washington D.C. She is the author of *Farewell Navigator: Stories* (2008), *the Listeners* (2012), and *Red Clocks* (2018). She was a nominee for the literary John Dos Passos Prize in 2021, and *Red Clocks* was nominated for the Orwell Prize for political fiction and Neukom Award for speculative fiction. *Red Clocks* has been translated into eight languages. As a feminist author who drew inspiration from her own experience becoming a mother, Leni Zumas created a feminist dystopia in her novel that reveals readers what it means to live as a woman in a society that is dominated by men. In an interview, Zumas admits that she was inspired by the political laws that prohibit abortion in the U.S. while writing her dystopian novel. She says that after Trump was elected, she revised her novel several times with the disbelief and horror because she could not believe the laws that control women's bodies. Thus, she states that by writing about ordinary characters who are not politically active in their lives, she wanted to show that it is when "things start to happen to them. And that's the kind of horrifying wakeup" (DeFreitas, 2019, n.p.).

In Zumas's dystopian novel, *Red Clocks*, five female protagonists experience hardship as a result of the abortion ban. The novel is set in an isolated Oregon village in America where abortion is prohibited nationwide. The "Personhood Amendment" law gives unborn children full human rights from the time of their conception. Fertilization is forbidden since embryos cannot consent to being transferred outside the body, and as a result, "Every Child Needs Two", a law that forbids single people from adopting is put into action. Because of the metaphorical "Pink Wall" which is a diplomatic agreement between America and Canada, border police are authorized to forcibly arrest and test any woman that they suspect of being pregnant. The story centers around five women living in a tiny village whose mysteries are revealed throughout the novel. Each woman in the novel represents a different way and understanding of mothering. The reader follows an intertwined story of "Biographer" Roberta (Ro) Stephens, an unmarried high school teacher in her early forties trying to conceive a baby through fertilization before her time runs out; "The Daughter" Mattie Quarles, an adopted high school student struggling with her unexpected pregnancy; "The Wife" Susan Korsmo, a normative housewife with two children stuck in a loveless marriage; "The Mender" Gin Percival, a healer who assists women with their gynecological maladies and unwanted pregnancies and she is also the biological mother of Mattie, Eivør Mínervudottír, a long-dead explorer of whom Ro writes a biography of. The novel is divided into chapters narrating five women's lives from their own perspective. Offering many voices and consciousness and interrupting each other's words and stories in the novel parallels what Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, coins "Polyphonic Novel". Silvia Martinez asserts that Zumas's *Red Clocks*, "as a polyphonic novel, [it] sustains reflection on the blurred borders between history and fiction in the interspersed sections" (Martinez, 2021, p. 276). While writing about Eivør's life story, Roberta's own story in her chapters often intersects with Eivør's historical life stories. Thus, the border between the past and the present in some chapters blurs. Moreover, Zumas emphasizes the roles of women in society by not revealing the names of each character in the chapters. In a place where abortion is illegal, these women lose control over their bodies and lives. Thus, this work focuses on what it means to live inside a woman's body.

From a different yet related perspective, Christina Dalcher presents the reader with a feminist dystopian world. Christina Dalcher is a linguist, novelist, and flash fiction writer from America. She earned her doctorate in theoretical linguistics from Georgetown University. Her short stories and flash fiction appeared in more than one hundred journals worldwide. Dalcher won the first

prize in the Bath Flash Fiction Award (2019), the second prize in Bartleby Snopes Dialogue-Only Contest (2016), and she was nominated for The Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Best Small Fictions. Dalcher is the author of *Vox* (2018), *Master Class* (2020), *Q* (2020), and *Femlandia* (2021). Her first novel, *Vox*, published in 2018, and has been translated into twenty different languages. *Vox* presents a dystopian near future where women lose their voices in the United States. According to the critic who wrote praise for *Vox* in *Vanity Fair* magazine, “considering the threat of a society in which children like the protagonist’s six-year-old daughter are deprived of language, *Vox* highlights the urgency of movements like #MeToo” (As cited in Fisher, 2018, n.p.). In an interview, Dalcher states that as a linguist who has a PhD in theoretical linguistics, she was inspired by a famous study called “Genie”. Genie is a girl who was raised without language, and Dalcher wrote the character Sonia, the protagonist’s daughter who was fitted by bracelets while she was in critical age to stress the importance of language in human’s lives (O’Keeffe, 2018). Furthermore, according to the *Washington Post* magazine although “Trump is never named in the pages, the allusion is clear since the novel opens with the administration of a totalitarian leader after America's first black president” (Charles, 2018, n.p.).

Dalcher’s *Vox* was announced as the next *The Handmaid’s Tale* since “both are set in a society where motherhood and purity are fetishised” (Butter, 2018, n.p.). The novel’s protagonist, Jean, is a former neurolinguistics researcher. Women in *Vox* are confined in the realm of their houses by a totalitarian leader. They lose most of their rights in a very short time. They are banished from reading any books except Bible, they are removed from the workforce, and fitted with bracelets that prevent them from speaking more than 100 words a day. The goal is that they will be more submissive to their husbands and if they try to break the law, they will be sent to labor camps as prisoners with special bracelets that will kill them if they speak even a word. Deprived of all her rights, Jean is trapped in a house with her husband and four children. In a world where half the population's voice was cut down with the metal bracelets and with surveillance cameras that make sure sign language is also not used, female characters struggle, and they feel helpless when their sons or husbands start to become vocal defenders of this totalitarian, patriarchal regime. *Vox* is about the bleak future of women who lose their rights, voices, control of their lives and their bodies. It tells a powerful story where the female body is the target of men. In this dystopian feminist story, not only do women lose all their rights but also, they are forced to perform stereotypical gender roles such as staying at home and raising their children. The writer analyzes

the women's oppression but also the women's resistance towards this patriarchal oppression. It depicts how the female characters react to this oppression. Through another female character called Jackie, “the louder sort of the crowd” as Jean defines (Dalcher, 2018, p. 16), Dalcher tries to show us that thanks to marginalized, activist women like her, society may still have a chance to overthrow the patriarchy.

Both Zumas and Dalcher reveal in their novels how mothers are systematically weakened in the patriarchal system and the motherhood roles of women have been used to deny their rights because in patriarchal motherhood, being a mother is a pre-requisite role for a woman. Wendy Chavkin supports this as such:

[M]otherhood is one of the most intimate and essential of human connections and therefore of concern to all; and female biological reproductive capacity and social assignment for childcaring and the maintenance of domestic life have been centrally connected with women's subordinate status across many cultures and historic eras. (Chavkin, 2010, p. 4)

However, women in both novels are marginalized women who go against the mandates of patriarchal motherhood mandates. Each of the five women protagonists in *Red Clocks* defy the normative motherhood mandates by representing marginal ways of motherhood. For instance, Mattie is a pregnant teenager who gets abortion, Gin gives her daughter for adoption after giving birth, Roberta tries to become a mother as a single parent, Eivør is a woman who do not wish to be a mother, and Susan represents a normative mother who struggles with motherhood mandates weighs on her. Similarly, Jean in *Vox* is a marginalized woman and mother who challenge the dictates of patriarchy. Women protagonists in both novels regain their control over their bodies and their agency through revolting against the patriarchal ideologies. These writers portray the marginalization and subalternation of women in their works to show us the devastating results of patriarchy and patriarchal motherhood. In a world where men's dominance has been strengthened and enforced by the full power of states since there has been a continuous lack of women in positions of power, the biggest challenge that women in the novels face is patriarchal systems where men hold positions of social, economic, and political power. The patriarchal order and internalized patriarchal beliefs hold control over these women's bodies.

Furthermore, in order to tackle the women's problems in their writings, Zumas and Dalcher write in a feminist critical dystopian fiction genre because it “offers both criticism and a transformation of the present by exploring the struggles of small groups that act both individually

and collectively” (Baccolini, 2022, p. 1231). Also, according to Baccolini, women writers started using the dystopian genre because:

Women writers, therefore, have necessarily had to resist and possibly revise the essentially masculine literary heritage with its notions of well-defined genres, while feminist critics have exposed different issues regarding women’s writing, canon formation, and genre theory. In particular, feminist criticism has focused on the ways in which women were marginalized into non-canonical genres, on women’s use of generic forms traditionally dominated by men, and women’s use of genres of their own – although feminist theory has also questioned the very establishment of genre and its consequences. (Baccolini, 2022, p. 1229)

While Dalcher’s dystopian world is bleaker with electrocuting bracelets and surveillance cameras, Zumas paints a more realistic picture of women’s oppression because Zumas claims in an interview that “I was kind of imagining this more as, not a dystopia, but a paratopia, something about dystopia feels so solidly separate from us, and I wanted to invite the reader to experience the world of *Red Clocks* as, ‘This is actually happening, maybe next week’” (as cited in Crum, 2018, n.p.). By using the word “paratopia” which means “near” or “around” instead of dystopia, Zumas would like to stress on the reality and perhaps the urgency of the dangers that women are going through. On the other hand, all these elements discussed above also make the feminist critical dystopian form “a concrete tool of resistance and critique” (Baccolini, 2022, p. 1231) because according to Foucault, if there is domination or “power-over”, there is also resistance since they complement each other (Foucault, 1990). In order to understand the women’s resistance but also empowerment in the dystopian world, Allen’s different understandings of power based on Foucault’s power theory will be discussed. Allen discusses that while defining power, it is important to ask: “What interests feminists when we are interested in power?” (Allen, 2018, p. 121). Thus, the different senses of power such as “power over”, “power to”, and “power with” as proposed by Allen will be highlighted and discussed in terms of revealing the power relationship in the novels. The relationship between power and resistance will also offer insight into women’s resistance and empowerment. Lastly, it will be argued that according to feminist theorists such as Hannah Arendt and Amy Allen, “solidarity” between men and women together may be a solution to women’s oppression and subordination in a patriarchal society since human beings in general are interconnected and what happens to women ultimately will affect men (Allen, 2018). They conclude as such:

[Solidarity] is achieved through a mutual promise or shared commitment to act in concert, not an exclusionary unity that is presumed in advance. And although this power grows out of promises and shared commitments, these commitments must be subject to contestation and revision; otherwise, the promises will cease to bind and

the power will disappear. Thus, this conception offers feminists a way of understanding the requirements for forging relations of solidarity between unique, distinct women (and men) of different races, classes, ethnicities, and sexual orientations, who are, as a result of their differences, differently empowered. (Allen, 2018, pp. 109-110)

Overall, this thesis aims to address to study the oppression and subordination of the 21st-century women in patriarchal society with a specific reference to the theories of patriarchal motherhood offered by Adrienne Rich, Orna Donath, Nancy Chodorow and “matricentric feminism” coined by Andrea O’Reilly. In this light, it will be highlighted that patriarchal motherhood roles of women need to be discussed for the sake of challenging these conventions that confine women to the role of giving birth to a child and mothering in a patriarchal world. Also, to demonstrate how women in both novels make their voices heard, stand up to the patriarchal system, and regain their rights in dystopic worlds, theoretical framework is mainly based on the concept of power and the importance of solidarity proposed by Baccolini, Foucault, and Amy Allen.

2. Theoretical Background

Amy Andrada argues that since women’s central role at home is being a “mother”, the role of mothers is defined by male partner or children in family (Andrada, 2019). However, although the word “mother” is also defined as female parent in the dictionary, as Mielle Chandler points out, it should be “understood as a verb; as something one does, a practice” (Chandler, 2021, p. 531). LaChance states that the word “mother” should not be only linked with biological mothers, or even women since it is not dictated by nature but by choice (LaChance, 2010). In the patriarchal society, motherhood which is institutionalized and constructed with an ideology is only linked with women. However, O’Reilly argues:

Scholars of motherhood have long recognized that Rich’s distinction between mothering and motherhood was what enabled feminists to realize that motherhood is not naturally, necessarily, or inevitably oppressive, which is a view held by some second-wave feminists. Rather, if freed from the institutional shackles of motherhood, mothering could be experienced as a site of empowerment and social change. (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 59)

Thus, according to feminist scholars, mothering and motherhood need to be differentiated because whereas mothering refers to the practice a mother which is regarded to be empowering and female-defined, patriarchal institution of motherhood is socially created, oppressive, and “male defined” (O’Reilly, 2007, p. 794).

For feminist scholars, the word “woman” is also problematic since it is defined by the word “man”. Thus, the term "womxn" has been used in feminist writing since the 1970s to avoid linguistic sexism, and “womxn” began gaining more attention in the 2010s as a term because intersectional feminists promoted it as explicitly inclusive. It became popular in 2017 when Ebony Miranda, the organizer of the Women's March, proposed using “womxn” for those affected by misogyny, oppression, or any women-related issues, and Catriona Ida Macleod, Tracey Feltham-King, Jabulile Mary-Jane Jace Mavuso, and Tracy Morison use the term “womxn” and "womxnhood" in their writing to disrupt normative assumptions about gender and sex (Macleod et al., 2019). They explain that “the term ‘womxn’ denotes and recognises womxn-identifying persons with the biological capacity to become pregnant, including intersex and transgender individuals, of womxn of colour, womxn, trans, queer and intersex womxn, as well as all womxn-identifying persons who have been excluded from dominant constructions of ‘womanhood’ and feminist praxis on the subject” (Macleod et al., 2019, p. 30). In patriarchal society, according to Lynch and Shapiro, childlessness, intentional or not, has been seen as problematic and voluntary childlessness in particular unlike involuntary childlessness have been seen greatly problematic. (Lynch et al., 2018 & Shapiro, 2014). Drawing from an early essay published in the “Journal of Ethics” in the 1920s:

To remain, voluntarily, childless, to renounce the privilege and to refuse the responsibility of parenthood, for any reason but the altruistic one of unfitness, is to be not a quickening stream but a stagnant pool. No man, no woman, can reach full spiritual stature without mating and natural fruition. No life that was ever lived was worth while for the mere living of it. (Robb, 1920, p. 205)

Thus, according to the essay in the 1920s, motherhood was thought of as essential, natural, and privilege for women. However, what is alarming according to Ross and Solinger is that some of these normative mandates are still valid for the women of the 21st century. They argue that maternity is thought to be expected and natural element of adulthood, in contrast to woman who are too young, too poor or unsuited for motherhood (Ross & Solinger, 2017).

Historically, motherhood has become a topic of much scholarly debate. In the 1970s, the women's movement against the patriarchal society has risen and the ideological construction of motherhood has been questioned. Thus, the topic of motherhood has been an important study for scholars. What is commonly discussed by feminist scholars is the gap between normative motherhood and the real-life experiences of mothers in patriarchal society. According to O'Reilly, “patriarchal motherhood has become the official meaning of motherhood that marginalizes and

renders illegitimate alternative practices of mothering” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 58). Mothering which is essentially empowering for women has turned into a cause of oppression because patriarchal motherhood or motherhood institution has a history and ideology. It was purposefully designed by men to dominate women. In the Victorian period that followed industrialization, for instance, where women were seen as “angels in the house”, women had very few rights and freedom. Bearing children, attending the house, and being submissive were encouraged and enforced by society because “happy homemakers” were necessary for men’s own agenda. O’Reilly puts forward a powerful argument and terms the “ten ideological assumptions of patriarchal motherhood” in her book, *Matricentric Feminism Theory, Activism, and Practice* (2021).” In sum, she states that these ten ideological mandates may be acknowledged as the theoretical framework of patriarchal motherhood. Namely these are: “essentialization” which positions motherhood basis of female identity, “privatization” restricts mothers in the realm of the home, “individualization” enforces that mothering is the responsibility of a single person, “naturalization” means that being a mother is expected and natural to all women, “normalization” assumes that mother is a wife and father is a provider. “Expertization and intensification” enounce childrearing is all day job and expert-driven whereas “depolicialization” mandates that being a mother should be private and unpolitical. Lastly, “biologicalization” lays stress on blood ties and birthmother (O’Reilly, 2021, pp. 10-11). According to Bowlby’s “attachment theory”, children who were not raised according to the dictates of these ideological mandates would suffer from “maternal deprivation” and it would have tremendous effect on child’s life (Vicedo, 2011). Hence, “intensive mothering” where mothering is regarded as the holiest job that requires all the time, resource, and energy of the female emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. For Rich and also other feminist scholars, “intensive mothering” and “attachment theory” of Bowlby result in oppression on mothers. The oppression is not because children have needs and attention, but the society’s mandates that only biological mothers can fulfill the needs of children (Rich, 2006).

Kawash argues that nowadays the topic of motherhood compared to the 1970s has disappeared from feminist studies and feminist scholars in the twenty-first century have no longer focused on the issue of motherhood in their studies (Kawash, 2011). According to O’Reilly, it is because of “post-feminism -the idea that feminism is no longer needed because second-wave feminism ‘solved’ gender inequity and as a result, women can now ‘have it all’” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 96). However, O’Reilly argues that even though women have gained some of their rights and

accessed to educational and professional contexts with the second-wave feminism, once they become mothers, children become their sole responsibility, and hamper their hard gained rights (O'Reilly, 2021). Furthermore, although numerous feminist scholars have challenged motherhood institution and ideological assumptions that historically and socially constructed on the female body, women in the twenty-first century are still considered as the sole responsible of childrearing and as Hall states, women are believed that they were born “with a built-in set of capacities, dispositions, and desires to nurture children and [this] love and instinct is utterly distant from the world of paid work” (Hall, 2007, p. 60). Thus, feminist writers and scholars such as O'Brien and O'Reilly argue that contemporary women suffer from “post second-wave split subjectivity” (O'Brien & O'Reilly, 2012) or as Orenstein calls “half-changed” (Orenstein, 2000). According to scholars, although women's lives in the modern world are similar to the lives of men in terms of educational and professional contexts thanks to second-wave feminist movements, their lives change fundamentally once they become mothers. As a result, according to O'Reilly, “contemporary women's subjectivity, then, is split between newfound gains as unencumbered women and old gendered expectations when become mothers” (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 79). Furthermore, according to Williams (2000), once become a mother, women in the twentieth-century face “the maternal wall” that compels mothers out of the workforce. According to him, “the maternal wall” shows itself in some ways as follows:

Negative competence assumptions (once mothers, women are regarded as less committed to their careers); negative prescriptive stereotyping, both benevolent and hostile (it is assumed that mothers should be more feminine and devoted to family, lest they be viewed as too masculine); and attribution bias (the assumption that if mothers are away from or late to work, then, it is because of their children). (Williams, 2000, p. 97)

Hence, when women come back to work after giving birth, they encounter many obstacles that make their lives harder. They are judged according to the performance of their maternal roles.

Feminist critics argue that today, the condition of mothers is even harder than in the 1950s and 60s since raising a child was a full-time job for women in the 50s and 60s. According to Hays, the definition of “a good mother” in the past was an intuitive and intensive mother who personally accountable for the sole care of their children while also being constantly emotionally present to their children. She was supposed to invest in their development while providing them countless activities to do (Hays, 1996). Arendell adds on the argument and continues: A good mother is “heterosexual, married, and monogamous ... White and native born ... not economically self-sufficient ... ‘not employed’”. ‘Good mother’ discourses and images are culturally and temporarily

located” (Arendell, 1999, p. 3). Now, intensive mothering of the 50s and 60s turned into “new momism”. New momism ideals add on the mothers’ oppression since “embedded in the new momism is the idea that women have their own ambitions and money, raise kids on their own, or freely choose to stay at home with kids rather than being forced to” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 5). However, it is emphasized as follows:

[T]he feminist insistence that woman [sic] have choices, that they are active agents in control of their own destiny, that they have autonomy. But here’s where the distortion of feminism occurs. The only truly enlightened choice to make as a woman, the one that proves, first, that you are a ‘real’ woman, and second, that you are a decent, worthy one, is to become a ‘mom’ and to bring to child rearing a combination of selflessness and professionalism.... Thus, the new momism is deeply contradictory: It both draws from and repudiates feminism. (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 5)

Thus, it is argued that the empowerment of women in the twenty-first century “is now entrenched, even acknowledged and utilized, within the new momism” (Hallstein, 2010, p. 115). Accordingly, new momism has become the essential ideology of “post feminism” that it means women in today’s world can do anything a man can do as long as they are perfect, selfless mothers (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Furthermore, good mothers for society are intuitive nurturers and intensive mothers, they are 24/7 emotionally available for their children. They are responsible for providing endless activities and investing in children’s development and lastly, mothers are held individually responsible for the care of children (Hays, 1996). To this extent, “new momism” distorts feminism since the ideology feeds on women’s right to choose (Douglas & Michael, 2004). O’Reilly elaborates on it: “The new momism not only enacts and reinforces the essentialization, normalization, and idealization of patriarchal motherhood, but it also distorts and disguises it as an empowered, or in other words ‘enlightened,’ mothering” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 96).

Today, women's mothering is defined by society's rules and the mandates of patriarchal society decide who is a good mother or not. According to Mimi Schippers’s definition, “idealised feminine [is defined] as ‘Gatekeepers’: Mothers [who] are stay-at-home, white, middle-class, and presumably married”. However, the other group called “pariahs” or “rebels”, are defined as “unpartnered mothers [which] represent resistance to feminine normative identities” (Schippers, 2004, p. 175). Extending Shippers, Becker and Goffman argue that women and mothers who resist the “Gatekeepers” are outgroups, and they are often othered or labelled, and this othering and labelling form stigma and discrimination (Becker, 1973 & Goffman, 1963). However, Rich argues that in order to resist patriarchal motherhood and empower mothers, we need “bad mothers” or

“outlaws” because outlaws will be identified as good mothers whereas patriarchal mothers as bad mothers (Rich, 2006). O’Reilly extends Rich’s argument and argues that in this way there will be a movement in society from motherhood to mothering which is empowering to women (O’Reilly, 2021). Feminist scholars emphasize that empowered mothers are better mothers for children. They are healthier women and more productive workers. Thus, empowered mothers are beneficial for their families and society. For this reason, O’Reilly asserts that a theory that will empower mothers and “consider how mothers from various cultural positions resist patriarchal motherhood to achieve an identity and experience of maternal empowerment” need to be developed (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 104). She continues:

Whereas patriarchal motherhood characterizes childrearing as a private, nonpolitical undertaking, my theory of empowered mothering redefines motherwork as a socially engaged enterprise and a site of power wherein mothers can affect social change, both in the home through feminist childrearing and outside the home through maternal activism. (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 106)

For Rich, on the other hand, motherhood in the modern time is “powerless responsibility” in the form of dominant culture’s values and expectations (Rich, 2006). Rich believes that patriarchal motherhood not only harms mothers but also children. She tackles the mother-daughter problem and dwells on how patriarchal motherhood leaves children as well as mothers weakened. Rich argues that since daughters do not wish to be aligned with their mother who is powerless in oppressive culture, they feel rage and hatred towards their mothers which Rich calls this distancing as “matrophobia” (Rich, 2006) and this distancing or breach of trust between mother and daughter leave daughters adrift and powerless. For the sons, on the other hand, Chodorow argues that according to Freud’s Oedipal separation theory, in the world of the father in patriarchal system where “masculinity is distinct from and preferable to femininity” (as cited in O’Reilly, 2021, p. 71), the Oedipal boy must reject his mother since “mother is the other” (Chodorow, 1999). Also, according to Mariam Irene Tazi-Preve:

For women, Freud’s model positions the male partner as an emotional surrogate for the lost mother. This dependency, which is often also economical, is a result of having intersected the mother-daughter-bond by eliminating matrilinearity and replacing it with a husband. Separation from one’s children in many countries happens at an early age. In the U.S., teenagers often move to distant colleges, which is supposedly the right step toward developing independence. This leads often to early marriage or partnership, due to the fact that long-term monogamous relationships are considered to be the only socially acceptable norm. Returning to one’s mother—even temporarily—is considered to be emotionally infantile and/or caused by a professional failure. (Tazi-Preve, 2020, p. 169)

As for the mothers, they are already afflicted by second wave split subjectivity in the modern era and they are also expected to follow the patriarchal mandates of naturalization that assumes all mothers naturally love their children.

Almond claims that mothers suffer from “maternal ambivalence” which is a complex mental state in which love and hate feelings towards their children mingle and exist side by side. Almond continues that when women cannot meet the society’s expectations on being a good mother, they feel incompetent and angry (Almond, 2011). Lionel Shriver comments as follows:

While we may have taken the lid of sex, it is still out of bounds to say that you do not like your own kids, that the sacrifices they have demanded of you are unbearable, or perish the thought, you wish you never had them. (Shriver, 2005, n.p.)

According to O’Reilly, this paradox of women which mothers both love and hate their children at the same time may be explained through Rich’s argument that between this love and hate emotions of motherhood “one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution – which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control” (Rich, 2006, p. 7). Treleaven also notes that even though we share everything on the social media, we as mothers are still afraid of sharing our feelings towards motherhood and she says that “[r]egretting motherhood is the biggest to date” (Treleaven, 2016, n.p.). Kingston puts forward that “maternal regret” is “an affront to the sanctity of motherhood and the entrenched belief that maternal instinct is innate and unconditional” (Kingston, 2018, n.p.). Indeed, “maternal regret” that women feel against their children is the greatest threat against patriarchal motherhood since it clearly indicates that motherlove is not innate and natural for all women and not all women find purpose and joy in motherhood. Donath explains “maternal regret” under six themes: “who I was and who I am; motherhood as traumatic experience; bonds and fetters of maternal love; obligated to care; being a mother and a never-ending story” (Donath, 2017, pp. 102-108). However, O’Reilly argues that if women start to experience “maternal regret”, it is assumed by society that it is not because women’s dislike of motherhood, but it is because societal circumstances were not right since otherwise every woman would find joy in motherhood. Rothman claims that if women had more help with their children, they would find mothering tolerable even enjoyable (Rothman, 2000). O’Reilly, on the other hand, claims that “this assumption reinforces the patriarchal dictates of normative motherhood” (O’Reilly, 2019, p. 23), and Rothman’s statement is problematic in a couple of ways because it assumes that if the conditions were right, all women would enjoy being a mother. Yet, according

to Donath's study in 2017, "maternal regret" is not only a matter of right or wrong conditions. In her research, regardless of women's social conditions -poor, rich, single, married etc., they all admitted that they experienced "maternal regret". Thus, Donath concludes her argument that "improving the conditions of their motherhood would not necessarily eradicate regret because it is motherhood itself that they find intolerable" (Donath, 2017, p. 203). Furthermore, since mothers are afraid of being judged by society, what Maushart terms as "the mask of motherhood", mothers "deny and repress what [they] experience, to misrepresent it, even to [themselves]" (Maushart, 1999, pp. 1-2). Thus, mothers who are oppressed under the ideologies such as "essentialization", "naturalization", and "idealization" feel the need of wearing "the mask of motherhood". However, Maushart continues arguing that "unmasking the motherhood" and shattering the unattainable image of motherhood is essential to empower the mothering (Maushart, 1999). Donath adds:

Silencing regret impacts women who do not want to be mothers (both those who have children and those who do not): women who do want to be mothers (and who may or may not have children); and children – all of them suffer the actual consequences. (Donath, 2017, p. 221)

Furthermore, For Elizabeth Butterfield "maternal authenticity" which refers to "independence of mind and the courage to stand up to dominant values' and to being truthful about motherhood and remaining true to oneself in motherhood" (Butterfield, 2010, p. 701) is crucial for empowered mothering. Indeed, acknowledging and voicing the "maternal regret" in society is a feminist resistance against normative motherhood that regulate women's mothering and consequently empowering to women who are mothers or not since it debunks the mandates of patriarchal motherhood.

To "unmask the motherhood" or to have "maternal authenticity", Naomi Lowinsky introduces the term "motherline". It is "a world- view that is as old as humankind, a wisdom we have forgotten that we know: the ancient lore of women" (Lowinsky, 1992, p. 1). She argues that when women gathered in circles in the past, they shared the stories of female experience physical, psychological or historical such as giving birth, bleeding, menopause and these stories connect generations of women: "mothers who are also daughters, daughters who have become mothers; grandmothers who also remain granddaughters" (Lowinsky, 1992). She believes that most women in modern times are cut off from their "motherline". Thus, they suffer from what she calls "the feminist ambivalence about the feminine". Thus, she stresses that women, or more specifically mothers in the twenty-first century need a movement that will focus on mothers' needs to regain "motherline". Also, Johnson introduces the concept of "matrifocality", and she explains that in

matrifocal societies women define themselves as mothers rather than wives because according to her, while women are strong as mothers, they are weak as wives since it is the wife role that primarily causes oppression in patriarchal society (Johnson, 1988). O'Reilly lists the roles of normative wife according to patriarchal norms as follows:

The normative wife role assumes and expects that 1) the family will be organized around the career of the husband; 2) the career of the wife, should she have one, will be necessarily secondary to that of her husband; 3) the wife is to support her husband's career and its advancement; and 4) the woman is responsible for and performs the many and varied tasks of maintaining the household and homemaking. (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 78)

In matrifocal cultures, on the contrary, there is greater gender equality and women are more empowered as mothers (Johnson, 1988). Likewise, Chodorow emphasizes that "matrifocality" in society resolves "matrophobia" since it is empowering to mother. It strengthens mother-daughter identification and results in a strong sense of self in daughters (Chodorow, 1999). O'Reilly extends Johnson's concept of matrifocality in society and terms "matrifocal narrative". She believes that matrifocal narratives where motherhood is valued in the plot, and from the perspective of the mother are needed (O'Reilly, 2021). Quinzio argues that "it is impossible for feminist theory to avoid the issue of motherhood and it is impossible for feminist theory to resolve it" (Quinzio, 1999, xx). O'Reilly continues: "If feminist theory is not the means to resolution, matrifocal narrative may well be" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 45).

Consequently, O'Reilly believes that "a mother-centered feminism is needed because mothers -arguably more so than women in general remain disempowered despite forty years of feminism" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 42). She uses the term "matricentric feminism" to convey the ideology of mother-centered feminism and she defines:

[Matricentric feminism] is explicitly matrifocal in its perspective and emphasis—it begins with the mother and takes seriously the work of mothering—and that it is multidisciplinary and multi-theoretical: regards mothering as work that is important and valuable to society but emphasizes that the essential task of mothering is not, and should not be, the sole responsibility and duty of mothers; contests, challenges, and counters the patriarchal oppressive institution of motherhood and seeks to imagine and implement a maternal identity and practice that is empowering to mothers. (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 46)

O'Reilly elaborates on it, and she argues that matricentric feminism challenges patriarchal motherhood's ideologies and while it has a mother-centered perspective, it is not maternalist. Consequently, its focus is on mothers rather than politics of maternalism (O'Reilly, 2021). Matricentric feminist theory is against maternalist theory which positions maternity as the basis of female identity. It challenges the ideologies of patriarchal motherhood. Bueskens supports

O'Reilly's ideas, and she asserts that motherhood is the source of oppression and inequality as we see in the career profiles, income, leisure, or lack of these things and according to her that is why matricentric feminism is definitely needed (Bueskens, 2021). She asserts that "[b]eing a mother continues to undermine women's equality and because that equality needs to be refracted through the lens of difference to accommodate the plethora of mothers' voices in turn redefining the very meaning of equality" (Bueskens, 2021, p. 39). Bueskens continues: "Mothers are the unspeakable of feminism, the 'problem with no acceptable name.' But it now has one: matricentric feminism. O'Reilly has bequeathed us with a term that is at once critical, political, avowedly feminist, and mother centred" (Bueskens, 2021, p. 39). For O'Reilly, matricentric feminism repositions the word "mothering" as a verb makes it resistant but inclusive and through this "it ultimately moves beyond gender. In its explicit and emphatic matrifocal perspective, matricentric feminism is concerned with anyone who identifies as a mother and/or practices mothering" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 30).

O'Reilly claims that the word mother and mothering is troubling for feminists since "feminists are uncomfortable with anything that underscores gender differences and suggests essentialism and...more than anything else [motherhood] marks binary gender differences" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 27). For feminist theories, gender differences are the central cause of the oppression of women. She argues that "liberal feminists advocate what has been called 'sameness feminism,' wherein women become more like men. Radical-libertarian feminists promote androgyny, and poststructuralist feminists seek to destabilize and deconstruct gender difference altogether" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 27). However, O'Reilly challenges these ideas and asserts that although motherhood is constructed, mothering should not be disavowed. Mariam Irene Tazi-Preve adds on the topic as follows:

It is urgent to understand that in patriarchy mothers will never be offered anything other than a constant negotiation of unacceptable options, politically labelled as 'freedom of choice.' This is what I call the Mother Trap. The analysis of motherhood under patriarchy shows that equality for women is only possible for childless women, and that therefore female procreation is an obstacle to real emancipation. But the irony is that women without children do not reach equality either. (Tazi-Preve, 2020 p. 170)

O'Reilly believes that "matricentric feminism" provides resistance and empowerment for women (O'Reilly, 2021). She believes that mothers need a separate feminism who will empower them because she continues:

Mothers, in other words, do not live simply as women but as mother women, just as black females do not live simply as women but as racialized women. Moreover, mothers' oppression and resistance under

patriarchy are shaped by their maternal identity, just as black women's oppression and resistance are shaped by their racialized identity. Thus, mothers need a feminism of their own—one that positions mothers' concerns as the starting point for a theory and politic of empowerment. (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 226)

Rich asserts that women are born into a world so hostile that they need love to learn to love themselves. However, “this loving is not simply the old, institutionalized, sacrificial, ‘mother-love’ which men have demanded; we want courageous mothering (Rich, 2006, p. 246). Thus, O'Reilly argues that “feminist theory moves from a repudiation of patriarchal motherhood to a recuperation of motherhood...the final act must be expressed as a revolution of motherhood for mothers themselves” (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 209) and “matricentric feminism recuperates the word ‘mothering’ by positioning it as a verb and divesting it of biology, thus making it not only resistant but inclusive” (2021, p. 29).

Feminist writers such as Zumas and Dalcher choose to write in dystopian fiction in response to the oppression where women are deprived of their fundamental rights because according to Bashford “feminist dystopia has ... become an outlet not only for women's anger, but for their disillusion, disempowerment, and more heartbreakingly -their fear” (Bashford, 2019, n.p.). Before moving on with the analysis, a short theoretical background is a prerequisite to be able to explain the essential concepts of dystopia. Dystopia is viewed as a subgenre of literary utopianism and the word utopia (eu-topia) means no place and according to Ildney Cavalcanti, the word utopia is contradictory in itself since it refers to a “good place” and also a “no place” at the same time (Cavalcanti, 2003). Dystopia, on the other hand, according to Cranny-Francis's definition is “the textual representation of a society worse than the writer's/reader's own” (Cranny-Francis, 1990, p. 125) and Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash argue that both Utopia and Dystopia are derived from the longing of the better future, and both are concerned with change and “seek[ing] to alter the social order on a fundamental, systemic level” (Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash, 2010, p. 2). As argued by Stockwell, while “utopia (no place) is our reality, dystopia is a dis-placement of our reality” (Stockwell, 2000, p. 211). Gregory Claeys supports this argument and claims that division between Utopia and Dystopia continuously blurs because “what is utopia for a few rests on dystopia for the many” (Claeys, 2021, p. xx). The contrary of Utopia, Dystopia offers little space for hope for the readers. Thus, Jessica Norledge argues that as a combined form of utopia and dystopia “critical dystopias maintained a sense of utopian hope within their presentation of negatively refracted futures, both as regards a hopeful ending for the texts' protagonists and also for the reader in relation to their own real-world futures” (Norledge, 2022, p. 7). Thus, critical

dystopias offer utopian hope to the readers and open space for happy ending contrary to bleak depressing genre of dystopian narrative. Raffaella Baccolini makes a distinction between “dystopia” and “critical dystopia” as follows:

Dystopia is traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope in the story, only *outside* the story: only by considering dystopia as a warning can we as readers hope to escape such a dark future...but the presence of utopian hope does not necessarily mean a happy ending. Rather, awareness and responsibility are the conditions of the critical dystopia’s citizens. (Baccolini, 2004, pp. 520-521)

Following this definition, Ditum states in her article that “there is fiction that understands women’s oppression, recognises women’s subjectivity, has the imagination to stress-test how the worst case might play out, and the hope that we might pick some kind of better future from it in the end” (Ditum, 2018, n.p). According to Cavalcanti’s definition, “feminist critical dystopia, a subgenre of literary utopianism that has become a major form of expression of women’s hopes and fears, and to show the relationship between the dystopian genre in its feminist inflection, utopian desire expressed in literature” (Cavalcanti, 2003, p. 47). In line with all the things happening to women in the 21st century, feminist writers give a place for women’s sufferings and their resistance in their critical feminist dystopian writings. The post-war years saw the explosion of feminist critical dystopia by second-wave feminist writers. It powerfully emerged in the 1970s and 1980s with the works of writers such as Suzy McKee Charnas’s *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975), Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and later, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and with the contemporary feminist dystopian writers such as Joanna Kavenna’s *The Birth of Love* (2010), Eugene Fischer’s *The New Mother* (2015), Naomi Alderman’s *The Power* (2016), Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), Leni Zumas’s *Red Clocks* (2018), Christina Dalcher’s *Vox* (2018), Joanna Ramos’s *The Farm* (2019), Sophie’s Mackintosh’s *Blue Ticket* (2020), Sara Foster’s *The Hush* (2021), Megan Giddings’s *The Women Could Fly* (2022), Kirsten Miller’s *The Change* (2022). While feminist dystopian writing has been explored for years, 21st century brings a unique perspective to the genre. 21st century feminist dystopian writing such Zumas’s *Red Clocks* and Dalcher’s *Vox* is firmly rooted in the current social, political and cultural issues respond to contemporary debates on reproductive rights, gender equality, #MeToo movement, LGBTQ+ rights and intersectionality of oppression. Also, 21st century dystopian writings are more focused on the female agency and empowerment.

Thus, it can be said that the genre of feminist critical dystopia is characterized by the oppression, marginalization and intersection of feminist issues and Emrah Atasoy argues that “[d]ystopian narratives accordingly offer an ideal platform for an intersectional approach to the discussion of oppression and gender” (Atasoy, 2021, p. 223) and the oppression that women have experienced is not only gender-based but is produced through multiple, separate reasons, which conforms to the tenets of intersectional feminism. As defined by intersectional feminism which “is a lens, prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (Steinmetz, 2020, n.p.). According to Kimberlè Crenshaw who coined the term in 1989, intersectional feminism makes us understand these overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression of women. Crenshaw elaborates the definition, and she draws an analogy as follows:

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149)

Lucy McBath elaborates and points out the problem:

You cannot focus on one issue without the intersectionality of all of the issues. It’s like you have a wheel and every issue is a spoke that ties into that wheel. Until we’re able to eradicate or work on all of these kinds of issues, we’ll never solve one issue. Because they’re all intricately connected. (as cited in Gray, 2018, p. 69)

Thus, feminist critical dystopias offer representations for different women from different backgrounds and races. Furthermore, Baccolini further states that feminist critical dystopias through their “permeable borders, questioning of generic conventions, and resistance to closure” also arise as “preferred sites of resistance” because it offers the reader “empowerment, resistance, utopian imagination, and awareness” (Baccolini, 2000, p. 30).

To understand the resistance, according to Foucault, first it is essential to understand “power” because he argues that “[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather, consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1990, p. 95) Hence, he states that fundamentally resistance and power are “coextensive” (Foucault, 1988, p. 122) and the problem that women have is that they are excluded from political sphere and chained in the private sphere without power and according to Friedrich Engels, “the separation between the private and public spheres is crucial in the control of women's sexuality by men” (as cited in Gordon, 1990, p. 11). O’Brien extends the argument and claims that since men is in the

domain of political sphere, he has the ownership of private property and to assure the future of that property, he claims the ownership of children and women's reproductive labour (O'Brien, 1986). Feminists, on the other hand, divide "power" in four categories as "power as resource", "power as domination", "power as empowerment", and "power of solidarity" (Allen, 2018). "Power as resource" can be defined as the source of political power that denied from women since they are in domain of private sphere while "power as domination" indicates the dominance or as Allen argues, it is generally defined as the men's exercising power over women in patriarchal world and it indicates master-subject relation. A third feminist conception of power, "power as empowerment" specifies "the power that women are able to exercise, what we might call the power of the powerless" (Allen, 2018, p. 18), Held describes this kind of power as: "the capacity to give birth and to nurture and empower could be the basis for new and more humanly promising conceptions than the ones that now prevail of power, empowerment, and growth" (Held, 1993, p. 137). According to her, this new understanding of power will replace the old "male-defined" power which is "the power to cause others to submit to one's will, the power that led men to seek hierarchical control and ... contractual restraints" (Held, 1993, p. 136). Lastly, Allen divides two concepts of unity "sisterhood" and "solidarity" since former refers to women's bond against oppression, yet the latter can be defined as united togetherness of men and women in the face of oppression (Allen, 2018) and as she discusses while the former indicates "power-over" or "power-to", solidarity and sisterhood can be viewed as the third sense of power which is "power-with" (Allen, 2018).

Since women are excluded from "power" in public and private spheres systematically, "women begin the journey of resisting and refusing to accept the order of things according to androcentric doctrines" (Kalev, 2018, p. 280). Resistance, from theoretical standpoint, is defined as "acts that challenge the structured power relations of class, race, disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other forms of societal stratifications" (Shaw, 2001, p. 188) and Henriette Dahan Kalev explains the journey of women's resistance as follows:

For years, the women walked on the path of obedience for the reason of keeping their only breadwinning source and, more extensively, sometimes it meant saving their lives. This became a norm in the global capitalist era. Years after the affair was over, its memory was registered within various layers of the society. The public consciousness reflected through bringing up illustration from the affair that demonstrated examples of violation of gender order, women disobedience, but also the ability of marginal women to become agents and courageously take control of their lives. (Kalev, 2019, p. 281)

Moravec argues that excluding women from politics sphere for years is because of the belief that women are born with certain qualities “such as emotionality which rendered them too irrational. When women invoke the bonds of womanhood, when they speak from their personal grief, even when they read protest letters in public, they do not become politically efficacious acts” (Moravec, 2010, p. 24). Historically, DiQuinzio argues that when mothers try to rebel against patriarchy or inequality in society, their voices are interpreted as emotional, predicating that women’s political resistance derives from the loss they experience or suffering rather than logic which he terms it as “politics of grief”. However, she believes that “this representation of women’s political agency in terms of emotion risks the delegitimation of maternal politics as irrational” (DiQuinzio, 2006, p. 61). She asserts that “politics of grief” risks the motherhood movement and reinforces the normative sacrificial motherhood. O’Reilly, on the other hand, challenges DiQuinzio, and argues that although maternalism is problematic for contemporary feminism, it gave many women a public voice as in “the Madres de La Plaza de Mayo” during the military dictatorship in Argentina or “Another Mother for Peace” in the United States during the Vietnam War or as Sociologist Lisa Brush claims “maternalism is feminism for hard times” (Brush, 1996, p. 431). Gibbons also adds that maternal activists used and misused the maternal essentialism and performed “good” motherhood in order to achieve “outlaw” or “activist” mothering (Gibbons, 2010). Thus, O’Reilly continues:

In the context of strategic essentialism discussed above, they decoded and deconstructed what was expected of them as ‘good’ mothers in order to role-play normative maternity to make possible their successful maternal activism. Through this, they redefined their identities as mothers as well as the larger meaning and practice of political engagement and protest. (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 154)

O’Reilly discusses that nowadays many motherhood organizations around the world such as madd, umove, Milliom Mom March, Code Pink, Mothers Acting Up employ “politics of grief” to convey their voices and Logsdon-Conradsen extends that many types of activism derive from our personal experience, and it is an elitist perspective to defend that activism should be based on the logic rather than emotion. She also questions “why mothers are questioned for being emotionally motivated, while other activists are not” and she defends that it is just another way to devalue motherhood and “holds up the stereotypically masculine trait of unemotional as more legitimate” (Logsdon-Conradsen, 2010, p. 21). O’Reilly argues that “strategic essentialism is an effective practice of resistance and protest if it is employed strategically and situated as a politic rather than a sentiment” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 155). Drawing from DiQuinzio’s “politics of grief” O’Reilly

terms “politics of the heart”: “a theory and practice that positions motherlove, or more specifically, maternal nurturance, as an act of resistance” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 155). Wilson also adds on the topic and argues that emotion could be a powerful motive for political struggle and “embodied activism” delivers the message that injustices are not abstract wrongs that hurt a particular nation but literal wounds that injure living, breathing bodies” (Wilson, 2010, pp. 235-236). Furthermore, Wilson asserts that while maternalism labels women as “natural” caretakers and prison women to their social status, activist mothering ideology “moves beyond this limiting frame by using motherhood as a launch rather than base” (Wilson, 2010, p. 233). O’Reilly continues:

Mothers develop critical awareness, acquire confidence, build community, and achieve agency in and through their resistance on behalf of their children. In other words, although motherhood activism may originate from a child-centred perspective or purpose, it becomes matrifocal and arguably feminist in the way that it results in and gives rise to an empowered and powerful maternal subjectivity. (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 158)

Thus, Sheri Lucas comes up with the term “mamazon” which “was created by merging the meanings of Amazon (the mythical tribe of warrior women who are represented as autonomous and competent, as physically, emotionally and intellectually strong) and ‘mama’” to support the idea that being a mother can be a form of resistance in political sphere for women (Lucas, 2010, p. 682).

All in all, this thesis will analyze the representations of non-normative motherhood as an act of resistance against the patriarchal motherhood mandates in *Red Clocks* and *Vox* within the framework of the theories discussed above and the women’s resistance through unity and solidarity with men who support feminism against the oppression of patriarchy and inequality. It will be highlighted that women are made vulnerable, powerless in the patriarchal system for years and women’s resistance is a response to the ways in which the system limits women’s freedom and opportunities that favoring male dominance and privilege. Furthermore, aforementioned matricentric feminism, motherhood and resistance theories will serve as a basis for the claims made in the thesis. These issues will be covered in the chapters that follow “Chapter 1: Matricentric Feminism in *Red Clocks* and *Vox*” and “Chapter 2: Women’s Resistance in Dystopian Worlds of *Red Clocks* and *Vox*”.

Chapter 1 will focus on women’s assigned roles as a mother in both novels and the concept of motherhood being shaped and influenced by patriarchal systems and structures. Women in both novels are expected to conform to certain roles assigned to them which make them weak, unhappy, and frustrated mothers. Furthermore, both writers portray marginalized, non-normative

mothers in their novels to show that mothers who go against the norm face additional layers of oppression such as discrimination, being labelled as bad mothers. However, in the end both Zumas and Dalcher reveal that the act of giving birth and raising children can be seen as a form of resistance in patriarchal system where women's bodies and reproductive rights are tried to be controlled, and non-normative mothers who resist patriarchal motherhood norms can challenge and overcome the oppressive systems they face. Thus, this thesis will emphasize the urgency of "matricentric feminism" which studies the mothers' oppression under the patriarchal motherhood mandates and offers insights to the ongoing problem on the basis of the analysis of these novels because according to Lynda R. Ross, the term 'motherhood' "is a word that was and remains imbued with a sense of goodness, something regarded as so unquestionably good as to be beyond criticism" (Ross, 2016, p. 1). However, as in the novels I will try to analyze in this thesis, there are women who do not wish to be a mother, or they may be unhappy as a mother and the role of motherhood have been a big issue for all women who are mothers or not until this date. Hence, what will be argued here on the basis of "matricentric feminism" is not the mothering of the female characters in the aforementioned novels but their motherhood roles because while mothering is a practice of nurturing, motherhood is an ideology constructed by men.

Chapter 2 will dwell on women's resistance against the oppression and subordination in both novels and how they are able to gain the control of their bodies and lives in a dystopian world. Women in both novels try to gain their own agency and autonomy by reclaiming the power from totalitarian regime with forming solidarity with other women and men who resist the patriarchal powers. Zumas and Dalcher will also show that women in both novels get empowered by their motherhood and use their mothering as an act of resistance against the system to reclaim their rights back. In the end, women in both novels have a glimpse of hope and comfort through gaining awareness and taking responsibility for their actions. Thereby, this study will touch upon mothers' and women's resistance against the system with its focus on Foucault's concept of power as well as Amy Allen's feminist understanding of power such as motherhood as a tool of empowerment and resistance, sisterhood, and solidarity. The novels will achieve this by having resort to the tenets of feminist critical dystopian writing. In doing so, the novels will present the possibility for female characters to find strength, hope, and solace in a dystopian world.

Thus, the conclusion is that Zumas's *Red Clocks* and Dalcher's *Vox* lay out the women's oppression in public and private sphere in society, and they also argue that when women become

mothers, they get disempowered and oppressed even more. However, in both novels it will also be argued that not only mothers but also children are disempowered and weakened because of the patriarchal system. Thus, through marginalized women who stand against the traditional norms that imposed on them, it will be revealed that some means of success and hope can be accomplished. Also, both novels show that women and mothers who are excluded and labelled as “bad” are the power to resist against the system. Since there is still a need to understand and study the oppression of women and the resistance, this study will offer insight to marginalized and resilient women from different backgrounds, status, and races standing up for their rights in feminist critical dystopian genre.



CHAPTER 1

MATRICENTRIC FEMINISM IN *RED CLOCKS* AND *VOX*

*“NOW I am like the earth—
I can give food;
And you, my little one, look to me only.
We are so little separate, you and I—
Still your growth comes of me,
And my strength makes you strong.
Now I am like the earth—
I can give birth to flowers, and nourish them.”*

(Campbell, 1917, n.p.)

Zumas states that *Red Clocks* started with “some personal anxiety and anguish of [her] own and expanded to be about the political future of our country” (Breslow, 2019, n.p.). She says that the novel is based on her own personal and political journey of being a mother. Zumas was dealing with infertility when she began writing her novel. She said that she came up with the idea of the novel when she was researching fertility treatments in the US and during the research, she came across references to proposed legislation that would outlaw vitro fertilization (Alter, 2018, n.p.). She also remarks during an interview that when people around her have learnt about the vitro fertilization procedure she is trying to have, they start saying “that it is unnatural, that you shouldn’t be allowed to do it, that it’s better to choose adoption” (Selvin, 2018, n.p.). Therefore, she says that all her personal experiences of being a mother pushed her to write *Red Clocks*. The novel is about “experiencing motherhood or choosing not to become a mother or the beliefs that we inherit about it” (Walton, 2018, n.p.).

Similarly, Dalcher also admits that when she was writing her novel, she was inspired by the ongoing events in the US. She claims that the Pure Movement in *Vox* is based on the 19th-century movement in the US called “the Cult of Domesticity” where women were expected to behave in certain ways, and the feminine behavior and “true womanhood” were dictated. Even though this social system that cultivate the virtues of a true woman such as “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (King, 2021, n.p.) ended in the US in the 19th century, she says that the continuation of this movement called “True Woman Revive Our Hearts Movement”, is still active in the US in the 21st century and its manifesto is as follows: “we are called as women to affirm and encourage men as they seek to express godly masculinity and to honor and

support God-ordained male leadership in the home and in the church" (O’Keeffe, 2018, n.p.). Thus, Dalcher says in another interview that “I’m particularly concerned about what might happen if (or when) too much control falls into the hands of anyone with an agenda. In *Vox*, this agenda is a return to the culture of domesticity” (Canfield, 2018, n.p.). She also indicates that she came up with the idea when “in 2017 [she] watched the women marching on Washington [the day after the inauguration of Donald Trump] and [she remembers] thinking I bet there are people out there watching this who wish those women would just shut up” (Ellor, 2018, n.p.).

Although these two novels have similarities in representing the oppression of women under the theocratic patriarchal system and society, they address the issue in different ways. While *Zumas* focuses more on the oppression of women through reproduction rights, Dalcher stresses how women are effectively silenced and gradually lose their voice. However, in both novels, it is shown that the roles of motherhood in a patriarchal society are determined by male supremacy. Furthermore, in both novels, abortion is outlawed by the patriarchal power structures such as the Personhood Amendment and religious doctrines. Yet, both novels argue that there are women who do not wish to be a mother, because they think that they may be unhappy when they become a mother, or they want to be single mothers which is perceived as unconventional. As Isabel Grant notes:

[T]he issue is not whether a pregnant woman has a moral obligation to conduct her life in a manner consistent with the best interests of her fetus. For most of us that is beyond question. Rather, the issue is whether the law should be used to enforce this moral responsibility. (Isabel, 1989, p. 220)

In *Red Clocks* and *Vox*, the ideology of patriarchal motherhood still exists in the 21st century and it tries to oppress and control women by romanticizing, idealizing, or most importantly enforcing the roles of motherhood. Andrea O’Reilly draws attention to this subject by claiming that although feminist scholars believe that “maternal empowerment and empowered mothering is essential for women’s equality and autonomy in the twenty-first century”, there are very few qualitative studies on feminist mothering or empowered mothering (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 103). Thus, she believes that “mothers are oppressed under patriarchy as women *and as mothers*. As a result, mothers need a mother-centered feminism organized from and for their particular identity and work as mothers” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 42). Matricentric feminism which is “determined what it is not (i.e., patriarchal motherhood) rather than by what it is...[it] may refer to any practice of mothering that seeks to challenge and change various aspects of patriarchal motherhood that cause mothering to be limiting or oppressive to women” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 168). Both *Zumas* and Dalcher present a

matricentric approach in their novels by demonstrating strong women who rebel against the norms of patriarchal motherhood, and they offer a feminist understanding of motherhood.

In *Red Clocks*, Zumas presents a dystopian world where abortion is outlawed, and women do not have any control over their own bodies. By presenting motherhood as women's ultimate purpose in life, a male president enacts the law that takes control of all the women's bodies in the country and deprives them of choosing not becoming a mother. As Rich points out, "most women in history have become mothers without choice" (Rich, 2006, p. 13). She reveals the psychological effects of this entrapment as follows: "Motherhood without autonomy, without choice, is one of the quickest roads to a sense of having lost control" (Rich, 2006, p. 264). Thus, Zumas exposes to the readers that motherhood institution aims at ensuring that all women should remain under the control of men and patriarchal motherhood norms. These norms promote that no woman can achieve her full position in society until she gives birth to a child. Furthermore, Zumas opposes to the belief that women should be the sole caregivers of children and they should spend all of their time and energy raising the children. According to O'Reilly, "normative motherhood, although representative of very few women's lived identities and experiences of mothering, is considered the normal and natural maternal experience: to mother otherwise is to be abnormal or unnatural" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 53). *Red Clocks* presents various portrayals of motherhood, and each woman feels entrapped by the ideology of motherhood. For instance, the protagonist, "Biographer" Roberta is a single woman who tries every possible way to conceive a baby through fertilization. She tries to stand up to society's patriarchal beliefs about being a single mother. When Ro learns she cannot get pregnant because she has ovarian polycystic, she feels frustrated. She thinks "She is a failure. She and her uterus fail, fail, fail... The biographer and her ovaries fail, fail, fail" (Zumas, 2018, p. 133). The phrase "fail" signals Ro's internal patriarchal beliefs imposed by society. Also, in the novel, when Ro sees Susan's children in the stroller or holding her hand, she envies the wife and thinks: "The wife *made persons*. No need to otherwise justify what she is doing on the planet" (2018, p. 175). She questions her desire to become a mother and tries to understand this urge is imposed on her by society or not. She says:

But why does she want them, really? Because Susan has them? Because the Salem bookstore manager has them? Because she always vaguely assumed she would have them herself? Or does the desire come from some creaturely place, pre-civilized, some biological throb that floods her blood ways with the message *Make more of yourself!* (Zumas, 2018, p. 87)

Roberta also admits that “babies once were abstractions” for her and although she has always thought that “the topic of baby craziness to be crap for lifestyle magazines”, she is now one of the women who worry about biological clocks. She cannot explain exactly why she yearns to have a baby, and maybe she thinks it is because “she has flat-out been programmed by marketing. Awash in images of mother and child, mama bear and baby bear, she learned, without knowing she was learning it, to desire them” (Zumas, 2018, p. 220). According to Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels, “motherhood became one of the biggest media obsessions of the last three decades, exploding especially in the mid-1980s and continuing unabated to the present” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 5) and the patriarchal ideology, conceiving, bearing, and raising a child is imposed as the ultimate reason for women’s existence and any woman who revolts against this ideology and refuses to get married, have children, or if she desires to be a single mother is seen as odd or even in need of help. However, matricentric feminism opposes the norms of patriarchal motherhood, and “challenges the assumption that maternity is natural to women—all women naturally know how to mother—and that the work of mothering is driven by instinct rather than intelligence and developed by habit rather than skill” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 27). By presenting non-normative ways of motherhood with different characters, Zumas shows that there is not only one understanding of mothering, and although these women are oppressed and trapped under the mandates, they “managed to salvage for [them]selves [and] for [their] children, even within the destructiveness of the institution ... the tenderness, the passion, the trust in our instincts, the evocation of a courage [they] did know [they] owned” (Rich, 1986, p. 280).

In Zumas’s dystopian world, women are treated as the inferior sex and the society they live in makes them question their maternal skills that are expected from women. Even though they stand up to the patriarchal norms, in some parts, it is understood that women also internalize these beliefs, and they cannot resist questioning themselves throughout the novels. For instance, especially “biographer” Ro often feels judged and depressed whenever she mentions having a child through vitro fertilization to her friends and families. When she comes home from work or a social event, she takes her notepad and lists all the “accusations from the world” as follows:

1. You’re too old.
2. If you can’t have a child the natural way, you shouldn’t have one at all.
3. Every child needs two parents.
4. Children raised by single mothers are more liable to rape/murder/drug-take/score low on standardized tests. (Zumas, 2018, p. 13)

Woollett and Boyle argue that motherhood is “constituted not as normal and natural for all women, but only for those who are married or in stable heterosexual relationships, who are not “too old” or “too young” and who are in the “right” economic and social positions” (Woollett & Boyle, 2000, p. 309). Ro’s list clearly shows how society makes women believe that if they are not young enough or married to a man, they are unworthy of a child and they are even selfish to try. Moreover, when Ro is in a therapy session, her therapist questions her choice of being single and asks: “Do you feel undeserving of a romantic partner?” “No,” says the biographer. “Are you pessimistic about finding a partner?” “I don’t necessarily *want* a partner.” “Might that attitude be a form of self-protection?” “You mean am I deluding myself?” (Zumas, 2018, p. 40). This scene shows that if a woman does not have a partner, it is not a choice or will, but a problem, and women are only “deluding” themselves by being happy as a single woman. The following scene between the therapist and Ro also reveals how much pressure is put on women and on their decisions to get married or remain single by society, and how it is different from male and women’s decision of not wanting a partner can only be associated with disappointment while men’s choice of being single does not have the stigma. When Roberta visits the therapist, she mentions her plan of having a child through vitro fertilization without a husband or partner and her therapist says: “Are you claiming not to need a romantic relationship in order to shield yourself from disappointment and rejection?” “Would you ask that question of a male client?” “You’re not a male client” (Zumas, 2018, p. 184). When Ro comes back home from her therapist, she adds “new accusations from the world” to her notebook such as: “Preferring one’s own company is pathological”, “Do you think anyone actually believes that you’re happy on your own?” or “Why didn’t you try harder to find a mate?” (2018, p. 136). In this regard, the patriarchal norms dictated by society have become a reality in women’s lives and make them feel judged, defenseless, and worthless. As opposed to others, marginalized women like Ro experience the worse oppression since they defy the norms of society. Women, like Ro, are made to feel less because they are not a part of the dominant male culture. Even the people who love Ro such as her father or Susan often question her choice of being single by asking “about time you found someone, don’t you think?” (Zumas, 2018, p. 38) and her father regularly sends out Rose City Singles gift certificates to force her to meet someone and get married even though she indicates that she is fine by herself several times. As Becker and Goffman claim “women and mothers that resist the ideal are outgroups. Outgroups are often viewed as othered and/or labelled (e.g. single mother)” (Becker, 1973; Goffman, 1963). Ro’s

words on the topic support Becker and Goffman's statement: "After January fifteenth, when Every Child Needs Two goes into effect, no adopted kid will have to suffer from a single woman's lack of time, her low self-esteem, her inferior earning power" (2018, p. 110). As is clearly expressed, patriarchal society forces women to have babies if they want to be whole and have meaning in their lives. However, if women do not want to have babies or if they want to have a baby against the normative motherhood ideologies, they get shunned and blamed that they are only doing this as a "defense against the pain of being alone" (Zumas, 2018, p. 184). However, even though women like Roberta who want to be a single mother are labelled as outgroup, they change the meaning of mothering and motherhood and according to "matricentric feminism" women like her in society may create alternatives and transform the meaning of motherhood (O'Reilly, 2021). Roberta shows the reader that normative motherhood is not the only right way to become a mother. By choosing to be a single mother without any father involved, she stands up against the mandates of patriarchal motherhood.

The other character, "The Wife" Susan, is a housewife with two children and stuck in a loveless marriage. Susan drops out of the law school and becomes a housewife once she learns that she is pregnant. She is the only one who gets the children from school, cooks, cleans and she describes her days as hell since the responsibility of the children is solely laid on the shoulders of her. Susan recalls: "[her husband] can't remember the name of the kids' pediatrician" (Zumas, 2018, p. 62) or "when Didier last gave them a bath" (2018, p. 258). Motherhood institution forces mothers to be completely responsible for meeting all the needs of their children because by defining women's reproduction roles in society, patriarchal culture aims to constrain and enclose women in their defined roles (O'Reilly, 2021). Rich agrees and continues: "motherhood as institution has ghettoized and degraded female potentialities" (Rich, 2006, p. 13). However, mothering in "matricentric feminism" understanding as opposed to oppressive motherhood within the patriarchal institution is empowering to mothers since "mothering" is a practice that a man, as well as a woman, can perform. In *Red Clocks*, we witness that Susan does all the sacrifices and she has all the responsibility for their children. When she gets pregnant, she believes, or more accurately is believed that she needs to stay at home to take care of the children. Similarly, her husband, Didier, does not even think of taking care of the children's basic needs such as feeding and bathing since it is woman's responsibility. From time to time Susan questions: "the original moment of longing to let a bulb of lichen grow in her until it came out human? The longing is

widely endorsed. Legislators, aunts, and advertisers approve. Which makes the longing, she thinks, a little suspicious” (Zumas, 2018, p. 88). In this regard, *Red Clocks* demonstrates how motherhood operates to constrain and control women and their motherhood roles even before they become mothers, and even though Susan follows the rules of patriarchal motherhood as a mother and wife, Zumas shows that no woman can win in the patriarchal system. In the end, Susan wants to be free from all the oppression and perform transformative practises that “matricentric feminism” offers such as “rejecting the wife role expected of mothers; renouncing the belief that mothers are totally responsible for the character of the child; challenging the assumption that mothers will raise their children according to patriarchal expectations” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 171). Susan leaves her oppressive wife role and decides to do what is best for her and her children by leaving her husband at the end of the novel. She decides to be free from all the labels and responsibilities that make her invisible and weak in family and society.

“The Daughter” Mattie, on the other hand, is a teenage pregnant girl who tries everything to get rid of the baby. Zumas by portraying a character who opposes the patriarchal mandate of essentialization explores a matricentric perspective in her novel. She shows that not every woman wants to be a mother and maternal desire is not innate to all women. Mattie cries out in the novel when she goes to the secret abortion clinic. She says: “I just want it out of my body. I want to stop being *infiltrated*. God, please get this out of my body. Make this stop” (Zumas, 2018, p. 269). Opposed to what has been dictated by patriarchy, Mattie has never experienced the natural feminine longing to bear and raise children. On the contrary, when she has gotten rid of the baby, she has felt relieved. Thus, the novel shows how women find different ways of living their motherhood. On the contrary, according to patriarchal motherhood mandates, Enza Gandolfo states as follows:

The woman who does not have children is believed to be abnormal; she is the damaged woman—infertile, barren, and *childless*. Even when a *childless woman* is envied her freedom, it is understood to be at the cost of the most intimate and crucial of human relationships. The *childless woman* is the *other* of the *other*, doubly lacking first as a woman (not man) and then as a non-mother (not fully woman). (Gandolfo, 2005, p. 113)

As is stated, the idea that all women are supposed to be joyful mothers has been used to dominate and domesticate women. Any woman who does not want to get married or have a child is considered “damaged” and pushed away from society. However, by presenting characters such as Mattie, the novel signifies that there are many women who do not wish or enjoy being mothers. Thus, by using examples of these women or better addressed as “womxn” as coined by Miranda

who refuse to be mothers, terminate pregnancies, or choose to be mothers as single mothers. Thus, Zumas presents readers in matricentric focus that there are women who do not wish to be a mother, or who do not perceive motherhood as a bliss occurrence like the patriarchal motherhood dictates.

Lastly, Zumas shows the reader how patriarchal motherhood ideology has been used to oppress women for ages by presenting the character Eivør Mínervudóttir, a long-dead explorer. In Ro's biography, the reader learns that Eivør was forced to get married at the age of nineteen to an older man and expected to have children of her own and when she could not bear any and fulfill her role in society, she was exiled since she was thought "broken":

This mother informed the explorer only two days before the wedding that she was to marry a man she'd never set eyes on, a widowed salmoner aged fifty-two. Eivør was old to be unmarried-nineteen....that in eighteen months I had not been gotten with child brought shame to my mother. She said, Go on, get that broken *fisa* [vagina] away from us. (Zumas, 2018, pp. 105-113)

Eivør is presented as a marginalized woman from the past. In the novel her story as an exiled woman and scientist guides Roberta and encourages her of being a strong woman herself.

Zumas also cleverly connects Eivør's story from ages ago with "The Mender", Gin Percival and Zumas tries to show that how rooted the problem of patriarchy is, and how women's oppression is still under discussion. For example, one day Eivør goes on an expedition on polar ice for her book with several men and according to Eivør's account, one day the blacksmith catches a polar bear, and the cook makes stew from the liver and heart. Although Eivør asks them not to eat the meat, she narrates "they did not believe me that vitamin A occurs at toxic levels in polar-bear livers. They are saying I cursed the stew." (Zumas, 2018, p. 233). The intentional link of Gin's trials in the 21st century to the Salem witch trials cleverly demonstrates how society still has fears about marginalized women who do not fit into conventional norms. Historically, in the late Middle Ages women began to be persecuted for witchcraft with practitioners of midwifery or folk medicine. In the novel, the name of the place they live in is "Salem" and "The Mender" is pictured as a woman living in the woods by herself with her farm animals away from humans. People in Salem often call her a "witch" and describe her with twigs in her hair and by her animal dishevelment. Mattie describes her as a "spinster, bold and cold". When the whales start to die in the town, town people accuse her of hexing the water "because she lured the dead man's fingers back to Newville and they messed up the water" (Zumas, 2018, p. 134), and they send threatening notes in her post box. Gin heals women with feminine maladies with herbs that she prepares which also causes her to be accused as a witch. In the end, she gets arrested for medical malpractice.

After she gives Lola, the school principal's wife, a potion to heal her scar, Lola falls down the stairs so hard that her brain swells up. At the trial, Ro compares Gin's trial with the Salem witch trials, and she recounts: "Accused witches in the seventeenth century were dunked in rivers or ponds. The innocent drowned. The guilty floated, surviving to be tortured or killed some other way" (Zumas, 2018, p. 240). This scene demonstrates how society has always feared marginalized women who do not confine to society's rules. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "the monster woman is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who *has* a story to tell - in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, p. 58) and patriarchal society fears these women's power and they either try to change them or confine them. Thus, strong and independent women like Gin are mostly feared and accused of being harmful to society since they do not fit into the standards of normative womanhood or motherhood. Since these women are labelled as "monster women" or "witches", they are often excluded and marginalized.

Christina Dalcher, in a similar way, depicts a society where women are of no importance and their sole work is to stay at home, take care of children, husband, and the house. Women in the novel must follow the religious Bible Belt doctrines of the government. They have no authorization to possess a passport which make them limited and prevent them from fleeing to other countries. As it were in *Red Clocks*, the oppression of women started unexpectedly when a man they did not vote for was elected as the president, and the next day, women were fitted with wristbands that control their word count because women need to be silent and under obedience. Women have lost their voice and as in *Red Clocks*, control over their bodies and lives. The protagonist, Jean, narrates the oppression of women at the beginning of the novel as follows: "They won't kill us for the same reason they won't sanction abortions. We've turned into necessary evils, objects to be fucked and not heard" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 33). Since female characters have lost the right to abortion in *Vox*, unhappy, desperate mothers who do not wish to be mothers came about. *Vox* shows us a darker society where abortion is outlawed and having children is encouraged or even enforced. In Dalcher's dystopian novel, women and especially women who are also mothers lose the sense of autonomy and sense of self, which instills helplessness and fear. They are no longer capable of taking initiative or having choices. In this regard, the novels under discussion demonstrate the representation of mothers who are trapped, manipulated, and objectified in a patriarchal world. Tazi-Preve discusses "what it means to be a mother" in her article as follows:

The German mother image in particular is clearly the product of a male fantasy, designed over many centuries by clerics, jurists, psychologists, and political theoreticians. Political theorists like Jean-Jacques Rousseau started to invent motherhood in the eighteenth century. In the twentieth century, national socialism in Germany and Austria created a special form of motherhood, the traces of which can still be seen today. The characteristics today are: a normative number of children, strict instructions about how to raise them, the amount of care to provide, and the correct way to sanction and not 'spoil' the child. (Tazi-Preve, 2020, p.168)

With the character Jean, we have a chance to observe patriarchal society's judgments over women's motherhood roles, and we come to realize that women are put under a lot of pressure by men, other women, and by themselves. According to patriarchal society's doctrine,

[Women] should more fully realize that [their] position as wife and mother, and the angel of the home, is the holiest, most responsible, and queenlike assigned to mortals; and dismiss all ambition for anything higher, as there is nothing else here so high for mortals. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 54)

Here by referring women's utmost responsibility as being a wife and mother signifies the "essentialization" and "privatization" roles of the patriarchal motherhood and these roles imprison women in the realm of the home and control every aspect of their lives. Female characters in *Vox* were removed from the workforce and sent home by claiming that this is better for the children. The responsibility of the children fell on the women alone. Women were imprisoned at home and forced to raise children. This kind of forced isolation and forced mothering of women refers to O'Reilly's "individualization" norm of patriarchal motherhood wherein women in these kinds of societies are seen as the sole responsible for their children. However, "the individualization and isolation of mothers make them extremely vulnerable, the perfect target for political and psychological interventions" (Tazi-Preve, 2020, p. 169). Patriarchal religious powers in *Vox* wanted to resurrect the Victorian cult of domesticity and often set the rules for the mothers about mothering. They wanted women to "adorn [themselves] with shamefacedness and sobriety, and that [they] exhibit modesty and femininity without fanciful or proud displays" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 82). Women also have been assumed the role of nurturer because according to patriarchal motherhood norms, no woman achieves her full position in society until she gives birth to a child whereas men have been acknowledged as the providers or breadwinners which supports the "normalization" role of the genders wherein the mother is a wife to a husband and the husband is the provider of his family. However, "due to the fact that mothers shoulder most of the responsibility for the children, a practice that is clearly unmanageable and unsustainable, the nuclear family necessarily leaves basic needs unsatisfied" (Tazi-Preve, 2020, p. 168). Thus, Jean, the protagonist of the novel, often questions herself: "Am I the sun or the moon? Probably Pluto,

the un-planet” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 37). Even though she is a top-notch scientist in her field and very successful, she feels worthless like the un-planet Pluto in society and sometimes in her own family, and she feels insignificant and small day by day. The feelings of inferiority and worthlessness show how patriarchal institutions are created to constrain women and disempower them strategically. By locking them in the houses and removing them from the workforce and fitting them with a bracelet that allows a hundred words a day, all the female characters were isolated because, as Tavi-Preve claims, “the method of divide et impera, of isolating mothers from each other and from society as a whole, renders them perfectly controllable” (Tazi-Preve, 2020, p. 170).

In addition to patriarchal society’s oppression over women, *Red Clocks and Vox* demonstrate that on top of all the problems that women have in the patriarchal system, when they become mothers, they get oppressed even more. Rich argues that “the womb—the ultimate source of the power—has historically been turned against us and itself made into a source of powerlessness” (Rich, 1986, p. 68) because motherhood practiced in the current patriarchal system is extremely disempowering and oppressive for women for several reasons. O’Reilly exemplifies these reasons as such: “the societal devaluation of motherwork, the endless tasks of privatized mothering, the current incompatibility of waged work and motherwork, and the impossible standards of idealized motherhood” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 22) and when women become mothers in the 21st century, they hit the “maternal wall” as defined by Joan C. Williams. Williams explains the “maternal wall” as “bias and stereotyping that affect mothers in particular as opposed to women in general” (Williams, 2000, p. 97). According to Sylvia Hewlett’s study,

Across a range of professions, high achieving women continue to have an exceedingly hard time combining career and family: 33 percent of high-achieving woman and 49 percent of ultra-achieving women are childless at age 40. This compares to 25 percent of high-achieving men and 19 percent for ultra-achieving men. (Hewlett, 2003, p. 86)

This study demonstrates that if a woman would like to have a successful career, she is forced to choose between her career and family although this is not always the case for men.

In *Red Clocks*, we can perceive how women hit the “maternal wall” when they get pregnant through Susan. She drops out of college in her last year of law school when she gets pregnant with her first child, and even though she wants to go back to law school, she believes that she cannot because of the children. On the other hand, we can understand that her husband, Didier, did not have to make any sacrifices or changes regarding his teaching career when they have a baby. In addition to rearing the children, Susan takes care of the house and does all the housework at home

alone and Didier often belittles the things Susan does. He often says, “*somebody* needs to start doing some cleaning. It’s like a bus station in there” (Zumas, 2018, p. 32) and when Susan could go out of the house once in a while, the people in the town often acknowledge and call her as Didier’s wife. Moreover, Susan shows us how women suffer from “post second-wave split subjectivity” or as Peggy Orenstein calls “half-changed” where women’s lives without children are more similar to men’s lives, becoming a mother makes women stuck more in the traditional patterns in the modern world. O’Reilly points out that “many women today—particularly those who are college educated, middle-class and professional—may not actually encounter overt gender discrimination until they become mothers” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 80). Thus, women’s subjectivity is divided between newly found gains as a childless woman and old expectations of mothers. Susan often misses her life before being a mother. She often imagines herself going back to law school and finishing her degree. She says instead of being a full-time housewife, “I’d much rather be at work all day” (Zumas, 2018, p. 103). She continues: “The wife would have finished the program and sat for the bar and been hired by a firm and maybe, yes, still have had time to make children. But maybe not” (2018, p. 155). She continuously questions her decision by saying: “*Why don’t you go back to law school?* screams the wife’s younger self. She shouldn’t have dropped out. Of course she should have. What if she hadn’t?” (2018, p. 155). We can clearly observe how Susan’s subjectivity is split between being a mother and wife and being a law school student and having a career.

In a similar way, Dalcher demonstrates how motherhood is another oppression for women and how it is used to control them in *Vox*. All women in *Vox* have already lost their professional jobs and were locked in their houses expected to do the housework, cook, and raise the children. Additionally, a lot of scenes in the book show how women had to make a choice between their freedom and their children by the patriarchal totalitarian regime. For instance, when Jean or the female characters try to resist the current regime, they often think and fear that “they’ll take me away; that’s certain. I’ll never see my kids again” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 177) and whenever Jean plans to get away from the country, she questions: “Solomonic choice dangling in the space above us. Which one? Which one do I save? (2018, p. 195) or when Lorenzo, her secret lover, offers Jean to flee country with him, she thinks: “What brand of monster would hop on a flight with a forged passport and leave four children behind? Then again, how fucked-up would I have to be to stay, knowing exactly what will become of this next baby?” (2018, p. 223). At the end she decides that

she cannot flee the country since she has kids. Furthermore, Annie Wilson, Jean's neighbor, was reported by her own husband because of committing adultery. Jean recounts Annie Wilson's story, and she says that Annie wanted to leave her husband for years since her husband was canceling her credit cards and stopping her payments and turning her life into a maximum-security prison. While the policemen are taking Annie to North Dakota to work in a farm with a wrist counter set to a daily maximum of zero word as punishment, Jean recalls their conversation and she remembers "cheering her on, silently urging her to just walk out of the house and get in that blue pickup and never look back. If she hadn't had the two boys, both under ten, maybe she would have done that" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 111). This scene shows that when a woman becomes a mother, she gets oppressed and controlled in the patriarchal system even more although mothering essentially should be empowering to women. Furthermore, when Jean has a chance to go back to work, her son, Steven, snaps at the dinner table and says: "how're you going to teach Sonia and work and take care of the house, Mom?" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 95). Here, Jean hits the "maternal wall" even before she goes to work. Zumas and Dalcher present women who are extremely disempowered in a patriarchal system. While these women fight for their rights against the system outside their home, they also had to fight against the inequality or internalized patriarchal beliefs at home. However, according to "matricentric feminism", even in the oppressed environment, these women do not give up. They are represented as "courageous mothers" who "refuse to be a victim" (Rich, 1976, p. 246).

Furthermore, Steven's question to Jean in *Vox* and Susan's decision to stay at home when she gets pregnant in *Red Clocks* show that women are the sole responsible for raising the children. In light of this discussion, Marga Vicedo asserts that "questions about the nature of mother love and children's needs were (and remain) entangled with the question who should rear the children and how?" (Vicedo, 2011, p. 426) and according to Bowlby's popular "attachment theory" in the 1950s, "the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother". Otherwise, "children deprived of mothering would grow up to hate and mistrust, leading to a life of truancy and promiscuity" (Vicedo, 2011, p. 42). Bowlby argues that "to deprive a small child of his mother's companionship is as bad as depriving him of vitamins" (Bowlby, 1958, n.p.). This controversial theory exclusively focuses on mother-child relationship. However, the father Bowlby admits that he can be the provider of the family or the supporter of the mother, yet not a substitute for the mother (Bowlby, 1958). Later, when a reporter in the

English News Chronicle asked: “Should a woman with children take a job?” Bowlby answered “the mother who stays at home gives her children a better chance” (as cited in Vicedo, 2011, p. 414) and he further states: “we must first ascertain who it is that holds the values we oppose...I think it is career women who look down on women who stay home” (as cited in Vicedo, 2011, p. 415). Furthermore, in the New York Times, the period’s popular author, Sloan Wilson, contributed to the discussion and put forward that married women with children should help their husbands’ career choices as he termed as “executive wifehood” instead of following jobs (Wilson, 1956). As is clear from Bowlby’s own words, being a mother should take all of the mother’s time and energy for the sake of child’s well-being and ultimately it prepares to ground for removal of women from the workforce. It was manifested that it is mother’s holiest duty to stay at home and raise their children. We can trace how these controversial post-war beliefs still leave a mark in the 21st century mothers. In *Red Clocks*, whenever Susan decides to divorce her husband, she thinks: “in therapy the kids will blame her for their broken childhoods and the maladaptive coping mechanisms that have ruined their adulthoods. Their therapists will say, *Do you think you can ever forgive her?*” (Zumas, 2018, p. 156). This shows that mothers are blamed and held responsible for their children’s current and future behavior. Mothers are expected to sacrifice their happiness or freedom for the sake of their children, and they should live as a family even if they are unhappy or miserable. In the next episode, Susan tries to convince Didier to go counselling before deciding to get a divorce. While she was planning how to open the conversation, she thinks to herself as follows:

Which might work! Which would be the whole point. To feel okay again. Even good. To stop her throat from hurting when Bex asks ‘Do you and Daddy love each other?’ To stop reading online articles about the maladaptive coping mechanisms of kids from broken homes. To stop *brokenhomebrokenhomebrokenhome* from reeling in her head. To stop staring at the guardrails. (Zumas, 2018, p. 79)

Here, “guardrails” symbolize the feeling of helplessness and being stuck that she is feeling in her marriage. She is so worried that her children will be somehow broken in their adulthood, she sacrifices her happiness for them. Because according to O’Reilly, this is what a mother is expected to do in society. O’Reilly further explains:

In most societies, Feminine and Mother are combined to form a single representation of WOMAN—and for most women in the world this still is their only self-representation. Motherhood is a state of being. Although the specifics are expressed idiosyncratically, primary preoccupation with the child, availability to the child, self-sacrifice for the child, are values upheld as inherent in good motherhood. (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 26)

Similarly, in *Vox* when Jean finally went back to work as a scientist, she continued to hit the “maternal wall” once more. When she cannot find a babysitter for her daughter, she comes to work late and her boss says: “this is why the old way didn’t work. There’s always something. Always some sick kid or a school play or menstrual cramps or maternity leave. Always a problem” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 156). And her boss, Morgan, continues:

You women aren’t dependable. The system doesn’t work the way it was. Take the fifties. Everything was fine. Everyone had a nice house and a car in the garage and food on the table. And things still ran smoothly! We didn’t need women in the workforce. You’ll see, once you get over all this anger. You’ll see it’s going to be better. Better for your kids. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 156)

Here, it is understood how women are overtly discriminated when they become mothers. Hence, drawn from O’Reilly’s statement, once a woman becomes a mother, it becomes her identity, “a state of being”. Furthermore, it is clear that the representations of female characters in both novels are clearly linked with society’s expectations. According to it, mothers should be devoted to their children fully and they need to sacrifice everything that they can since it is better for the kids and also society which is termed as “sacrificial motherhood” by O’Reilly. Accordingly, “children require full-time mothering, or in the instance where the mother must work outside the home, the children must always come before the job” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 45). However, in *Red Clocks* Susan finally realizes that the most important thing for herself and her children is to be happy and in *Vox*, Jean understands that as a respected scientist, she sets an example for her children which is more important than “being a sacrificial mother”. Because in “matricentric feminism” opposed to “Bowlby’s theory, it is known that “children need love and care, but it is culture, not children, that demands that the mother be the one to provide them” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 58).

According to patriarchal motherhood norms, if a mother does not submit to “being a good mother” mandates, she is labelled as a “bad mother” and excluded by society. In both novels under discussion, female characters question their motherhood, and they often feel that they failed at motherhood and that they are “bad mothers” to their children. For instance, in *Red Clocks*, Roberta does not fully believe that she would be a good mother even though she did not get pregnant yet. Roberta’s inner thoughts reflect her worries: “But how can you raise a child alone when you can’t resist twelve ounces of coffee? When you’ve been known to eat peanut butter on a spoon for dinner? When you often go to bed without brushing your teeth?” (Zumas, 2018, p. 88). She believes that a “good mother” should be the perfect model for the children. Otherwise, she will turn into a “bad mother” which will harm the children deeply. Moreover, Susan constantly

questions if she is a bad mother or not when she is thinking about getting a divorce or even when her children do not behave. For instance, when they go for a picnic, they come across with Jessica Perfects and “The Perfects” which has dual meaning is a perfect normative mother who is tanned, well-dressed, and brags about how she feeds her children with only grass-fed beef and how she makes her children’s clothes. She even insults Susan as follows: “I notice you’ve got some unsoaked nuts on the premises, and I’m a little concerned. Frankly I wouldn’t dream of feeding my children an unsoaked nut” (Zumas, 2018, p. 56). As is seen, mothers suffer from so many negative emotions such as insult, guilt, and some mothers even live in constant fear that they are not becoming a good mother as society dictates because Sara Ruddick argues that mothers are always watched by others which she calls “gaze of others”. Thus, mothers, “relinquish authority to others, [and] lose confidence in their own values” (Ruddick, 1989, p. 111).

Similarly, in *Vox* Jean often believes that she is a “lousy mother” whenever she cannot meet the mandates of being a “good mother”. Women like Jean or Susan who are exposed to prolonged oppression of being a good mother often identify themselves of “bad mothers”. When her children start crying, Jean says: “Sam and Leo start crying. For the smallest of moments, I register a single thought: *lousy mother*. My boys are in distress, and I’m moving past them, uncaring and oblivious” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 31) or when Jean tries to make Sonia not speak since she has the bracelet she says: “I’m thinking I did a crackerjack job on the behavioral part, conditioning Sonia with bribes of cookies and marshmallows to keep her words unspoken. Someone should take away my mothering license” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 91). Her words imply the feeling of helplessness and guilt that mothers feel. She blames herself and her motherhood for what happens to their children or how they feel even though it is not her fault. Rich argues that the mothers are taught to believe that they are the sole caregiver. They live their lives in accordance with society’s instructions on how to be better mothers and they compete to be the best mother in this warzone (Rich, 1976). As discussed before, mothers who do not follow normative motherhood rules are labelled as “bad mothers” whereas women who fit into the society’s mandates are positioned as “good mothers” or as Schippers term them “Pariahs and Gatekeepers”. Amy Andrada further discusses that “‘gatekeepers’ hold the idealised position, whereas othered and ‘rebel’ mothers fail by virtue of being in an othered position and the othered, ‘pariah’, or ‘rebel’ (single) mother is policed and penalised for failing to align with traditional feminine ideologies” (Andrada, 2019, p. 51). Before the totalitarian regime with the Bible Belt doctrines take away all women's

rights in the United States, Jackie warns Jean, and Jackie says: “don’t think they’ll all be men. The Becky Homeckies will be on their side” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 25). As predicted, when totalitarian regime puts forward the religious doctrines about “good mothers and wives”, the biggest support comes from “gatekeepers”. One of the “gatekeepers” that support the Bible Belt without questioning in *Vox* is character Olivia. In the novel when the president announced that all women would be forced to become stay-at-home mothers, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children as in the olden days, Olivia supports the decision by saying:

We don’t know who men are or who women are anymore. Our children are growing up confused. The culture of family has broken down. We have increases in traffic, pollution, autism rates, drug use, single parents, obesity, consumer debt, female prison populations, school shootings, erectile dysfunction. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 43)

She falsely links all these problems to the mother’s choice to work. She believes that since women prioritize work over their families and children, families break up, children grow up as criminals. She accuses the women who choose to work as “neglected or bad mothers”. Olivia continues and claims that “how hard it is on kids when both their parents work, how we’ve gotten to this place where people forget about simple things” (2018, p. 39). O’Reilly puts the framework of “good mother” according to patriarchal society’s standards. She says that according to patriarchal motherhood norms:

Good mothers put the needs of their children before their own, are available to their children whenever needed...her children rather than her career should be at the center of her life. Good mothers are the primary caregivers of their children: care other than that provided by the mother (i.e., daycare) is viewed as inferior and deficient. (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 22)

Patriarchal society and culture do not see mothers as having life outside of motherhood and if a mother wants to do anything other than motherhood, she is named as a “bad mother”. O’Reilly further argues that “non-normative mothers—whether they are defined and categorized as such by age, race, sexuality, or biology—can never be the “good” mothers of normative motherhood” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 75). However, Rich defines “mother outlaws” or “pariahs” as good mothers and patriarchal mothers or “gatekeepers” as bad mothers and she claims that we need “bad mothers” to resist and overthrow patriarchal motherhood. (Rich, 1976). Thus, by representing “pariahs” in both novels, Zumas and Dalcher resist the patriarchal motherhood norms and shows that mothers who go against the system are policed and penalized, yet these feminist mothers according to “matricentric feminism” thoughts “[refuse] this patriarchal profile and script of

‘good’ mothers and ‘good’ mothering. And in so doing, [they challenge and change] the various ways patriarchal motherhood” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 177).

Modern version of “intensive mothering” or “new momism” as Hays argues is characterized as “the mother is the central caregiver, mothering is regarded as more important than paid employment, mothering requires lavishing copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources on the child” (Hays, 1996, p. 8). Drawing on Hays’s argument, O’Reilly discusses that the mothers in the 21st century compared to their mothers in the 1950s or 1960s are expected much more. They are expected to spend “quality time” with their children beside physical proximity (O’Reilly, 2021). Also, unlike their mothers in 1950s-1960s, women in the 21st century expected to meet expectations of their professional careers. Tazi-Preve argues:

If a mother is a housewife, she is blamed for being overwhelming or overprotective. If she is employed, the isolated mother is blamed for seeking her so-called ‘own advantage’ or ‘self-realization.’ Like a boomerang, each of her attempts to raise her children while making a living causes serious accusations of failure and falls back on her. (Tazi-Preve, 2020, p. 169)

Thus, society’s impossible standards on mothers make them feel insufficient, and women who cannot follow these demands may end up feeling “maternal ambivalence” and then “maternal regret”. As Almond argues “maternal ambivalence” results in “as women fail in their attempts to fulfill impossible standards of mothering, [t]hey feel angry and disappointed with themselves and, in turn, angry and disappointed with their children” (Almond, 2011, p. 11). We can identify “maternal ambivalence” and “maternal regret” in *Red Clocks* with Susan and in *Vox* with Jean. Susan in *Red Clocks* is always in love and hate relationship with her children. She associates herself with the burning animal that she saw on the road. She says:

Of the road. It was burnt within an inch of its life, but it was still moving—which felt so, I don’t know, brave? I think it was a possum. It was like it wasn’t accepting death—or didn’t even realize death was near. It *kept going*. (Zumas, 2018, p. 102)

She identifies herself with the possum, and she feels like she is on fire yet alive. She keeps pretending as a happy mother and wife which is consuming her as the fire consumes the possum at the end. Then, when she is driving with the kids, she often fills with the idea of driving off the cliff road with the kids in the car. She imagines: “Hands off the wheel. They would plow through the branches, fly past the rocks, tear open the water. The newspapers tomorrow: MOTHER AND CHILDREN PERISH IN CLIFF TRAGEDY” (2018, p. 176). Being a mother and the heavy burden of it overwhelms her so much that she sometimes envisions herself and children as dead.

However, when John, her son, is sleeping on her chest, she says that “this planet may be choking to death, bleeding from every hole, but still she would choose them, every time” (2018, p. 153). The feeling of ambivalence that mothers feel towards their children is a complex and conflicting emotion. These positive and negative feelings such as love, joy as well as frustration and guilt that mothers feel are often experienced because of the heavy burden of social expectations and norms. Mothers are often expected to be perfect, selfless, and fulfilled mothers, and it leads to feeling of disappointment and resentment when these expectations are not met. Mothers also feel a sense of loss about the aspects of their pre-motherhood identity or life. Susan’s changing feelings towards her children and the longing of previous life as an unencumbered woman signify the complex and challenging realities of motherhood and how it deeply affects mothers emotionally. Likewise, in *Vox* we can understand that Jean also feels contradicting emotions towards their children such as resentment and love. Jean often repeats: “I don’t hate them. I tell myself I don’t hate them. But sometimes I do” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 31). However, the following scene shows how Jean is caught in ambivalent situation: “I love you, Mommy. I love you so much. Nine words are all it takes to make my heart skip a beat” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 129). Or, when her oldest son, Steven rebels against her mother, Jean thinks “*I don’t hate my son. I don’t hate my son. I don’t hate my son.* Except right now I do, a little bit” (2018, p. 87). Then she compares Steven with Frankenstein’s monster: “There were so many times I wanted to blame him, but I can’t. Monsters aren’t born...They’re made, piece by piece and limb by limb, artificial creations of madmen who, like the misguided Frankenstein, always think they know better” (2018, p. 193). She believes that it is not the child’s fault but the parents and afterwards, she feels extreme guilt and shame and she says: “I can’t hate Steven because he believes in something so wrong, even if I hate what he believes” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 70). According to Orna Donath, being the sole caregiver mothers often establish a neurotic attachment with their child, and a recent Israeli study shows that mothers love their children, but they cannot stand the motherhood (Donath, 2017). Mariam Irene Tazi-Preve agrees with her and continues: “Overburdened, impatient mothers will be the target of their children’s frustration and aggression and vice versa; children’s constant demands will drive mothers into despair and aggressive reactions” (Tazi-Preve, 2020, p. 168). Thus, we can conclude that being a mother adds to women’s oppression because of normative motherhood mandates that enforce mothers as the sole caregiver.

Furthermore, “maternal ambivalence” that mothers feel may turn into “maternal regret” for some mothers if they feel complete disappointment in their motherhood. The feelings of not having lived up to their own expectations or society’s expectations of what it means to be a good mother may result in “maternal regret” for mothers. “Maternal regret” refers to feelings of disappointment, remorse, and sadness that some mothers experience about their experiences of motherhood. Both Zumas and Dalcher show how some of the mothers do not find joy in their motherhood and they would wish that they had not been mothers because non-normative mothers, according to “matricentric feminism” ideals, know that “being a mother does not fulfill all of women’s needs, [they question] the expectations that are placed on mothers by society, [challenge] the idea that the only emotion that mothers ever feel towards their children is love” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 173). In *Red Clocks*, As discussed above, Susan clearly feels regret and remorse in being a mother. She reveals the realities of being a mother: “Susan’s marks of motherhood: spider veins at the knee backs, loose stomach skin, lowered breasts. Affronts to vanity worn as badges of the ultimate accomplishment” (Zumas, 2018, p. 87). She feels overwhelmed and frustrated by the responsibilities of parenting and she says:

Two days, two nights every week to herself. *Tell Didier you are leaving.* Before having kids, she envisioned motherhood as a jubilant merging. She never thought she would long to spend time away from them. It is hideous to admit she can’t bear the merging 24-7. Same guilt that’s kept her from putting John in daycare: she doesn’t want it to be true that she wants to be apart. (Zumas, 2018, p. 229)

As Rich explains: “The mother was frequently compared to a saint, and...only good mother was a ‘saintly’ woman. The natural patron saint of the mother was the Virgin Mary, whose whole life bespoke her devotion to her child” (Rich, 1986, p. 32). Thus, society’s unrealistic expectations for mothers and dealing day-to-day challenges of parenting burdened on the mother only results in guilt and depression. Mothers who feel like they are constantly falling short with these demands may feel that they are failing as mothers, and they suffer from stress, anxiety, and loneliness. Likewise, Susan often shows regret about being a mother through the pages. She says: “And I won’t miss having three children” (Zumas, 2018, p. 291). She sometimes tries to hide from their children at home to find some peaceful minutes for herself. She wishes she would be free as Gin Percival: “Whatever frees Gin Percival to leave her hair twiggy and wear shapeless sack dresses and smell unwashed—the wife wants that” (2018, p. 229). Furthermore, in the next scene Susan remembers the half-dead animal on the road that is burnt, yet still trying. However, she later decides that the animal is now dead: “Darkening, bubbling. Charred and rubbery. Little animal,

burnt black” (2018, p. 104) and “*I wanted to help it, but it was already dead. How do you help a cinder, half-alive? Run over it fast to stop the burning*” (2018, p. 155). The animal that she closely associates herself with accepts death. Accordingly, Susan who is trying so hard to be a happy mother and wife now accepts that she is not. As is understood, being a mother is far from a happy and joyful situation for some mothers. Zumas shows that some mothers like Susan try to survive motherhood let alone enjoy it. Furthermore, through another character, Mattie, Zumas shows how being a mother is not the holiest duty one can ever accomplish. As discussed above, Mattie never wanted to be a mother and when she got pregnant, she tried everything to have an abortion. She questions why people have a saying about her own body. She wonders:

Why do some walruses in Washington, DC, who’ve never met the daughter care what she does with the clump? They don’t seem bothered that baby wolves are shot to death from helicopters. Those babies were already breathing on their own, running and sleeping and eating on their own, whereas the clump is not even a baby yet. Couldn’t survive two seconds outside the daughter. (Zumas, 2018, p. 178)

Because “voluntary childlessness, abortion and teenaged mothering act as pathologised presences that simultaneously mask and enable normative understandings of mothering” (Macleod et al., 2019, p. 42). Macleod et al. claim:

Deviant reproductive decision-makers’ and/or ‘failed mothers’. A hierarchy is created in which womxn who do not have an abortion are ‘better’ womxn and mothers, than those who do terminate a pregnancy. Therefore, similar to those womxn who refuse motherhood in the first place, terminating a pregnancy positions them as failed or ‘bad’ womxn. (Macleod et al., 2019, p. 34)

Mattie faces with extreme sadness as soon as she learns that she was pregnant. Thus, it is understood that not all women are born to perform maternal roles as the essentialist ideology of patriarchal motherhood demands. Sarah LaChance Adams argues: “Maternal commitment is voluntary and conscious; it is not inevitable, nor is it dictated by nature” (LaChance, 2010, p. 727). “Matricentric feminism” understands that not all women enjoy motherhood and it challenges every patriarchal mandate weighed on women. Mattie refers it as “the clump” not a baby and she does not think that she was a murderer as society labels. Because according to society, good women are supposed to be good decision-makers when it comes to reproduction. They only have sex to reproduce. Thus, they will not need abortions. (Granzow, 2007). However, Mattie opposes this doctrine and she says that “the daughter is not a murderer. They’re only cells, multiplying. No face yet. No dreams or opinions” (Zumas, 2018, p. 179). Opposed to other people’s thoughts, she defends: “an embryo is a living being. So is a dandelion” (2018, p. 114). Labelling women who

choose to get an abortion as “bad mothers” or “bad womxn” or forcing them to account for their choices show how women are crushed under the normative motherhood norms. However, feminist mothers in “matricentric feminism” like in *Red Clocks* and *Vox* “make visible what is often invisible about institutionalized motherhood: they acknowledge the confining aspects of motherhood; recognize how regulatory elements of the institution are harmful to woman and children; and speak to the low self-esteem, self-blame and self-hatred of internalized oppression” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 170).

In a similar way, Jean in *Vox* like Mattie tries every possible way to get rid of the baby once she gets pregnant. She says: “What I don’t say is: *What if I don’t want this baby?* I already know the answer” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 150). She shows no emotional connection with the baby in contrast to what is dictated in the context of patriarchal motherhood, “essentialization”. She refers to the baby inside her as “creature”: “The twenty-four hours I’ll wait before I find out whether the creature inside me is a boy or a girl” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 243). Later, she tries to get rid of the baby by poisoning it:

I drive the long way back home, stopping at a 7-Eleven to pick up a pack of Camels. I could smoke it out of me, I think, poison the little palace, practice Teratology 101 in the privacy of my own home. Abortion the old-fashioned way. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 151)

Since in patriarchal society, women do not have autonomy and agency in making decisions about their own body, she is ready to risk her own life rather than being a mother. She confirms this by saying: “I don’t want a fine baby around December 20 of this year. I don’t want a baby at all” (2018, p. 150). Since abortion is out of option in Dalcher’s dystopia, Jean asks her lover, Lorenzo, to take the baby with him wherever he goes. She says: “You could take her—it, him, whatever it is. You could take her away” (2018, p. 197). Rich explains in detail:

Motherhood . . . has a history, it has an ideology, it is more fundamental than tribalism or nationalism. My individual private pains as a mother, the individual and seemingly private pains of the mothers around me and before me, whatever our class or colour, the regulation of women's reproductive power by men in every totalitarian system and every socialist revolution, the legal and technical control by men of contraception, fertility, abortion, obstetrics and extrauterine experiments - are all essential to the patriarchal system, as is the negative or suspect status of women who are not mothers. (Rich, 1986, p. 22)

In patriarchal societies, “maternal regret” is amplified due to the societal pressures and expectations placed on mothers. When mothers cannot meet these expectations and prioritize their role as a mother above all, they may feel extreme regret, dissatisfaction, or burnout. In patriarchal motherhood “maternal regret” is exacerbated by society’s expectations and limitations and some

women may choose to end their pregnancy by having an abortion which also may lead to the stigmatization of women and contribute to guilt and shame. “Maternal regret” women feel before or after the baby was born signals that not every woman bursts with joy about being a mother. Thus, O’Reilly argues: “not only does maternal regret denote and enact a critique of patriarchal motherhood and its normative dictates but also, and more profoundly, it signals an unmitigated and unreserved repudiation of motherhood in itself” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 25).

Not only mothers but also children especially daughters are affected greatly in patriarchal society. The oppression and hardship that mothers have to go through in daily bases may have a direct impact on their children. “Matrophobia” coined by Sukenick in 1972 refers the fear of becoming like one’s mother. According to Rich, daughters "see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted. Easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her" (Rich, 1986, p. 235). Patriarchal motherhood contributes to feelings of anxiety or fear since particularly daughters may feel pressure to conform to societal expectations and fears being judged or stigmatized once they grow up and become mothers. Daughters who do not want to associate themselves with their mothers feel rage at their mother who cannot offer the daughter a strong role model. As Rich adds: “A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches for clues as to what it means to be a woman” (Rich, 1986, p. 198). In *Red Clocks*, it is through Eivør that we can understand the feeling of disconnected and rage towards her mother. She comes to understand her mother’s restricted role in the patriarchy, and she refuses it:

The polar explorer liked to stand on the turf roof of the two-room cottage and think of her feet being precisely above the head of her mother, who was stirring or cutting or pounding; and how many inches of grass and soil lay between them; and how she was *above*, her mother *below*, reversing the order, flipping the world. (Zumas, 2018, p. 41)

Since she does not want to connect with a mother who is powerless and “below” in patriarchal system, she prefers not to associate herself with her and by disconnecting herself, she becomes “above”. On her accounts she often refers her mother as “this mother” (2018, p. 105) which also shows the distancing between mother and daughter. Unlike her mother, Eivør chooses to be marine biologist without a husband and children. It is implied in the novel that she chooses not to be like her mother who is “below” her in every possible way. Another character, Ro, also admits that she does not want to be like her mother “who went from father’s house to college dorm to husband’s

house without a single day lived on her own, never knew the pleasures of solitude” (Zumas, 2018, p. 84). She chooses the “manless” and solitary life over her mother’s life. Because as Rich argues: “The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr” (Rich, 1986, p. 236) and daughters sadly try to perform “radical surgery” to break off from mothers’ lives.

From a different yet related perspective, not only Dalcher displays how Jean’s six-years-old daughter, Sonia, comes to understand her mother’s restricted role as a woman and mother but also the writer shows how Jean’s son, Steven, as a male in the patriarchal system sees and acknowledges her mother. For Steven, her mother is “other” and for him being a male is preferable to being a female. For instance, one day Sonia paints a picture of her family and Jean describes it. She says that instead of “standing next to Patrick, or even at the far end of the family line, bookending our kids, I’m fifth. After my husband, after Steven, after the eleven-year-old twins. And Sonia has made me smaller than everyone except for her” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 89). Even as a six-year-old Sonia notices her mother’s and her role at home and society. The picture she drew clearly shows how women, mothers, or daughters are weakened and disempowered in patriarchy. Thus, it can be deduced that when these daughters grow up, they will not want to be weakened as their mothers. That is why, the breach of connection and thrust between mothers and daughters will be destroyed tragically. O’Reilly argues that because of “matrophobia”, daughters grow up breaking off their bonds with their mothers rather than finding common ground with them in their similarities. Thus, it results in the loss of strong and essential relationship between mothers and daughters (O’Reilly, 2021) and Rich concludes: “The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy” (Rich, 1986, p. 237). As for the son, Dalcher shows that mothers sometimes lose the respect of their sons since sons as males in the patriarchal system do not associate themselves with their mothers, and they may turn into the vocal defender of this system which weakens mothers deeply since it is the system they were born and raised, and they identify male gender as separate and more preferable to female gender. For instance, when Jean supports the women who resist the system, Steven says: “Women are crazy” he continues. “It’s not like it’s news, Mom. You know that saying about hysterical women and fits of the mother” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 16). Here, we can understand how he becomes the vocal defender of the system. Throughout the novel he often uses words “hysterical” and “crazy” when he addresses women and he truly believes that women should only stay at home and raise their children. When Jean tries to confront his son, she says: “You think I should garden and cook more? You think the work I do is

less important than—I don't know—crafts?" Steven answers: "Not you, Mom. Other women. The ones who just wanna get out of the house and have some kind of identity" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 39). Steven already thinks that women do not have any identity other than being a mother at home and the important part is that although Jean and her husband, Patrick, are the supporters of women's right and equality, Steven is completely against it. This shows how big the society's impact on children. Thus, even if parents individually resist the patriarchal society and raise their children accordingly, the society still has the larger impact on the children and in patriarchal system, mother-children relationship and connection is systematically weakened. As it is understood, it is not only women or mothers who are affected, but also the children of our future. Consequently, Rich argues that it is time and politically crucial to heal that relationship (Rich, 1986). For mother-daughter relationship, Rich implies that daughter's empowerment is possible on condition that the mother is empowered (Rich, 1986). Feminist writers such as O'Reilly and Rich argue that patriarchal motherhood effects generations of mothers and daughters leaving them disempowered. However, they also claim that according to "matricentric feminism" ideals, "a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist" (Rich, 1986, p. 247). For instance, in *Vox* when Sonia asks, "can I be a vet when I grow up?", Jean says "Maybe. Lots of school, though. You up for that?". Then Jean's son, Steven, replies: "You did it, Mom" Jean says: "I think my heart might explode, and I know I made the right decision" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 278). Even though Sonia and Steven are aware of mothers' position in the patriarchal system, such feminist mothering discussed in "matricentric feminism", "works against matrophobia, which is at the heart of mother-daughter estrangement and is what makes possible reciprocal mother-daughter empowerment" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 63). Thus, these feminist mothers can "raise a new generation of empowered daughters and empathetic sons" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 178).

Many feminist critics and writers argue these problems that women as mothers in the 21st century face such as post-second wave subjectivity, maternal wall, maternal ambivalence and regret or matrophobia as discussed above and some feminist critics such as O'Reilly, Rich, Miriam Johnson try to understand the reason behind or come up with some solutions to these rooted problems. For instance, Marxist Christine Delphy believes that when women get married and becomes housewife, their value of work decreases because she points out that there is not much point in discussing the value of women's work so long as it is not their to exchange. She further

explains “it is not the nature of women’s work that causes it to be unpaid, but rather women’s work is not paid for because it is performed within marriage” (as cited in Miriam, 1988, p. 248). Miriam M. Johnson adds to it and she argues that “it is not what women do, including women’s mothering, that puts women at a disadvantage; it is the way the implicit marriage contract sidelines and mainstreams men” (Miriam, 1988, p. 248). She explains that marriage in the patriarchal system puts women in secondary position in society (Miriam, 1988, p. 248). She even extends her argument and says that “having a mother who is not a wife is bound to affect children’s view of what women are like—they are real people who are also mothers, not wives” (1988, p. 265). In *Red Clocks*, Roberta character often expresses that she does not want to have a husband but a baby. She says: “The biographer’s family once looked like the Korsmos—mother father sister brother, a foursquare American family. They had a weedy yard, a house. The biographer doesn’t want a house, but she wants a kid. She can’t explain why” (Zumas, 2018, p. 220). Johnson also argues that “it is naive to believe that denying all difference will make difference disappear” (Miriam, 1988, 269). But “difference itself need not produce inequality...it is what we do about it that produces inequality” She says that “it is the male dominated context that of women’s childbearing and child-rearing that underlies inequality” and she concludes “women are strong as mothers but made weak by being wives” (1988, p. 269). Thus, Johnson supports Rich’s and O’Reilly’s argument discussed before that while mothering itself is empowering, it is women’s role as wife and mother in the system is disempowering. In *Red Clocks*, Susan’s chapters in the book is divided as “The Wife” as her role in the society. Before anything else, she is the wife of Didier and as understood, Susan feels weakened in her wife role and she often wants to leave her wife role behind. She says: “She could stop being Didier’s wife” (Zumas, 2018, p. 156). She often thinks and feels “less” and invisible as a housewife. She believes that the work she has done at home such as chores and cleaning and also raising the children is not acknowledged by others as valuable. At dinner party she feels that everyone at the party thinks about her as such: “Pampered white lady who doesn’t have a job, lives on family property—what does she *do* all day?” (2018, p. 174). She knows that the work she has done at home for her family is not important for other people. She associates herself with the house: “The wife has been letting the house “go.” And letting herself ‘go.’ We’ll go if you let us. Wife and house run away together, hand in door. Hand in dormer window. *I’d take lonely over beaten to a paste*” (Zumas, 2018, p. 244). Her wife role makes her so miserable and weak that she fantasizes running away. By playing with the word “go”, Zumas indicates some

women are so unhappy in their wife role that they would only be free and happy if society breaks them free or “let them go”.

In the same way, Dalcher shows how the role of a wife in a patriarchal society is often defined by traditional gender roles and the needs and desires of men over women. For instance, the totalitarian religious regime in *Vox* openly set rules about the expectations from women around domestic duties, child-rearing responsibilities. Women in *Vox* are expected to be submissive to their husbands, to show modesty, chastity, and obedience. Jean narrates these roles: “We are called as women to keep silence and to be under obedience. If we must learn, let us ask our husbands in the closeness of the home, for it is shameful that a woman question God-ordained male leadership” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 81). Jean’s son Steve speaks on behalf of Julia and talks about his plans: “When we get married and have kids, she’ll take care of that house stuff while I’m at work. She loves it. I’ll make the decisions, and Julia will go along. Easy-peasy” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 95). Jean sees her neighbor’s house through the window, and she watches Evan and his wife, Olivia. She realizes how little Olivia looks in front of Evan and Jean says: “It’s *Father Knows Best* now, baby. All the way” (2018, p. 173). As wives, women are expected to be subservient to their husbands. They are often expected to take care of household, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. Also, as mothers, women are expected to prioritize their children’s needs and wellbeing. They are demanded to be nurturing, loving, and selfless. Thus, it is understood that the gender norms assigned to women is quite limiting and prevent them from pursuing their own goals and interests outside of the roles of wife and mother. However, as discussed before, it is clear that while mothering is empowering for women, the role of mother and wife for women cause inequality and oppression in male-dominated context. Consequently, Roberta’s desire to be single mother, Susan’s decision to get divorced, or Jean’s non-normative, resisting mothering are indicated as transformative practices in “matricentric feminism” that stands against patriarchal motherhood, and these “transformative practices include the following: mothering outside of heterosexual relationships; living apart from the father and mothering alone; developing feminist styles of childrearing; creating other models for family; and practicing non- authoritative ways of parenting” (O’Reilly, 2021, pp. 170-171).

Another feminist critic, Susan Maushart, believes that mothers mask their pains, regrets, and some sad realities of motherhood which she coins as “mask of motherhood” in her book. She argues that “there is a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image

to which we are trying to conform” (Maushart, 1999, xi). She believes that mothers in the 21st century “increasingly bring to the experience expectations that are not simply inaccurate, or ill-informed, but downright disabling ... even delusional” (Maushart, 1999, xiii). She states that masks are for pretending, hiding the emotions, pain, or horror from the audience (Maushart, 1999). However, “like all social masks, the mask of motherhood is an invaluable means for organizing and domesticating the more rapacious aspects of the realities we confront. Yet the personal and political price we pay for this control has far exceeded the value of its social dividends” (1999, p. 2).

The mask of motherhood is what keeps women silent about what they feel and suspicious of what they know. It divides mother from daughter, sister from sister, friend from friend. It creates an abrupt and tragic chasm between adults who have children and adults who don't. It distorts the distance between childhood and adulthood, cutting ever deeper gaps between the generations. (Maushart, 1999, p. 2)

As discussed above the mask that was created to hide the realities and real experiences of motherhood harms society as a whole. Glorifying the ideal motherhood and ignoring the real-life experiences of it drag mothers to anxiety and fear. Maushart gives some examples of the mask of motherhood in her book:

Media images of Supermom, books that describe labor urges as forceful urges, the apologetic tones of embarrassed mother who murmurs over toddler's tantrum, women's magazines that promise Great Sex after Baby, or childcare manuals that imply easy babies are made, not born. (Maushart, 1999, p. 3)

All of these things discussed above cause mothers who cannot meet the impossible expectations of society to wear the mask of motherhood and hide the realities from others. Both Zumas and Dalcher show how mothers wrestle with the confusion and guilt between their experiences of motherhood and the idea of motherhood. In *Red Clocks*, Susan is often pretending to be an “ideal mother” that the society dictates. However, she also always struggles with the expectations and the reality of motherhood in her daily life. She always tries to show other people how perfect parent she is and how selfless and devoted as a mother. However, she hides all the regret, pain, and hardship that comes with it. The people around her like her husband or her old friend, Roberta do not know the real experiences of motherhood that Susan is having since she is wearing the mask all the time. As Roberta sees: “Susan is an expert in adulthood. Kid things, cooking things, knowing which fork to use for fish in a high-end restaurant things” (Zumas, 2018, p. 185). Yet, as understood in reality Susan always struggles with being a mother and wife. She often wishes she never got married and had children. The mask that she is wearing in front of her family, friends,

and society is hiding an unhappy mother and wife because she knows that if she showed the realities of motherhood, she would be harshly judged and labelled as a bad mother and wife in society. Fearing all these, she does or says what other people would like to hear. From the perspective of Roberta: “Susan is a person who does what you do. At the teachers’ picnic last summer she said to a fellow mother, “You don’t truly become an adult until you have kids” (2018, p. 185). Here, it is obvious that she is submitting to society’s dictates of motherhood even though she feels the opposite. Also, while discussing Eivør Mínervudóttir’s life and achievements with Susan, Susan says: “If she’d raised six kids, she would’ve been beneficial to *their* lives” (Zumas, 2018, p. 294) even though she always wished she would never drop out of law school. Therefore, As Maushart argues mask of motherhood does not only harm mothers but also other women who do not have kids. It separates “friends from friends, sisters from sisters” (Maushart, 1999, p. 2) and puts a wall against the realities.

In *Vox*, character Olivia, the neighbor of Jean, is the one who wears the mask of motherhood all the time. Whenever she visits Jean, she checks over the house and Jean condescendingly. For instance, Jean narrates: “I realize I’m still wearing my robe when I open the door and find Olivia...Olivia follows me to the kitchen, and the stack of dirty breakfast dishes receives the same frown my bathrobe did at the front door” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 42). Olivia believes Jean is not a good mother since she does not follow the society’s rules of being a good mother. For Olivia, a mother should be well-groomed, a good cook, and homemaker. Susan Maushart tries to reveal the truth behind the mask and she questions:

For the uninitiated, the realities of parenthood and especially motherhood are kept carefully shrouded in silence, disinformation, and outright lies. The conspiracy of silence is real, and it’s documentable. That much is clear. What is much less clear is what purpose the conspiracy serves, and why the vast majority of women participate in it. (Maushart, 1999, p. 5)

Psychologist Harriet Goldhor Lerner argues that it is because of self-protection. It is “what the culture teaches women to do” (as cited in Maushart, 1999, p. 6).

By revealing the realities and challenges of being a mother, as it is called “unmasking the motherhood” without romanticizing it as a joyful and fulfilling experience, more honest and realistic understanding of what it means to be a mother can be created. As Maushart explains:

Unmasking motherhood means facing the sobering fact that real life is not temporarily elsewhere (back at the office, say, or at the gym, or on the evening news) but right here (on the couch, in the kitchen, curled up in the crib). Unmasking motherhood means accepting that we are all of us making it up as we go along, and

wishing we knew better. And when we get that far, we may be able to begin sharing what we really experience, and pooling what we really know, about life on the other side of the great divide of parenthood. We might even have a chance to produce a generation of daughters who will rise to the challenge of motherhood fearlessly, and without apology or pretence. (Maushart, 1999, p. 36)

O'Reilly believes to unmask the motherhood we need "an archaeology of maternity": an excavation of the truths of motherhood disguised and distorted beneath the mask" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 99) and this will start with the mothers who can talk truthfully about their experiences of mothering. According to feminist critics, being true to themselves having maternal authenticity towards their own experiences is quite essential for mothers and society since it allows mothers to create a strong sense of self. When mothers are authentic, they are happy in their role as a parent which also has a positive impact on children and society. Maushart further comments on the topic, and she adds: "Unmasking motherhood was a greater challenge to the feminist imagination than all the other 'women's issues' put together" (Maushart, 1999, p. 239). It is because as Sara Ruddick argues: "Idealized figure of the Good Mother casts a long shadow on many actual mothers' lives" (Ruddick, 1989, p. 31). However, the experiences of mothers from joy and love to fear, guilt and anxiety need to be surfaced because as Maushart argues that mothers cannot go on living the idealized motherhood forever and since mothers are so scared of outing themselves as flawed or failed mother in society, they pretend to feel only joy and love without showing fear, guilt, and anxiety (Maushart, 1999). Thus, O'Reilly argues that "the mask of motherhood exposes the costs and consequences for mothers who seek both to embrace and deny the idealization of patriarchal motherhood" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 100). In *Red Clocks*, we understand how heavy the mask Susan is wearing. Even though she fails to unmask throughout the novel, she shows the reader realities of her mothering in her inner thoughts. She openly expresses how her physical appearance have changed after birth. She says: "The stretching and loosening is permanent, no matter what miracles they tell you Kegels can work" (Zumas, 2018, p. 191). Or, with her private conversation with her daughter, Bex, she asks: "But if you do have another baby, will you get a purple nurple again? And will your hair fall out and your breasts die?" (2018, p. 192). Neither Susan in *Red Clocks* or Olivia in *Vox* have the courage to speak up the realities of their mothering and throughout the novels, they try to hide their anguish from society out of fear. Accordingly, it is understood that how patriarchal motherhood ideals prison so many mothers and prevent them having authenticity in their experiences. Rich, on the other hand, is quite optimistic about unmasking the motherhood.

She argues that “the words are being spoken now, are being written down, the taboos are being broken, the masks of motherhood are cracking through” (Rich, 1986, p. 239).

Lastly, Lowinsky argues that although “mother is the first world we know, the source of our lives and stories, the voice of her experience is seldom heard in our literature since the feminist literature has been daughter-identified” (Lowinsky, 1992, xi). She believes that since people are so full of judgments on what a mother should be, it is impossible to see what a mother really is. She thinks this causes “shattering to a woman’s sense of self and her connection to roots” (Lowinsky, 1992, xi). Lowinsky defines “motherline” as such in her book:

The Motherline is not a straight line, for it is not about abstract genealogical diagrams; it is about bodies being born out of bodies. Envision the word *line* as a cord, a thread, as the yarn emerging from the fingers of a woman at the spinning wheel. Imagine cords of connection tied over generations. Like weaving or knitting, each thread is tied to others to create a complex, richly textured cloth connecting the past to the future. (Lowinsky, 1992, p. 12)

She elaborates the definition: “they are stories of being female, of being mothers and daughter. They tell of our carnal knowledge of life’s mysteries (1992, p. 210). She believes that the stronger the motherline is, the stronger and more empowered the women will be because in this century women are cut out of their motherline on purpose. She puts forward that mothers are left alone and weak. She says: “We live in a culture that has left the mother’s experience, the mother’s perspective, the mother’s power, in the shadows” (Lowinsky, 1992, p. 4). She believes that women need to follow and find their mother roots to be empowered in the patriarchal society and firstly she suggests that women need to hear long lost and forgotten mothers’ stories and lore. She argues: “Women lament the lack of narratives of women’s lives, yet women’s stories are all around us. We don’t hear them because our perception is shaped by a culture that trivializes ‘women’s talk’ (Lowinsky, 1992, p. 2). She contends that women used to talk about the birth, raising kids, menstruation, the collective past of women. They used to have the motherline to connect them. However, now according to her, “women seemed to want to live their fathers’ lives. Mothers were rejected, looked down upon, left in the dark” (Lowinsky, 1992, p. 29). It is because patriarchal system always prioritizes male lineage and inheritance over motherline because as Lowinsky puts forward “patriarchal lineage is about legitimacy, inheritance, marriage contracts, all the ways men assure that their seed will fertilize the next generation” (1992, p. 14). In the male defined world patriarchal lineage is more important and preferable. Consequently, she says: “We are ashamed of our yearnings for connection, our tears, our mothers. We try to live like men” (1992, p. 32). Thus,

as she argues women in the 21st century have lost this connection between mothers, daughters, and sisters.

In *Red Clocks*, the loss of connection between mothers to daughters clearly observed in characters. For instance, Ro often states that she does not want to live her mother's life and has a completely different life from her mother. Eivør, likewise, does not respect her mother and cannot connect with her mother in any ways. Mattie does not have any connection with her mother, Gin Percival since she was adopted as a baby. It is obvious that the connection is long gone. Rich draws a conclusion that "the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy" (Rich, 1986, p. 237). The most striking example of this would be Gin Percival. Gin comes from a lineage of Percival women as they called. There is no male figure in Percival's house, and it is known that she has lived with her aunt and mother. Compared to other characters, she has the strongest bond or "motherline" since she has learnt everything she knows such as healing people with herbs especially from her aunt and it is known that Percival women have been healing people with herbs for generations. Thus, it has been taught from mothers to daughters for generations. She often states she is proud of being Percival: "Her mother was a Percival. Her aunt was a Percival. The mender has been a Percival since age six, when her mother left her father" (Zumas, 2018, p. 22) and when she has problems, she often tries to get courage or strength from her "motherline". She says: "Show them how Percivals do" (Zumas, 2018, p. 22) or "*You are a Percival*" (2018, p. 196). The name and the surname of the father is not even stated in the novel. However, there is also the loss of connection. For example, Gin is left by her mother at the age of eight and then she leaves her daughter when she was born. The motherline of Percivals ends with Gin and her daughter, Mattie. Ruth Lowinsky believes that losing our motherline divides our bodies with our past and "leave us wandering like motherless daughters in the too bright light of patriarchal consciousness" (Lowinsky, 1992, p. 32). Thus, she believes that we need to search out our feminine selves that connects us with our mothers and grandmothers (Lowinsky, 1992).

In *Vox*, on the other hand, we witness the women's reconnection with the motherline in a dystopic world. The new mothers who cannot talk because of their wristbands find the solution to help each other with their mothering as a community. They find ease and comfort with each other. Even though there are no words or stories to share among them, their mothering brings them together and makes them reconnect with their motherline. For instance, when Jean goes to park, she watches these new mothers for hours. She narrates what she sees:

Like all the new mothers in the neighborhood, they traveled in pairs or packs, running errands in sync, ready to lend a hand if one of the babies had a meltdown in the checkout aisle. These two, though, they were close-knit, tight. It was that tightness, I understand now, that was the problem. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 35)

Jean realizes at the end that this connection of women was a problem for patriarchal powers. She insinuates that women are cut of their bonds, motherline on purpose since it does not serve the purpose of the patriarchal powers. Jean keeps watching new mothers “taking turns to ogle each other’s baby, pointing at their hearts and temples in a silent pidgin. I watched them finger spell next to a pyramid of oranges, laughing” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 35) and amazes how these mothers’ mothering brings them together and empowers them even in horrible conditions they live in. Here, we can understand that women who reconnect with their motherlines are stronger and more empowered. Lastly, Green concludes that “through developing a feminist motherline, with feminist mothers being the cultural bearers of feminism in their daily lives, empowerment for mothers and children is surely to follow” (Green, 2006, p. 19). Thus, not only mothers but also the children of our future will be empowered if women are not cut of their motherline. Because according to O’Reilly, in “matricentric feminist approach” it is important for women to pursue and reconnect with their “motherline” because “motherline ensures that feminist mothers have a connection with a worldview that is centred and draws upon feminist’s crucial gender based analysis of the world—including parenting. It also promises a legacy of feminist mothering and motherwork for others” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 18).

To sum up, the novels in discussion testify that motherhood itself is the cause of oppression for many women even in the 21st century. Female characters in both novels mirror the problems that mothers have to face in patriarchal system. In *Red Clocks*, Zumas presents the reader a feminist critical dystopia where five women characters have to face with different kinds of difficulties since they have lost the control over their own bodies. Thanks to braided narrative of the novel, the reader follows the lives and oppression of each woman and their perspective on motherhood. Susan shows how to find joy in motherhood. However, she simultaneously suffers from maternal ambivalence, maternal regret, and post second wave split subjectivity, too. She hides behind the mask of motherhood to keep her inner conflicts to herself because she does not want to be judged or alienated by society. Even though she knows how motherhood may be a burden sometimes, she continues to behave according to society’s norms and enforces the norms on Roberta as well. On the other hand, Roberta, Mattie, Eivør, and Gin represent the marginalized women. Roberta is

isolated from society since she wishes to be a single mother through fertilization. Mattie almost dies while terminating her pregnancy. After telling her mother that she cannot bear children, Eivør is blamed and kicked out of her town and follows her dream to be a marine biologist instead of a mother. Gin gives her daughter, Mattie, for adoption. All female characters in *Red Clocks* become objects to oppression whether they follow the norms or not. In *Vox*, in the same way, all women have been effectively silenced by totalitarian leaders. They lose their basic rights, voices and the control over their bodies. As in *Red Clocks*, here also female body is the target of men. The main protagonist, Jean, is also a marginalized woman who defies the rules of patriarchy and patriarchal motherhood. Fearing of these women, totalitarian leader locks all women in their houses with their husbands and children and enforces them to perform stereotypical gender roles such as cooking and raising children. In the novel, Jean is often labelled as bad mother since she does not submit to the stereotypical good mother rules and throughout the novel, she faces with maternal ambivalence and regret. Olivia who is the “gatekeeper” of patriarchal motherhood always looks at Jean’s way of mothering with contempt. Apart from Jean, the reader witnesses the story of new mothers, and it is understood that since society does not protect mothers and their babies, they try to come together and help each other with their mothering. Thus, both Zumas and Dalcher portray strong, marginalized, and feminist mothers who try to fight for their rights and their children in the patriarchal system. These novels make the voice of the mothers heard, and “analyze becoming and being a mother from the perspective and subjectivity of mothers themselves” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 44). Mothers in both novels try to “mother against motherhood” (Rich, 1986, p. 208). Women in *Red Clocks* and *Vox* defy the rules of patriarchal motherhood norms which cause them to be labelled as “bad mothers”. They demand agency, authority over their bodies, and autonomy. As argued before, matricentric feminism coined by O’Reilly that places motherhood and mothering at the center of its analysis is needed (O’Reilly, 2021). She believes that feminist studies isolate mothers since motherhood marks binary gender differences and as she argues: “Feminists are uncomfortable with anything that underscores gender differences and suggests essentialism (i.e., cisgender men are naturally this way, and cisgender women are naturally this way)” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 231). She states that feminist should not ignore motherhood since “motherhood matters and is often integral to a mother’s sense of self and her experience of the world” (2021, p. 29). Motherhood itself is an oppression for women in many realms of society. When women become mothers, they get stuck in the traditional rules of society and lose their equalities and hard-earned

rights as a single woman. Petra Bueskens elaborates: “being a mother continues to undermine women’s equality and because that equality needs to be refracted through the lens of difference to accommodate the plethora of mothers’ voices in turn redefining the very meaning of equality” and she concludes: “it is on this basis that a matricentric feminism is needed!” (Bueskens, 2021, p. 39).



CHAPTER 2

WOMEN'S RESISTANCE IN DYSTOPIAN WORLDS OF *RED CLOCKS AND VOX*

*"i heard a woman becomes herself
the first time she speaks
without permission
then, every word out of her mouth
a riot
say, beautiful
& point to the map of your body
say, brave
& wear your skin like a gown or a suit
say, hero
& cast yourself in the lead role."*

(Barnhart, 2018, p. 20)

Historically, women's voices have been suppressed by the dominant patriarchal ideology and women could not make their voices heard in society because until the late 19th century, writing as a profession had been regarded as unsuitable for women and for the ones who could write had to go through a lot of troubles in order to publish their work. They mostly had to write under male pseudonyms because they needed to conceal their gender to be taken seriously. Writers in the 19th century such as Mary Ann Evans known by her male pseudonym, George Eliot, used male name to be able to publish her work. Yeung argues that even in the 21st century some female writers continue to hide their gender "especially in male-dominated genres like science fiction and crime. J.K. Rowling is one famous example – her publishers advised her to use initials instead of her full name when publishing the first Harry Potter book" (Yeung, 2020, n.p.). Zumas in *Red Clocks* explore the issue of silencing women in literature with Eivør Mínervudottír. Roberta tries to finish her book on Eivør Mínervudottír who was a polar explorer in the 19th century, but she says that "Eivør Mínervudottír, a nineteenth-century polar hydrologist whose trailblazing research on pack ice was published under a male acquaintance's name. There is no book on Mínervudottír, only passing mentions in other books" (Zumas, 2018, p. 34). Even though Eivør was a brilliant scientist and explorer, and she wrote many books to share her discoveries, none was published because of her gender, so she wrote to her tutor, Harry Rattray: "After many weeks of reflection on my

difficulties with the Royal Society I have taken the painful decision to request that you publish my findings under your own name. Otherwise the world will never know them” (Zumas, 2018, p. 272). In a similar way, in *Vox*, Dalcher shows how women’s voices were strictly controlled by men: “Actresses are allowed a special dispensation while they’re on the job. Their lines, of course, are written by men” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 22). Zumas and Dalcher show that women’s voices have always been cut down in male-dominated world, and their accomplishments in the public sphere was intentionally hampered. Thus, women were represented and voiced by male writers. In Victorian times, for instance, while some women were depicted as angelic figures or goddesses who are innocent and all-good, some were depicted as witches or evil. The common point of these two depictions of women is that women characters lack any personality traits or complexity as human-beings. Christ further explains this notion as follows:

Women live in a world where women’s stories rarely have been told from their own perspectives. The stories celebrated in culture are told by men. Thus, men have actively shaped their experiences of self and world, and their most profound stories orient them to what they perceive as the great powers of the universe. But since women have not told their own stories, they have not actively shaped their experiences of self and world nor named the great powers from their own perspectives. (Christ, 1980, p. 4)

Gilbert and Gubar explain that even in the 21st century “women exist only to be acted on by men, both as literary and as sensual objects” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, p. 8). The Twitter challenge in 2018 called “Men Write Women” by the author Whitney Reynolds is a good example of inaccurate description and representation of women by men in literature. Sawant presents some examples of these wrong representations, and she argues that Jack Kerouac, for instance, describes a woman’s body in his novel, *On the Road*, as such: “Her breasts stuck out straight and true; her little flanks looked delicious” (Sawant, 2019, n.p.). Another example she gives is Paul Auster. She says that Auster describes a female character in his novel, *Brooklyn Follies*, as to have “ample, poignant breasts” (Sawant, 2019, n.p.). Or, she claims that Jonathan Frazen describes a female character in *Purity* as such: “little squirrel who loves to fuck” (Sawant, 2019, n.p.).

Gilbert and Gubar argue that it is because “in patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text’s author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis” (Gilber & Gubar, 1979, p. 6). Thus, because of these patriarchal ideologies of the past and the present, they conclude that women cannot find much space for writing about themselves. Caren Kaplan questions in which form and how a woman writer is supposed to write where even language is defined by male ideologies (Kaplan, 1987). Where the

male perspective is all that matters, women's voices and their characterization are difficult to be found in many male authors' works. Gilbert and Gubar, on the other hand, claims:

Since his is the chief voice she hears, does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she 'talk back' to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre, insisting on her own viewpoint? (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, p. 46)

In a world where women are suppressed and silenced systematically, the feminist dystopian genre emerges as a channel to vocalize women's fears and anger. Feminist critics also argue that the best form of writing that women could express themselves freely is the feminist dystopian genre because "the duality of the female literary voice ties in wonderfully with the dystopian genre" (Demoor, 2010, p. 38). The feminist dystopian genre also through its exploration of oppression, portrayal of real empowered women, and critique of social injustices makes space for women's resistance while fostering awareness and responsibility. Dystopian fiction is not fundamentally different from the world we live in. In fact, it serves as a powerful mirror that reflects the potential paths that our society could take. Gilbert argues that "dystopian fiction isn't soothing anymore. It's too close for comfort" (Gilbert, 2018, n.p.) because both Zumas's and Dalcher's novels show that the themes explored in dystopian fiction are no longer far-fetched fantasies, but cautionary tales rooted in our reality. Authoritarian regimes exerting excessive control over women, marginalization of certain groups portrayed by dystopian fiction also serves as a reflection of threats women face today.

Red Clocks and *Vox* are feminist critical dystopian novels that explore the oppression of women by totalitarian leaders. Both Zumas and Dalcher give voices to marginalized and strong women in their feminist dystopias. Women in these novels under discussion lose most of their rights and freedom, yet they try to stand up against the patriarchal powers to reclaim what they have lost. In *Red Clocks*, women lose their reproductive rights and control over their bodies since abortion is illegal and fertility treatments are tightly regulated. The women in the novel try to navigate their lives in a society where their choices and lives increasingly restrict. Dalcher's *Vox*, in the same way, is a feminist critical dystopian novel that explores the impact of silencing and suppressing women's voices and how limitations are used to maintain power and control over a population. Zumas and Dalcher choose to write in the feminist dystopian genre because feminist dystopias reveal the potential consequences of systemic oppression of marginalized genders and try to encourage readers to consider the ways they can work together for a more equal future. Because in the dystopian genre:

Dystopian protagonists are constantly struggling, feeling incarcerated and confined to an unchanging system that oppresses everyone, forcing them to adopt a unified, stereotyped, and oppressive form of life. This pushes them to go into a loop of questioning the political system and social structure where they live, trying to find a way out of their trauma. (Al Disuqui et al, 2022, p. 134)

Dystopias compared to utopias “where we conceive that nearly everybody is happy or at least thinks they are” (Claeys, 2021 p. x) are bleaker, depressing, and offer very little hope for the future. However, according to Gregory Claeys it is difficult to separate Utopia from Dystopia because “many utopias possess dystopian elements and vice versa. In these terms, paradoxically, even More’s *Utopia* was not really a utopia” (Claeys, 2021, p. xxi). Because it is argued that utopia is an illusion and it cannot exist without dystopian elements. Thus, Sargent argues even Thomas More’s *Utopia* is “flawed utopia which refers to works that present what appears to be a good society until the reader learns of some flaw that raises questions about the basis for its claim to be a good society” (Sargent, 2003, p. 225). Claeys goes further: “Today, no society would be called utopian in which even a relatively small minority suffers coercion and oppression in order to provide privileges for the rest” (Claeys, 2021, p. xxi) and in parallel, Margaret Atwood says: “Utopia is only safe when it remains true to its name [*eu-topia*: no-place] and stays nowhere” (Atwood, 2005, p. 95). According to Tulloch’s definition, dystopias, on the other hand, reflect “the cultural zeitgeist and fears of the era [in which] they were created” (Tulloch, 2009, p. 13). Critics argue that dystopian writing is on the rise lately because it is created “as a response not only to the unrealised utopian visions of past centuries—such as those of More’s *Utopia* (1516), Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627) or Neville’s *The Isle of Pines* (1668)—but to the terrors of the current generation” (Norledge, 2022, p. 3). Thus, since the 20th century is an age of disasters, it is full of dystopian narratives which represent the dissatisfactions of the time and society, and it offers warnings about the possible outcomes of the current system and world to the reader. Claeys argues that writing in dystopian fiction significantly increased lately because:

Women’s rights are under threat from right-wing regimes and religious traditionalists more than at any time in the past half century, and oppression of gays, lesbians, and transsexuals is increasing. Racism is harsher and more blatant than in many decades. Almost everywhere we look, toleration and consent are decreasing and coercion is increasing. (Claeys, 2021, p. xx)

Mark Featherstone further points out the reason as follow: “the world of 2020 and beyond is the world of Trump, Johnson, Bolsonaro, Orban, and other right-wing leaders” (Featherstone, 2021,

p. 126) and the common point of these leaders is “their concern for the plight of the silent majority..which led to a politics of normlessness” (2021, p. 126).

Baccolini and Maylon, on the other hand, argue that while dystopias give very little hope to the reader in their story, “the new critical dystopias allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work” (Baccolini & Baylon, 2003, p. 7). Although critical dystopia is a subgenre of the dystopian fiction, they serve a more critical function and encourage readers to take action against oppression and offer them a little hope “within the work”. Because according to Rebecca Solnit, “[t]o hope is to gamble. It’s to bet on the future. . . . To hope is dangerous, and yet it’s is the opposite of fear, for to live is to risk” (Solnit, 2016, p. 5). Moyland adds and argues:

Since it [critical dystopia] views a sociopolitical system from the viewpoint of a discontented character, it evokes for the reader a ‘militant pessimism’, and it leaves the ending open so that the possibility of a ‘focused anger’ and a ‘radical hope’ remain possible for the reader. (Moylan, pp. 155-157)

She further argues that “the critical utopias keep the utopian impulse alive by challenging it and deconstructing it within its very pages” (Moylan, 1986, p. 45). Zumas’s and Dalcher’s novels offer this “militant pessimism” in their stories and leave the reader a glimpse of hope, but at the same time argue that hope is only possible through awareness and responsibility. Women in both novels do not accept the patriarchal mandates imposed on them. They resist the system. At the same time, throughout the novels, they dwell on their mistakes, and take responsibility for their actions. In *Red Clocks* Roberta admits that if women like her cared more about the election or maybe if she voted, things could be different. When Mattie gets pregnant, she asks Roberta to take her to a secret abortion clinic called “the Polyphontes”. While waiting for Mattie, Roberta questions her actions, and she says: “Up through the gummy darkness in her chest, through the self-pity and resentment, poke thin stalks of gratitude. The Polyphontes aren’t just shaking their heads” (Zumas, 2018, p. 283). Roberta regrets shaking her head and doing nothing against the injustice, and she realizes she should have taken more responsibility and raised her voice more. Similarly, in *Vox* Jean admits that she should have taken political action before the election. She says: “My fault started two decades ago, the first time I didn’t vote, the umpteen times I told Jackie I was too busy to go on one of her marches or make posters or call my congressmen” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 196)

As Cavalcanti states, feminist critical dystopias are “a subgenre of literary utopianism that has become a major form of expression of women’s hopes and fears, and to show the relationship between the dystopian genre in its feminist inflection” (Cavalcanti, 2013, p. 47). Cavalcanti

elaborates on the definition and states that feminist dystopias “envision imaginary spaces that most contemporary readers would describe as bad places for women, being characterized by the suppression of female desire (brought into effect either by men or by women) and by the institution of gender-inflected oppressive orders” (Cavalcanti, 2003, p. 49). Feminist critical dystopia provides feminist criticism through the representation of the oppressed women especially marginalized women by men and other women in a bleak world. In such dystopias, there is a portrayal of a patriarchal society where women are subordinated to men, and it focuses on the inequality of women in society. Cavalcanti continues with the definition: “In terms of narrative technique, feminist dystopias paint an exaggerated picture of the existing power relations between the sexes, as if they were placed under a magnifying glass” (Cavalcanti, 2003, p. 53).

However, the story in Zumas’s novel is not far away from the realities of the world which is actually more terrifying. Zumas who follows the footprints of Atwood shows that “dystopian fiction succeeds when it makes its readers believe in the plausibility of its nightmare world” (Hickey, 2019, n.p.). In an interview Zumas says that *Red Clocks* is not entirely a dystopian novel because so many women around the world are the victims of the same oppression as the women in her novel. She gives El Salvador where abortion is prohibited as an example (DeFreitas, 2019). In El Salvador abortion has been illegal under all circumstances since 1998 (Urquilla, 2018). There:

Women have been sentenced to up to eight years in more typical cases, but if a judge decides that the abortion was in fact an ‘aggravated homicide’ then a much higher sentence-up to 50 years - is passed down. And when a miscarriage takes place a woman is often at severe risk of being charged with this...The WHO confirms that 68,000 women die every year because of illegal and unsafe abortions. (Urquilla, 2018, n.p.)

Thus, Zumas’s *Red Clocks* is quite similar to what is happening in El Salvador. The novel is set in a dystopian world where five women characters go through difficult times because of the outlaw of abortion. Roberta enounces the new rules by the totalitarian leader in *Red Clocks* at the beginning of the novel:

On January fifteenth—in less than three months—this law, also known as Every Child Needs Two, takes effect. Its mission: *to restore dignity, strength, and prosperity to American families*. Unmarried persons will be legally prohibited from adopting children. In addition to valid marriage licenses, all adoptions will require approval through a federally regulated agency, rendering private transactions criminal. (Zumas, 2018, p. 35)

Zumas claims in an interview that she was greatly inspired by the real proposals of American politicians and leaders such as Donald Trump, Mike Pence, and Paul Ryan. Hence, her novel is

based on the real threats women face in the United States (Sugiuchi, 2018). After the election of Donald Trump in 2016 in the United States, Trump enacted abortion restrictions that overturn *Roe v. Wade*. According to the article by Laura Bassett,

In a single year, President Donald Trump has already decimated reproductive rights and access to family planning in the U.S. and around the globe. He reinstated and massively expanded the Global Gag Rule, restricting \$8.8 billion in U.S. foreign aid funding for international health programs that provide or even mention abortion. (Bassett, 2018, n.p.)

Lisa Shannon who is a global women's rights and advocate said in Bassett's article that because of Trump's actions "girls aren't able to get contraception, and they're starting to come back pregnant, suicidal, bereft. They're desperate, and they'll do whatever it takes. The only difference here is that the women will die from unsafe abortions" (Bassett, 2018, n.p.).

Zumas's dystopian world is not very different from the world we live in because according to Sarah Ditum, "the world as it is offers such a rich variety of nightmares for women that it seems superfluous for fiction to devise ever more horrifying worlds that could be" (Ditum, 2018, n.p.). In *Red Clocks* even though horrifying, women go through difficulties and restrictions that no longer seem so extreme. Roberta admits that no one believed abortion would be illegal and that was her first mistake. She says: "they started talking about this thing called the Personhood Amendment, which for years had been a fringe idea, a farce" (Zumas, 2018, p. 160) and she remembers that women have lost all control over their bodies in a single day because of a man who she did not even vote for, and she admits later that it was her second mistake. She says:

Woke up one morning to a president-elect [she] hadn't voted for. This man thought women who miscarried should pay for funerals for the fetal tissue and thought a lab technician who accidentally dropped an embryo during in vitro transfer was guilty of manslaughter. (Zumas, 2018, p. 35)

At first, the oppression of the totalitarian regime in the novel started with the manipulation of women. They started to make women wait for a long time before the procedure and made them watch an online tutorial on "fetal pain thresholds and celebrities whose mothers had planned to abort them" (Zumas, 2018, p. 160). Later, they have banned abortion altogether, and in consequence of the agreement with the Canadian prime minister, "The Pink Wall" which refers to the border of Canada allowed the US government to detain any abortion seekers who would like to flee the country. All women who seek abortion are charged with the intent to murder. Women who are deprived of options tried to find help from every corner from illegal abortion services to homemade abortion remedies. One of these women was Mattie's friend Yasmine. After Yasmine

got pregnant, she had to give herself a homemade abortion and was hospitalized. Even though she survived, she lost so much blood, and her uterus was removed since it was badly damaged. On top of it, police came and took her to jail while she was still in hospital (Zumas, 2018). As seen in this episode, the horrible things that Yasmine and all other women in the novel suffered in Zumas's dystopia is quite similar to what women around the world are going through right now.

According to the interview Zumas did with New York Times magazine, it was on purpose. She says: "It was very intentional to make the situation in the novel feel ordinary, and therefore more frightening. One of the things about looking at the world through a feminist lens is that we are already in a dystopia." (Alter, 2018, n.p.). Pakistani writer Bina Shah also states that "in patriarchy, women are always going to end up being the losers. What's going on now in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan is worse than what's happening in 'The Handmaid's Tale'" (as cited in Alter, 2018, n.p.). In *Red Clocks*, Roberta as a highschool teacher tries to show her students that oppression women in *Red Clocks* go through are man-made and intentional. She wants her students to understand who was to blame for women's sufferings. She says that the government are spending "taxpayers' money to criminalize women". When one of her students says "if they're breaking the law, they *are* criminals", she continues: "Laws aren't natural phenomena. They have particular and often horrific histories. Ever heard of the Nuremberg Laws? Ever heard of Jim Crow?" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 72). Consequently, she reminds her students that sometimes laws such as Jim Crow enforcing racial segregation, Nuremberg that enacted by Nazis, or Personhood Amendment by the government are used to oppress innocent people and gain more power.

Vox, on the other hand, offers a bleaker and more horrifying world to the reader compared to *Red Clocks*. It describes a totalitarian regime that takes away all women's rights in the United States. In this dystopian novel set in the US, all women have been effectively silenced by a totalitarian leader. Women and even small girls are fitted with metal bracelets that can track their word count and shock them if they exceed one hundred words a day because according to Dalcher, "What better way to force somebody into submission than to take away the one thing that makes them human, language?" (as cited in Alter, 2018, n.p.). Women in the novel have been forced to be silent, insignificant beings whose presences do not have any importance. With the bracelets on their wrists, women could not talk without being electrocuted, and with surveillance cameras to detect any body language, they were not allowed to use even sign language. At the beginning of the novel, officers visit the houses one by one to enforce the rules by the new totalitarian leader

such as setting up cameras, collecting all the books and electronics to make women more submissive and obedient. When they come to Jean's house to make "the necessary changes", Jean describes those moments as such:

The men spoke to me, at me, never with me. Patrick would be notified and given instructions; a crew would come to the house—was this evening convenient?—to install cameras at the front and back doors, lock my computer away, and pack up our books, even Sonia's *Baby Learns the Alphabet*. The board games went into cardboard boxes; the cardboard boxes went into a closet in Patrick's office. I was to bring Sonia, barely five years out of my body, to the same place that afternoon so her tiny wrist could be fitted. They showed me a selection, a rainbow of colors I could choose from. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 58)

Because Margaret Atwood argues that "the aim is to silence *the voice*, abolish the word, so that the only voices and words left are those of the ones in power" (Atwood, 1985, p. 427). Thus, feminist critical dystopias offer a critique of the current social and political system while presenting a warning for the reader and envisioning alternative ways of living. As Becca Bashford states, "[feminist] dystopian fiction has begun to focus on the very real threat that poses women, their bodily autonomy, their productive rights, and more pressingly -the silencing of their voices" (as cited in Books That Matter, 2023). Jean in *Vox* also states that "the answer comes much too easily, also in the form of a single word: *silence*" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 189). Hence, Dalcher presents in her novel that silencing women is the key to patriarchal power. If you manage to silence women, no one will stand against the system.

Women in *Vox* also have no authorization to possess a passport which make them limited and prevent them from fleeing to other countries. She says even though it is not as bad as Winston Smith "having to crouch into a blind corner of his one-room flat while Big Brother watches through a screen on the wall, but [they] do have cameras" (2018, p. 177). As in *Red Clocks*, here also the oppression of women started very quickly when a man they did not vote for was elected as the president. First, the representation of women in court has decreased significantly by stating "the country's best interest in mind": "Texas? Gone. Ohio? Gone. All the Southern states? Gone with the fucking wind, that's what. And you think it's some kind of blip?...Cut the representation in half again, and we're headed into the dark ages of 1970-something" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 24). The next day, women were fitted with wristbands that control their word count because women need to be silent and under obedience: "when [women] obey male leadership with humility and submission, we acknowledge that the head of every man is Christ, and that the head of every woman is the man" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 82). Thus, women will seek to adorn themselves inwardly,

and to be pure, modest, and submissive. In this way, they will glorify man, thereby glorifying God (2018, p. 82). Women, like in *Red Clocks*, try to cross the border into Canada, Cuba, or Mexico. However, authorities, again, put checkpoints or walls to control them. Both novels show how women try to flee the United States which was known as the country of democracy to have freedom and choice. In an interview Zumas says that she put “Pink Wall” in her novel after she heard “Trump rage-whining about border ‘protection’”. Then she decides to “mirror his southern wall with a northern wall that would keep the U.S. citizens from reaping the benefits of Canada. When they go low, we go high” (Breaden, 2018, n.p.). Similarly, in *Vox*, Dalcher shows the US-Mexico border or called as “The Wall” was guarded not to prevent Mexicans coming from Mexico to the United States but prevent the US people from fleeing Mexico: “The wall separating Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas from Mexico itself had already been built. ‘We can’t have our citizens, our families, our mothers and fathers, fleeing,’ the president said in one of his early addresses” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 15). Thus, both writers reveal how women are left with no option to raise their voices or flee the country to search for their rights in a different place.

When the new religious authority took over in *Vox*, they have told that the twenty-first century is poisonous for the young generation since “people don’t know who men are or who women are anymore and the children are growing up confused” (2018, p. 43). They believed that “the culture of family has broken down” (2018, p. 43). After the government made sure that everyone got used to the situation, they brought up new restrictions to ban swearing and bad words to make women even more submissive. The government officials who come to Jean’s house introduce the new wristbands as such:

We like to think of it as a gentle nudge, nothing more. Just keep things clean, and everything will function normally. No four-letter words, no blasphemy. If you slip up, that’s okay, but your quota reduces by ten for each infraction. You’ll get used to it. So this is how I lose my voice for the second time. With a click that sounds like a bomb. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 80)

In order to address the urgency of resisting the patriarchal powers, Jackie who is Jean’s friend from grad school foresees the danger. Jean describes Jackie as an activist person who goes to every protest and marches and Jean often regrets that she did not pay attention to Jackie’s warning before the election. She regrets that she did not go to protests with Jackie. One evening, when Jean watches the news with her family, she sees Jackie on television. Jackie tries to warn women on the television by crying out “we’re on a slippery slide to prehistory, girls. Think about it. Think about where you’ll be—where your daughters will be—when the courts turn back the clock. Think about

words like ‘spousal permission’ and ‘paternal consent’” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 17). While Jean is watching Jackie on television, she regrets that she did not listen to her before: “On nights like this, I wish I had. Maybe things—the election thing, the nomination thing, the confirmation thing, the executive order thing—wouldn’t have turned out the way they did” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 20). Although Dalcher, in general, offers the reader a more dystopic world than Zumas in her novel, Jackie’s horrific words such as “spousal permission” or “paternal consent” are not also far from realities of the world for many women. For example, Jackie refers to these as going back to prehistoric times or turning back to the clock, but some women in the 21st century still live with these problems and more on a daily basis in some parts of the world. For instance, Coumba Kane asserts in her article in *Le Monde* that women in Africa are still deprived of basic human rights and object to many forms of abuse such as femicide, forced marriages, domestic or sexual violence as well as internalized gender stereotypes. Kane discusses that the majority of women surveyed in Niger in 2022 stated that “a man has the right to beat his wife when she argues with him or burns a meal” (Kane, 2022, n.p.). Or, in Iran, the life of a woman is regarded as half valuable as a man’s. Today women in Iran need to have permission from a male family member for working, traveling, or driving. In *Vox*, “spousal permission” and “parentel consent” that Jackie fears are also put into practice in a short time. Women in *Vox* cannot drive without their male guardian, cannot watch most channels since it is password protected and “viewable only by the head of household and males over eighteen” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 41), and cannot travel without a male presence. Thus, as is seen in the surveys and reports discussed above, women’s condition is not so much different or better than the dystopian novels under discussion. In Dalcher’s dystopian world, children at school are taught doctrines of patriarchy such as “be teachers of good things; teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands” (2018, p. 38) and girls and boys have separate classes according to their social roles. Girls have sewing, gardening, or culinary lessons since they are confined within private space as wives and mothers whereas boys have sports or math to get prepared for the public space, they work in.

Both Zumas and Dalcher focus on the intersectional approach of oppression towards women. June Eric-Udorie defines intersectionality as follows: “Intersectionality offers us a way to understand how multiple structures— capitalism, heterosexism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and so on—work together to harm women: women who are poor, disabled, queer, Muslim,

undocumented, not white, or a combination of those things” (Eric-Udorie, 2018, p. xvi). To understand women’s oppression as Crenshaw argues, we need to examine the layers of oppression since women sometimes are not oppressed only because of their gender, and not all women are oppressed at the same level (Crenshaw, 1989). Cavalcanti claims that the intersection of “race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and other axes with gender in dystopian narratives explicitly exposes how oppression and gender inequality take place on numerous levels because of the constant efforts of the regime to maintain its unquestioned absolute power” (Cavalcanti, 2000, p. 153). In both Zumas’s and Dalcher’s feminist dystopias we understand that even though all women live in the dystopia, some women suffer more because of their color, class, or sexual orientation. In *Red Clocks*, for instance, Mattie wonders about what happened to Yasmine, her black best friend, after the abortion. She says that Yasmin was the smartest in class, but when she got pregnant, she had to give herself a homemade abortion because:

Yasmine said she didn’t intend to be anyone’s stereotype. Black teen mother slurping welfare off the backs of hardworking citizens, etc. And Mrs. Salter was the only woman of color in the Oregon State Legislature. She didn’t intend to jeopardize her mother’s career. She gave herself a homemade abortion. (Zumas, 2018, p. 223)

Also, Zumas implies that Mattie and Yasmine went through the same things, Mattie got away with abortion maybe because she was a white girl. We also understand this when Mattie tries to cross the border and gets caught. Even though the policeman understands Mattie tries to cross the border because she is pregnant, he does not arrest her and sends her back home. Even Mattie wonders whether they would do the same to Yasmine. Thus, Yasmine who belongs to the marginalized group suffers from oppression and discrimination because of several reasons that intersect and interact with one another. Similarly, in *Vox*, same-sex partners and black people are marginalized groups. In the novel, it is clearly shown that sexual orientation is another cause for oppression for women:

Of course, there aren’t any two-mommy or two-daddy families anymore; the children of same-sex partnerships have all been moved to live with their closest male relative— an uncle, a grandfather, an older brother—until the biological parent remarries in the proper way. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 75)

In *Vox*, homosexuality is regarded as disease that you can cure or a choice that you can choose and change. For instance, one evening while watching the television, Jean’s son, Steven says: “It’s a life choice, Mom. If you can choose one sexuality, you can just as easily choose another. That’s all they’re trying to do” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 126). To oppress the vulnerable groups such as same-

sex couples more in the novel, they take away their kids and force gay women to live with a man until they get pregnant because it is the normative way. Jean narrates the oppression of gay people as follows: “Funny, with all the talk before of conversion therapy and curing homosexuality, no one ever thought of the foolproof way of getting gays in line: take away their kids” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 77). After taking away gay people’s kids for the sake of sanctity of family, gay women are sent to prison camps with bracelets set to zero words. Dalcher reveals that marginalized groups such as gays and black are oppressed more compared to others. As argued, all women in *Vox* are suppressed. They were locked into their houses with bracelets that lets 100 words a day, but gay women wore bracelets set to zero and they were given two choices: “marry to a man or move to a cathouse” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 112) because their voices were regarded as more dangerous for the totalitarian regime.

Secondly, like Yasmine in *Red Clocks*, we understand that colored women also experience different forms of oppression. One of these women is Sharon who is the neighbor of Jean. Sharon often takes care of Jean’s daughter when she goes to work. Sharon and her family are the examples of discrimination between white and black people in the novel. Dalcher shows that individuals have multiple social identities such as their color, race, gender, and sexual orientation, and black women may experience discrimination in ways that are different from the experiences of a white woman. For instance, when Jean asks why Sharon is in resistance, she says:

Why do you think? Take a good look at me, Jean.

‘I’m a black woman.’

I noticed. So?

So how long do you think it’s gonna be before Reverend Carl and his holy Pure Blue sheep get it in their heads that it ain’t just women and men who were made differently under God’s eyes, but blacks and whites?

(Dalcher, 2018, p. 148)

Sharon differentiates between the experiences of black and white women. She says: “You white gals, all you’re worried about is, well, all you’re worried about is you white gals. Me, I got more to fret over than whether I have a hundred words a day” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 148). She implies that she and her daughters always have more things to lose as black women since the world does not treat them equally and fairly. Bhavnani and Coulson give an example of intersectionality of oppression from “Reclaim the Night Marches” that took place in 1970s in Britain. These Night Marches by non-black people took place in places where black people mostly live, and non-black people demanded streets to be safer and better policing for women in those places. Bhavnani and

Coulson note in their article that “which women?” because for black women, police 'protection' is very different practise than for white women. Black women are not black *and* women, but *black women* (Bhavnani and Coulson, 1986, p. 90). Thus, it is important to understand the “intersectional feminism” to hear the voices of marginalized women rather than “white feminism” which prioritizes issues that only white middle-class women have because in that way it is possible to create a more inclusive and equitable society for women and it can only be achieved by addressing the intersection and interaction of different form of oppression and discrimination because as Jamia Wilson who is a Director and Publisher of the Feminist Press argues: “Intersectionality is really about understanding the pillars of oppression in the world that impact our lives based on the various identities that we hold” (as cited in Gray, 2018, p. 90).

To do that, Baccolini suggests that we must have awareness and responsibility and for the women in feminist critical dystopias even in the presence of utopian hope there is not much room for happiness:

A sense of sadness accompanies the awareness and knowledge that the protagonist has attained. Instead of providing some compensatory and comforting conclusion, the critical dystopia's open ending leaves its characters to deal with their choices and responsibilities. It is in the acceptance of responsibility and accountability, often worked through memory and the recovery of the past, that we bring the past into a living relation with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for Utopian change. (Baccolini, 2004, p. 521)

Baccolini highlights the power of resistance and solidarity in the face of oppression because as she argues: “Discomfort, awareness, resistance, solidarity, and interdependence are necessary to activate precarious hope; when combined, they are the tools of the critical dystopia with which we can crack the darkness, let the light in” (Baccolini, 2022, p. 1238). Women in both novels under discussion have not been silent against all these oppressions as seen in feminist dystopian writings. In *Red Clocks*, all women take responsibility for their action and face their choices. For example, Roberta decides to “see what it is. And to see what is possible”. This open ending offers hope for the desired utopian change. She also plans to “go to the protest in May” and “to do more than go to a protest” (Zumas, 2018, p. 310). She wants to resist and be brave like people in “Polyphonte Collective” that help pregnant women. Hence, Roberta “completes her journey from alienation and discomfort to active resistance” (Baccolini, 2022, p. 1238). In *Vox*, Jean like Roberta understands that it is her fault that she did not vote and protest enough. She regrets not listening to Jackie and going to marches. She takes responsibility for her actions and at the end of the novel, she says: “I

want to fight, and I don't know how" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 139). Then, she imagines what Jackie would say to her: "You can start small, Jeanie," she said. "Attend some rallies, hand out flyers, talk to a few people about issues. You don't have to change the world all by yourself, you know" (2018, p. 139). Like Roberta, she also completes her journey and joins the resistance. These novels show the reader women's resilience and strength in a feminist critical dystopia. Although women in the novel were denied of their basic rights, they find a way to stand up to the patriarchal system and achieve victory and claim their rights back. According to Foucault's doctrine on resistance, because of the oppression and domination, the dystopian novels emerge, and because of the nature of oppression and domination, resistance arises and according to him, resistance is always linked to power (Foucault, 1972).

Historically, Foucault and other critics explain how "docile" bodies are created systematically through ages. According to Foucault, the bodies of women become "docile" through constant oppression, control, and manipulation and the "docile bodies" easily and willingly can be "manipulated, shaped, [and] trained" (Foucault, 2012, p. 136). However, Pinakoulia points out that "there are power relations that govern and force the subject into a state of docility and blind conformity to a given rule; but there is also resistance, active self-formation and agency on the part of the subject" (Pinakoulia, 2020, p. 195). In *Vox*, when the totalitarian and religious power takes over and send women to home, Jean questions: "this is what he wanted: docile women and girls. The older generations need to be controlled, but eventually, by the time Sonia has children of her own, Reverend Carl Corbin's dream of Pure Women and Pure Men will be the way of the world" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 79). Pure Women who are described as docile and chaste shows the manipulation plan of the religious and patriarchal order. This quotation by Jean not only reveals how the patriarchal institution controllably reinforces stereotypes and roles genders, but also it shows the horrific plan over women's bodies. However, although it is true the "docile" body of women is created according to the system's agenda to gain more power on women, women have resisted regaining their agency and power. Mary Beard argues that "there is a radical separation – real, cultural and imaginary – between women and power" (Beard, 2017, p. 70) and according to Gordon this is because men and women have access to the different kinds of power in society. She argues that girls and boys are shaped with very different expectations and rules as soon as they are born. For example, they are dressed in different colors, their actions are interpreted differently, and even their words to describe them differ and as they grow older, the

difference between male and female grow. While women are taught to be obedient and docile, men are taught to be assertive and rebellious. She says that even teachers at school expect girls to behave better and “conscientious” (Gordon, 1990, p. 23). Emma Gray in her book, *A Girl's Guide to Joining the Resistance*, sums up the situation:

Being a woman means growing up in a world that tells you to be quiet in a million small ways every day. Don't be too young. Don't be too old. Don't try too hard. Don't be too loud. Don't take up too much space. Be successful but not threatening. Be beautiful but naturally so. Buy all the things that corporations tell you will help you conform to these impossible standards, but don't make it obvious that you needed any products to achieve 'perfection.' And while you're spinning out trying to be the thing that you think you must be to be worthwhile, the men around you are free to learn, to speak, to explore, to lead. (Gray, 2018, p. 34)

Thus, feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, and Carole Pateman put forward that men historically have access to power as a resource and domination because of aforementioned constructed gender differences and they argue that these norms are not “natural” or “innate”, but taught (as cited in Allen, 2108). MacKinnon concludes: “Difference is the velvet glove on the iron fist of domination. The problem is not that differences are not valued; the problem is that they are defined by power” (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 219). In both novels, we acknowledge how men use power as domination over women. For instance, in *Red Clocks*, Mattie questions the different words to define single women and men: “*What does the word 'spinster' do that 'bachelor' doesn't do? Why do they carry different associations? These are language acts, people!*” (Zumas, 2018, p. 164). She is aware that through language as well society divides men and women and consequently, as MacKinnon puts forward, the difference that was created and deepened by society is used as oppression against women. Mattie changes the offensive associations of the word “spinster” with being “bold” and powerful. She says: “The witch [Gin] is a spinster too. She is bold and cold...Gin Percival would either quit caring or take revenge” (Zumas, 2018, p. 164) because according to Mattie, women are deliberately are weakened by language acts and she tries to give the power back to women by changing its patriarchal attribute. Similarly in *Vox*, Steven stresses on these differences between genders and he says: “you're getting kind of hysterical. I'm only saying that it makes biological sense to have women do some stuff and men do other stuff” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 24). Steven puts emphasis on the word “hysterical” when he defines women because he thinks that being hysterical is always associated with women. Allen draws a conclusion that the differences between genders are not the problem, but the problem is “costs and benefits unjustly attached to these differences” (Allen, 2018, p. 11). For this reason, Steven justifies the

system's oppression of women because he sees women as different yet subordinate. Moreover, as discussed before feminists divide power into four categories, and it is argued that men use power as resource and domination. Men use power as resource and this power according to Okin is distributed unequally. She argues that "when we look seriously at the distribution between husbands and wives of such critical social goods as work, power, prestige, self-esteem, opportunities for self-development, and both physical and economic security, we find socially constructed inequalities between them" (Okin, 1989, p. 136).

In both novels, it is clearly understood that women do not have the same opportunities as men and they do not access the same power as them. For instance, in *Red Clocks*, women are the ones who make the sacrifice, quit working, and stay at home. Susan stays at home to raise their kids, and leave her law school that she always regrets. For instance, when Susan learns that her friend from law school, Edward, is in charge of Gin Percival's case, she feels longing and sadness: "The past future Susan MacInnes could have been a battling litigator who brought milestone cases to the higher courts. Edward is battling; The wife can hardly bring herself to read about the case. *Bring yourself*" (Zumas, 2018, p. 229). Also, in *Vox*, even though not all men used power as domination of women or even some protested against the government, they still had access to power and freedom as they wished. Through pages, Jean observes this situation and complains about the fact that men had double standards. While women were prisoned at home, men had access to everything. She says that "I knew all about the double standard, the private clubs that had cropped up in cities and towns where single men of certain means could go to unload their stress and sperm on professional ladies of the entertaining sort" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 112).

Secondly, according to feminist critics, men also use power as domination which describes power as a relation of domination and subordination and according to Allen, "their [feminist critics] goal is not a redistribution of power [as in power as resource] but a dismantling of the system of male domination and female subordination altogether" (Allen, 2018, p. 11). In *Red Clocks*, they succeed by controlling women's bodies and their lives. As the Police officer tells Mattie: "Be the cow they have to buy. Don't be the free milk" (Zumas, 2018, p. 224). Women in the novel are reduced to the worth of beings that are only valuable when they reproduce only if they are married. In *Vox*, the domination of men over women is more horrific. Single women with no families, for example, since "they couldn't very well live on their own with no words and no income. They were given a choice: marry or move to a cathouse" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 112) or if

women go against the rules, their hair was cut down and they were publicly shamed as “they used to do to heretics during the Spanish Inquisition and witches in Salem” (2018, p. 171) and some men such as Jean’s boss think that the oppression that women suffer is because of women. He says that women had “marched one too many times, written one too many letters, screamed one too many words. You women. You need to be taught a lesson” (2018, p. 70). Furthermore, the electrocution of women if they exceed their words shows, from a Butlerian perspective of “Electrocuted Female”, “not only forces women to internalize their restricted position in the society but also normalizes the violent practices on the female subject” (Pinakoulia, 2020, p. 197) and the female body continues to be the object in the hands of the system. However, in both definitions, “power as resource” and “power as domination”, Amy Allen argues that women are defined as powerless without “adequate conceptualization of women's resistance to oppression” (Allen, 2018, p. 17). As Yeatman puts forward as “*politics of resentment*”:

When a movement understands itself as representing those who are powerless, the victims of the powerful, it neither permits itself responsibility for, nor engagement in the affairs of the world. It maintains an innocence of worldly affairs, and in particular an innocence in regard to power. It does not confront the truths that power inheres in all relationships, that any interpretation of reality is itself a manifestation of power, and that those who are relatively powerless still participate in power. (Yeatman, 1997, p. 147)

These two understandings of power according to Allen, “denies the power that women wield when we engage in political struggle for feminist causes” (2018, p. 17) and they do not explain how “those who are socially defined as powerless will ever be able to wield the kind of power necessary for changing society” (2018, p. 18). Thus, it is important to understand the other types of power called as “power as empowerment” or “power of solidarity” which are female-defined, empowering, and resilient.

Power as empowerment signifies that women are able to use their power of reproduction or their motherhood as an act of resistance (Allen, 2018). According to feminist critics discussed before, women are not weakened by their motherhood as society implies or enforces but in reality, they are able to get empowered by their motherhood. It means that the reason mothers are disempowered is not because of their motherhood but because of the patriarchal system. In contrast to former understandings of power, power as empowerment has “the ability to empower and transform oneself, others, and the world” (Allen, 2018, p. 18). Zumas and Dalcher reveal how motherhood can be a transformative and empowering experience for women. Moreover, mothering

can be a site of resistance and power against patriarchal motherhood and patriarchy. In *Red Clocks*, when Susan decides to leave her “wife role”, she imagines how much she will enjoy motherhood:

She’ll feel so much better from the solitude that she will teach John to like foods other than buttered spaghetti and chicken nuggets. She’ll bake those barley walnut muffins Bex eats at the Perfects’. She will start cleaning again, keep the rooms scrubbed and dusted, wipe the toilet rims weekly, buy a dehumidifier for the attic, make an appointment to test the kids’ bloodstreams for lead. (Zumas, 2018, p. 246)

This scene reveals that Susan is not disempowered because she is a mother. On the contrary, without her normative wife role she shows that she likes being a mother. Thus, Jean Baker Miller believes that this understanding of power “can bring new understanding to the whole concept of power” (Miller, 1992, p. 241). Virginia Held expands the argument. She says that “the capacity to give birth and to nurture and empower could be the basis for new and more humanly promising conceptions than the ones that now prevail of power, empowerment, and growth” (Held, 1993, p. 137) and according to her this new understanding of power inevitably will replace the old male-defined conception which is “the power to cause others to submit to one’s will, the power that led men to seek hierarchical control” (Held, 1993, p. 136). As discussed in the previous chapter any person, man or woman, can be a mother and get empowered by mothering since “mother” needs to be understood as a verb rather than identity. However, Allen argues as follows:

Since most mothers have been and continue to be women, and since maternal thinking arises out of motherhood as a practice, most maternal thinkers are women. Accordingly, these empowerment theorists are describing a perspective that is, for the most part, still specific to women. (Allen, 2018, p. 19)

This understanding of power brings Sheri Lucas’s term “mamazon” (as cited in O’Reilly, 159, 2021) to mind. As Lucas explains it “mamazon” “connotes primal and fierce ‘mother bear’ instincts; mothering practices that are nontraditional ... and the decision to mother outside of a committed monogamous relationship; and mother-driven political actions, particularly when it is loud, angry and assertive” (Lucas, 2010, p. 683). O’Reilly gives Demeter-Persephone story as an example to the term of “mamazon”. She argues that the anger and rage Demeter felt against her daughter’s, Persephone’s, abduction by Hades made her powerful and “this power made her rage empowering. This enraged power and empowering rage transformed Demeter from being a passive witness to her daughter’s abduction to an active opponent against it” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 158). She continues: “As evidenced in many motherhood organizations, the rage or grief that a mother feels as her child is threatened or killed radicalizes and mobilizes the mother and moves her to social action and political resistance” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 158). As explicitly shown in the novels under

discussion, the mothers thanks to their “mother bear instincts” go against the oppression when it comes to their children and their well-being. They use their defiance, grief, and protective instincts as a form of resistance, and as seen in the novels, the power they have empowers them so much that it results in a significant change in their lives or the system they live in.

In *Red Clocks*, for example, Roberta tells a similar story to Demeter’s triumph to their students in class. She says:

The Romans had invaded a while back and were ruling the land. Her husband died and left his fortune to her and their daughters, but the Romans ignored his will, took the fortune, flogged Boadicea, and raped the daughters and in 61 CE she led her people in rebellion. (Zumas, 2015, p. 17)

Roberta tries to show her students how mothers can make a difference when they stand up. In the story, Roberta further explains that even though Boadicea who is the queen of Celtic tribe could not win against Romans, she could be able to change the course of history with the great rebellion because Romans hurt her and her daughters (Zumas, 2018). In the same way, in *Vox*, we see the examples of resilient mothers who get empowered through their motherhood and be able to change their destiny. Olivia and the protagonist Jean in *Vox* are only two examples of many. To start with the character Jean, she used her anger as a mother turned it against the system, and used it as a cause of rebellion. At first, we see that she had to bottle up her rage through pages when she witnesses the things her daughter, Sonia, go through:

When I thought of Sonia—of what would happen to her if Patrick and I were out of the picture, of whether she would be forced into a loveless marriage or sent away to a commune of whores where she could do nothing with her mouth but suck and moan—my blood boiled. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 112)

Or when she thinks about the cathouses that women were forced to go, she says: “For the second time today, I picture Sonia, twenty years old, playing courtesan, satisfying a monster’s appetite” (2018, p. 114) and she believes that there is no way she could stand it and at some point, she decides that she could do anything for her children. Moreover, one evening Jean sees her son, Steven, on television. Steven was accused of “fornication” because according to Reverend Carl’s religious doctrine, as a “Pure Man”, having sex with a “Pure Woman” before marriage was banned. When Jean sees her son on television as frightened and helpless, her rage boils “through every vein and artery, until the pressure builds to a trapped scream” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 245). Then, she decides to do anything to save her son even if it means killing: “Right now, with a half-baked formula on the table and Reverend Carl scolding Steven on the television, I put all the questions together and come up with a single answer. *Yes, I would do anything. I would kill*” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 245).

Olivia, likewise, is another great example of women's using motherhood as power. Olivia who was previously the greatest supporter of the religious, patriarchal regime shows the biggest resistance and resilience against it when it is about her daughter. Olivia as discussed before was one of the greatest fan and woman pioneer of the oppressive system. She followed every rule and restriction without complaining. However, when her daughter was taken as a prisoner because she disobeyed the system's rule. She cried: "You can't take her! Evan! Do something! For fuck's sake, do something instead of standing there with your fucking hands in your fucking pockets and watching. Kill them. Shoot the motherfucking bastards. Tell them it wasn't her fault! It wasn't" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 135). She cried without caring about the bracelet she is wearing: "Olivia continues on, begging and sobbing now. "Please don't take her. Please. Take me instead. Please." Each word is interrupted by the sickening zap of an electric charge and a wail" (2018, p. 136). Jean describes those moments as "Outside, the screaming has gotten worse. Olivia—I think it must be Olivia of the pink head scarves and pink Bibles and empty measuring cup in her hand—has unleashed pure hell" (2018, p. 135) because as Pinakoulia argues "Vox is not just a story of women's struggle and oppression. It is also a narrative of the female body as a site of conflict, negotiation and resistance" (Pinakoulia, 2020, p. 199). Instead of locking Jean and the other activist mothers into the realm of their houses, being a mother and worrying about their children's futures led them to demand freedom and resist. Thus, Held concludes: "The power of a mothering person to empower others, to foster transformative growth, is a different sort of power from that of a stronger sword or a dominant will" (Held, 1993, p. 209).

However, DiQuinzio asserts that the resistance of mothers stems from maternalism which "risks the delegitimation of maternal politics" (DiQuinzio, 2006, p. 61) which she calls as "politics of grief". She argues that mothers' power derives from the loss of their children or grief, and this is why the resistance of mothers is seen as irrational, impulsive, and emotional. Moravec claims that such emotional resistance "undercuts the political efficacy of women; risks being misheard as an individualized expression of emotion and predicates women's political agency on pain and suffering" (Moravec, 2010, p. 9), and according to O'Reilly this is why motherhood has been an issue that divides feminist critics for a long time because as DiQuinzio further explains: "maternalist politics based on traditional sentimental representations of motherhood present significant risks and pitfalls for the merging mothers' movement" (DiQuinzio, 2006, p. 66). She continues: "Maternalism is the feminism we resort to when we can't do any better on behalf of

women” (2006, p. 66). Samira Kawash points out that the topic of motherhood has disappeared from feminist studies in recent years because of the claims that mothers do not need separate attention from their greater identity group of women (Kawash, 2011). Thus, O’Reilly concludes: “It troubles me deeply that feminists are able to understand the intersectionality of gendered oppression when it comes to race, class, sexuality, and geographical location but not so for maternity” (O’Reilly, 2021, p. 225). Judith Stadtman Tucker asserts that these frameworks and arguments have hindered the twenty-first-century motherhood movement’s progress and she continues: “The mothers’ movement hasn’t taken off yet because there’s a divide that exists between whether this is a maternalist movement or if this is about the politics of motherhood aimed at resolving the social disadvantages of motherhood” (cited in O’Reilly, 2021, p. 146). The critics argue that the resistance of mothers such as Jean or Olivia roots in maternalism that is the fear of losing their children. Thus, it loses the essence of the act.

However, Wilson challenges DiQuinzio’s argument by stating maternalism nevertheless gave women voice and “it allowed mothers to move beyond the ‘private sphere’ and gave them a public voice, albeit a voice that limited the ways in which they could speak” (Wilson, 2010, p. 233). Women and mothers like Olivia who do not have any voice in the public and the private spheres can have a voice and impact after all. When Olivia lost her daughter, she taped her voice to the machine and played it over and over again until the bracelet fried her arm and ultimately killed her. “Evan said when he came into their bedroom, the recording was still playing. Same words, over and over. ‘I’m so sorry, Julia,’ it said” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 170). This act was the beginning of resistance. Activist mothers like Jean had a stronger voice and courage so that this would not happen again. Thus, activist mothers whether or not their feelings stem from maternalism “they invoke one of feminism’s most cherished ideologies—the personal is political” (Nathanson, 2008, p. 245). Nathanson further explains:

It [activist mothering] exemplifies the very core of feminist ideology –that the personal is political. Second, it helps to negate essential notions of motherhood by transforming views of it...And third, whether intentional or not, it upsets traditional gender and power relations. (Nathanson, 2008, p. 244)

Also, according to Gayatri Spivak’s theory of “strategic essentialism” which can be defined as “the need to accept temporarily, an ‘essentialist’ position in order to be able to act” (Mambrol, 2016, n.p.), using maternalism as a strategy on behalf of their rights and their children well-beings is a powerful act. Michael Kilburn explains this strategy as such:

[Spivak's theory] is deconstructive, like that of a good lawyer: when on defense, prods the prosecution's narrative until the cracks begin to appear and when prosecuting, pieces together the case by understanding the criminal's motivation. [It] is like role-playing, briefly inhabiting the criminal mind in order to understand what makes it tick. (as cited in O'Reilly, 2021, p. 152)

Therefore, Madres de La Plazo de Mayo during the military dictatorship in Argentina or the Another Mother for Peace organization in the United States during the Vietnam War used maternalism strategically in order to achieve their goal which is to make the world hear their voice and they achieved this through using their motherhood as "activist" mothering. Meghan Gibbons further argues that by showing themselves "as pious, self-sacrificing, obedient and devoted to their families" (Gibbons, 2010, p. 255) the mothers eventually gain national and international support and respect for their cause from all around the world. This type of activism is also called "embodied activism" as Wilson describes. "Embodied activism", O'Reilly further explains is that the "activism marks the actions of the Argentine madres, who embodied their grief by wearing posters of their missing children and marching with life-sized silhouettes, which gave a physical presence to the bodies of their disappeared children" (O'Reilly, 2021, p. 156). Thus, as argued before, this type of activism shows that the oppression or injustices injure living beings with "breathing bodies" (Wilson, 2010, p. 236). For instance, when Jean in *Vox* is forced to choose bracelets for herself and her daughter, Sonia, she chooses silver for herself "and blood red for Sonia. A trivial act of defiance" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 59) as an act of resistance. Thus, she implies that they are not submitting to those wristbands that control their voices and bodies. At the very end of the novel, when women pour into streets for resistance, they "marched in silence until their wrists and words were freed" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 282). The novel shows that these women's and mothers' marching with their wristbands in complete silence is the most deafening resistance of all. So much so that, at the end of their resistance, women were freed of their wristbands that control women's bodies and voices. Hence, it is understood that in *Vox* women regain their voices both in private and public sphere. This political act of resistance of mothers that DiQuinzio calls as "politics of grief" since it feeds on grief and loss is termed as "politics of heart" by O'Reilly because she argues that the act of resistance essentially comes from motherlove instinct (O'Reilly, 2021). Opposed to DiQuinzio's "politics of grief", Longsdon-Conradsen asks that "Aren't many types of activism motivated by personal experience?" (Longsdon-Conradsen, 2010, p. 21) and argues why it turns into a problem when mothers use it. She explains:

Why are mothers questioned for being emotionally motivated, while other activists are not? Does such an elitist perspective, in demanding that activism be based on rationality, not run the risk of devaluing both the feminine and the power of emotion? And is this just another way that society devalues motherhood and holds up the stereotypically masculine trait of unemotional as more legitimate? (Logsdon-Conradsen, 2010, p. 21)

Thus, both novels show that motherhood can be a powerful motive. It is also understood that by using their motherlove, mothers may gain empowering power against the oppressive system.

Furthermore, feminist critics argue that women also have a “collective power that binds the feminist movement together and allies it with other social movements in such a way that we can formulate and achieve our goals” (Allen, 2018, p. 126). This collective power similar to empowering power of mothers may serve as a form of resistance against the oppression of women and the patriarchal structures. However, Allen further argues that:

The goal of the feminist movement is not to put women in a position to exact at long last our revenge for the suffering we have endured under a heteropatriarchal society. Thus, it does not make sense to view the solidarity that enables the feminist movement to formulate and achieve its objectives as merely an instance of power-over. (Allen, 2018, p. 126)

On the contrary, women look forward to finding a sense of agency and self-empowerment. Through their shared experiences and struggles, women are able to find strength in one another against the powers that control them. She continues: “Our interest in domination is in the particular kinds of power that men are able to exercise over women. Our interest in empowerment and resistance is in the power that women have to act in spite of or as a response to such domination” (Allen, 2018, p. 123). Since the collective power cannot be defined as “power over”, or “power to”, it can be viewed as “power with” (Allen, 2018).

However, Allen discusses that this collective power that binds women together is not “sisterhood”. She continues that early second-wave feminists pushed the slogan “sisterhood is powerful” as “a call for a response to a shared experience (oppression) that binds women together as sisters-hence, to solidarity (at least in one sense of that term)” (Allen, 2018, p. 103). Yet, “sisterhood” as a collective power has some issues. One of the problems is, for instance, not all women share the binding feeling of sisterhood such as women like Olivia who support the religious totalitarian government in *Vox*, or the women who support the “Personhood Amendment” in *Red Clocks*. In *Vox*, for example, Jean describes Olivia:

Olivia seems small, almost shrunken, a house mouse scuttling from one refuge to another, fearful of what might lie in wait along her trajectory. She’s what Jackie would have called a Kool-Aid head, content with

her place in the hierarchy: God, man, woman. Olivia had drunk up the poison, every last drop. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 164)

It is true that there are women like Olivia who do not share the sisterhood sentiment with others. Or, there are women who may even support the patriarchal powers against other women's solidarity. Similarly, in *Red Clocks* Roberta remembers the day when the Twenty-Eighth Amendment was proposed. She did not think it would happen, but the next day she saw on the screen that "when Congress proposed the Twenty-Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and it was sent to the states for a vote...Thirty-nine states voted to ratify. A three-quarters majority" (Zumas, 2018, p. 161). She also mentions that there were women who ratified and there was glee in some villages like in Orlando and some places were just indifferent like in Newville (Zumas, 2018, p. 35). Even Ro's father openly supports Personhood Amendment, and he says: "It was about time the country came to its senses" (2018, p. 114). The other problem of sisterhood according to feminist critics is the shared identity. They argue that the organization of sisterhood "held up certain women or the experiences of certain women-most often those women who were 'just women,' whose identities were 'untarnished' by blackness, by queerness, or by membership in the working class-as paradigmatic" (Allen, 2018, p. 104). On the other hand, Hannah Arendt argues that group solidarity should not "rests on a shared identity if that identity is understood as resting on an inherent sameness, be it a shared essence, a shared experience of oppression, or what have you" (Arendt, 2013, p. 214). She argues that sameness cannot be the basis of any political action because as she continues: "we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (Arendt, 2013, p. 214). She continues that if we all wanted the same things and shared the same dreams and wants, it would be 'antipolitical' since "communication and concerted action are necessary in political life". (as cited in Allen, 2018, p. 105). Thus, Allen concludes as such:

Either we embrace the category of women so that we can have some basis for theorizing the common experiences of oppression that bring us together and make collective feminist political action possible, but in so doing, we implicitly marginalize or, worse, exclude legions of women from feminist discourse; or we refuse the category of women altogether, thus avoiding the problem of exclusion, but in so doing, we deny ourselves the ability to theorize the ties that might bind us together to make common cause. (2013, p. 104)

Her answer to these struggles is that we need to rethink of the phrase "sisterhood" and gather under the term "solidarity". By doing this, we also need to "reformulate the notion of solidarity in such a way that it can account for the power that feminists wield when we act in concert, and yet do so

in a way that avoids the problem of exclusion” (2013, p. 104) because Allen says that “one need not ‘be’ a woman to join in the collective effort to resist women’s subordination” (2013, p. 109). She continues that we need to “think of solidarity (women and men) as the power of those who pledge to work together to fight relations of subordination” (2013, p. 109). In this way, by forging different races, classes, genders, or sexual orientation to the cause of subordination and being nourished from our differences rather than excluding them, we may have a greater solidarity or empowerment. As a matter of fact, the expanded understanding of “power of solidarity” is visible in both novels under discussion. In *Red Clocks*, Polyphonte Collective that helps pregnant women against the “Personhood Amendment” law and a lot of men like Jean’s and Sharon’s husband in Vox who stand against the totalitarian system show that one do not need to be a woman to resist injustice and oppression of women.

In Vox, Jackie is the one who symbolizes the power of collective resistance. Jean remembers Jackie as a woman who lead marches, yell, fight for the rights of women long before women lose their voices under totalitarian regime. Jean regrets that she was not like Jackie who fights for their rights. When the new president was elected at the beginning of the novel, he put a religious law called “Bible Belt” that prevent women to be in Senate into practise. At first, according to Jean, noone believed people would accept it, or it was enforced. However, Jackie saw it coming. When twenty-one percent of the women in Senate down to fifteen percent representation after the election of the new leader, Jackie talks about her concerns over the new totalitarian leader, and Jean remembers saying “Honestly, Jacko. You’re getting hysterical about it” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 24) and Jackie continues: “Well, someone needs to be hysterical around here” (2018, p. 24). Jean admits that if there were more women like Jackie who stands up for women’s rights before “Pure Movement” which is the extent of the “Bible Belt” forcing women to be pure, chaste, and humble according to new president’s religious doctrine, maybe they would not be locked in their houses with their bracelets electrocutating them if they speak more than one hundred words. Thus, Jean says that: “I never spoke to Jackie again. On nights like this, I wish I had. Maybe things—the election thing, the nomination thing, the confirmation thing, the executive order thing—wouldn’t have turned out the way they did” (2018, p. 20). Jean believes that maybe because of women like her who “did not vote or too busy to go on the marches or make posters or call the congressmen” (2018, p. 196), they did not see the real threat before it is too late for them. After the election, Jean remembers Jackie saying: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do

nothing” (2018, p. 272). Thus, Jean believes that if she was more politically active, or maybe if she cared enough to vote, the new president may not be elected. Furthermore, Jean says that after the election, it was not all women who stand up against the totalitarian regime. She continues:

After the election, we started believing. Some of us became vocal for the first time. Women, for the most part, spearheaded the anti-Myers [the new president] campaign —women like me, who hadn’t ever tried on a pair of marching boots, piled into buses and Metro cars and froze in the Washington winter. There were men, too, I remember. Barry and Keith, who had three decades between them of fighting for gay rights, spent a Saturday painting signs at their house two doors down from ours; five of the graduate students from my department said they had our backs. (Dalcher, 2018, p. 164)

Or, when Jean “marched and phoned and wrote and protested”, she says Patrick, her husband, “reheated batches of soup and other one-dish meals, took care of the kids on weekends” (2018, p. 165). After the “Bible Belt” and “Pure Movement” law were put into force, people started realizing and they started resisting, but Jean narrates at the beginning of the novel that they failed because she believes that it is because it was too late. The new president had already put “every devilish detail” (2018, p. 23) such as bracelets and “Pure Movement” laws into practice. Jean believes that things happened because people did not think it would happen. She remembers saying to her husband: “Think about it, Patrick. You’re a scientist yourself. No one can shut half of the population up” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 166). She always thought: “This would never happen. Ever. Women wouldn’t put up with it” (2018, p. 92). Yet, they did because according to her, people were not attending rallies, going to marches, or caring about what is going on before the election like Jackie. Thus, when they started resisting after the election, “they were tased, stunned like misbehaving animals. Cows. Pets” (2018, p. 81). She continues that even though they resisted and fought, it was too late (Dalcher, 2018, p. 81).

As discussed before, Jean was a respected scientist working on aphasia before all women were removed from workforce. When one day the new president’s brother has brain trauma which causes aphasia after his ski accident, officials come to Jean’s house asking for help about the president brother’s aphasia, and in return they agree to remove Jean’s and Sonia’s bracelets until Jean finds a cure. Thus, Jean was forced to work for the government and to find a serum that will cure aphasia. While she is going to work, Jean starts leaving Sonia to her neighbor, Sharon Ray. When Jean goes to Sharon Ray’s house, she learns that the resistance is not over. Jean realizes that some men and women like Sharon Ray and her husband called “anti-Pure people” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 149) are secretly trying to overthrow the president and the “Pure Movement”. Thus, Jean asks:

“There’s a resistance? The word sounds sweet as I say it” Sharon replies: “Honey, there’s always a resistance. Didn’t you go to college?” (2018, p. 149). Hence, because of the hardship and struggle, men and women in *Vox* started resisting the totalitarian regime because Dalcher cleverly shows that the well-being of one is closely intertwined with the well-being of all which strengthens solidarity among people. In the novel, even though it all starts with the oppression of women and the marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+, the oppression of men who stands up to the system followed shortly after when the government started punishing men who go against the government. *Vox* demonstrates that the oppression and subordination of women are not only women’s problems, and it is in the common interests of women and men to support each other because collective action can achieve greater results than individual efforts alone. She also shows that the patriarchal system hurts everyone. Once the vulnerable ones such as women and gay people are oppressed, the men in power will find an excuse to silence anyone who will resist the system. For instance, in *Vox*, at first women were fitted with bracelets and silenced. Then, gay people were sent to farms until they stop being “gay”. At the end of the novel, Jean learns that her husband, Patrick who is a medical doctor working for the government also in the underground resistance working with Sharon Ray and her husband. One evening, Patrick explains that he decided to work secretly against the government when he witnessed the government officials started to shoot anyone men or women who protest. At last, it is understood that the government was “working to create a serum that doesn’t cure aphasia but causes it” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 188) since their ultimate aim to silence anyone, men and women, who resist to create a society with obedient and docile people following patriarchal, religious doctrines. Then, Jean again remembers what Olivia says: “Someone should shut that woman up, permanently” Then Jean says: “*Oh, Olivia, I think, what the hell did you expect?*” She further goes on by saying that they will first start silencing women and it will not be even televised which was inspired by Gil Scott Heron’s famous poem “The Revolution Will Not be Televised”. It is “a slogan that has resonated through the decades, inspiring generations of rebels and dissidents--as well as advertising gurus and headline writers who have coopted the phrase for their own less than-revolutionary purposes” (Baram, 2005, n.p.). Thus, in this episode it is understood that the resistance which surpasses the boundaries of television broadcast is about to start. Then, Jean says that they will go on with people like Del, Sharon’s husband, and Patrick, Jean’s husband, to “squench the last hope of any resistance “And so on and so on, until every last member of what must already be a threadbare [resistance] operation is found, forced to talk, and

ultimately silenced” (Dalcher, 2018, pp. 189-190). Dalcher shows that solidarity and unity of women and men are crucial in fighting against the inequality, oppression, and subordination of totalitarian systems because these systems rely on the division of people and concentrated power in their hands. However, by standing together and supporting each other, people can create a united power that can challenge the system and demand change. At the end of the novel, underground resistance including Jean, her husband Patrick, Sharon, her husband Del, and some other men and women come up with a plan to overthrow the president. When Jean learns that the government trying to silence anyone who will resist them with the aphasia serum that Jean had to create to cure the president’s brother, she secretly steals it with the help of resistance. Then, the next day Patrick who is in the Senate as a medical doctor of the president pours the serum which Jean steals to the drinks of twelve men in the Oval Office (Dalcher, 2018, p. 277). Jean narrates what happens afterwards. She says that the country was in a chaotic state for a while, and radios and television were quite for a few days. Later, the radios and television came to life. The new president was elected, and he states that “he will never see America repeat the damage it wreaked over the past twelve months (Dalcher, 2018, p. 282)”. At the end of the novel, we understand that thanks to unity and solidarity, the totalitarian regime was overthrown. Men and women together helped the resistance, and they remained together to “clear out the rubble and rebuild” (2018, p. 280).

From a different yet related perspective, *Red Clocks* also shows collective resistance against the totalitarian regime. The largest poster in the novel says: “**REPEAL THE 28TH AMENDMENT! SIT IN / RISE UP FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 282). In the background of the story, we clearly understand that there is resistance against the system. Another example is when Roberta takes Mattie for abortion with the help of “Polyphontes Collective”, she sees a flyer saying: “**WE NEED COP WATCHERS ON MAY 1ST, PLEASE VOLUNTEER!**” (2018, p. 284). At first similar to *Vox*, Roberta says that no one believed that they would ban abortion. She says that: “She couldn’t believe the Personhood Amendment had become real with all these citizens so against it” (Zumas, 2018, p. 161). She states that women wrote letters and attended marches to protest the Amendment, but the abortion became illegal despite all these because as Baccolini and Maylon argue that in the dystopian genre “the dystopian protagonist’s resistance often begins with a verbal confrontation and the reappropriation of language, since s/he is generally prohibited from using language, and, when s/he does, it means nothing but empty propaganda” (Baccolini and Maylon, 2003, p. 6). However, there is always resistance against the

oppression of the patriarchal system. Towards the end of the novel, Roberta opens her notebook which she usually lists “accusations from the world” and tries to write a new list which is “for which I am grateful”, and she writes: “two working legs, two working hands, two working eyes, the ocean” (2018, p. 204). Then, she realizes that she is not grateful, but furious. She is angry at the system. Also, she is angry at herself for being silent against the oppression. She says: “Fuck this shitty list. She’s sick of being grateful. Why the fuck should she be grateful? She is angry—at the amendment laws, the agencies” (Zumas, 2018, p. 204). She says that: “While she hid out in Newville, they closed the clinics and defunded Planned Parenthood and amended the Constitution. She watched on her computer screen. Don’t just sit there watching” (2018, p. 240). She believes that “she can’t cheat her way out. She can’t wait her way out, head in the sand” (Zumas, 2018, p. 247). Thus, she writes emails, marches in protests in Salem and Portland, and donates to Planned Parenthood (Zumas, 2018, p. 161). Thus, she understands that she must resist if she wants things to change, and she can no longer wait for others to fight for her rights as in “the bystander effect” where “nobody helping a crime victim when other people are around because everyone thinks someone else is going to do it” (Zumas, 2018, p. 255). However, unlike Vox, Zumas does not present a completely happy ending for women. Because as discussed before “awareness and responsibility are the conditions of the critical dystopia’s citizens” (Baccolini, 2004, p. 521) according to Baccolini and she further argues:

Instead of providing some compensatory and comforting conclusion, the critical dystopia's open ending leaves its characters to deal with their choices and responsibilities. It is in the acceptance of responsibility and accountability, often worked through memory and the recovery of the past, that we bring the past into a living relation with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for Utopian change. (Baccolini, 2004, p. 521)

Thus, Zumas much rather focuses on the personal resistances and successes of the characters in the dystopian world. To give a clear example, towards the end of the novel, each woman in *Red Clocks* achieves some means of success in their life even though at the end of the novel abortion is still illegal and the totalitarian system is not overthrown. For example, at the end of the novel, Susan finally has the strength to stop being in a loveless marriage and dares to get divorced. When she does, she feels light as a feather, and she says:

The wife kneels on the path. Rent a car. Open a bank account. Bring yourself to care. She reaches for the black earth. Her body yearns, inexplicably, to taste it. Brings a handful to her lips. The minerals sizzle on her tongue, rich with the gists of flower and bone. ‘Hell are you doing?’ says Didier. Bright minerals. Powdered feathers. Ancient shells.

‘Jesus, stop that!’ She keeps tasting. The soil is bark and needle and flecks of brain, little animal burnt and dead. Goodbye, shipwrecks. Goodbye, house. Goodbye, wife. (Zumas, 2018, p. 292)

She leaves the wife role which she associates with the shipwrecks. Susan who has tasted freedom at last understands that she has to “go” now to find herself again. She says goodbye to “shipwrecks” that confines her and takes the first step to feeling empowered. Susan takes control of her life at the end and takes responsibility. She starts to “care” now as Baccolini put forward. Roberta, on the other hand, decides to “stretch her mind wider than to have one...wider than not to have one”. She becomes free of her obsession with having a baby and decides to be more politically active. She goes against the expectations, pressures, and society’s norm of “true” womanhood. She makes peace with herself:

Her okayness with being by herself—ordinary, unheroic okayness—does not need to justify itself to her father. The feeling is hers. She can simply feel okay and not explain it, or apologize for it, or concoct arguments against the argument that she doesn’t truly feel content and is deluding herself in self-protection. (Zumas, 2018, p. 38)

In the end Roberta comes up with a new list instead of her “accusation from the world” list and that list shows Roberta’s final resistance and success. She goes on as such:

To write the last sentence of *Mínervudottir*.
To write the first sentence of something else.
To be courteous but fierce with her father’s doctors.
To be a foster mom.
To be the next principal.
To be neither. (Zumas, 2018, p. 310)

Even Eivør as a long-dead explorer becomes immortal thanks to Ro’s book. By writing a book on a woman scientist who died long time ago, Roberta gave her life. Even though Eivør *Mínervudottir* was one of the biggest explorers in her time, she did not have any name on her books, and no one knew about her contributions to the world because she was a woman. Roberta reveals how Eivør will continue to contribute the world thanks to her book:

The people who read ‘On the Contours and Tendencies of Arctic Sea Ice’ in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* were changed by the explorer. The English translator of her notebooks was changed by her. Mattie, hearing her tell of the *grindadráp*, was changed. The biographer, of course. And if her book has any readers, *Mínervudottir* will persist in them. (Zumas, 2018, p. 309)

Roberta believes that even though “she [Eivør] did not leave behind money or property or a book or a child, her corpse kept alive creatures who, in turn, kept other creatures alive” (2018, p. 309). For once, she lists the contribution of Eivør to society: “She brought in: 1. Refusal to submit to

cottage life 2. Measurements of ice chlorides and Arctic sea temperatures 3. Metric analyses of ice responses to wind speed and tide speed” (2018, p. 242).

Mattie, on the other hand, successfully gets the abortion and gets rid of the unwanted baby and lives the life she wanted as an accomplished student. Gin also wins her case against all the accusations in court: “Stop shaking. You’re a Percival. We find the defendant.—Descended from a pirate. —not guilty on both counts” (2018, p. 275). Towards the end of the novel, during the trial, Gin says: *Kook. People like to throw around labels. Kooky. Don’t let them define you. Kookaburra. You are exactly yourself, that’s who*” (2018, p. 264). Here the words “Kook”, “Kooky”, and “Kookaburra” signify the conflict between people’s labels and how she thinks of herself. While “Kook” and “Kooky” mean “odd” and “strange”, “Kookaburra” is a type of bird. Although people label her as “kook”, she feels like a bird free from those labels because at the end of the novel she accepts herself as she is and does not care what people think. Even the side characters such as Lola takes responsibility and gains awareness at the end of the novel. At the end, she decides to make things right with Gin Percival in spite of her husband’s pressure and testifies for Gin. She says: “Gin Percival saved my vagina” (2018, p. 264). She continues: “Because I’m done doing his laundry” (Zumas, 2018, p. 274) this act saves Gin from all accusations and Lola finally leaves her abusive husband and moves to her parents’ house (2018, p. 274).

All in all, both of these novels emphasize the importance of collective action through uniting against injustices in society. *Vox* shows the power of collectiveness to overthrow the patriarchal power because Dalcher stresses that we as individuals are interconnected whether we agree or not and the injustices and oppression that women suffer are the problem of all individuals, and she also cleverly shows that if men stay silent to women’s suffering today, tomorrow they may be in danger of being silenced too since our rights are also interconnected. *Red Clocks* also puts emphasis on the unity and solidarity. Zumas unlike Dalcher focuses more on the individuals and their personal resistances while also focusing on unity between these women. *Red Clocks*, rather than coming together as a whole to overthrow the patriarchy, it shows that how each woman’s life is interwoven with each other, and their actions affect others greatly. Lola by standing against her husband saves Gin’s life from prison. Roberta finds herself a purpose in life at the end while she is helping Mattie with her pregnancy. Roberta understands that there is more in life that she can do than forcing to get pregnant, and in the clinic where she took Mattie, she realizes she must be

more politically active. Also, Roberta gives life to Eivør with her book, *Eivør*, in exchange, changes Roberta's perspective in life on being a mother. The additional stories of Eivør as a long dead explorer also provides a sense of timelessness to the oppression of women which according to Zumas's interview, it was intentional. Zumas says that she wanted "her [Eivør] to act as a kind of a prism to refract different angles back onto the other characters" (Walton, 2018, n.p.). Thus, Allen concludes:

A feminist conception of power must be able to make sense of masculine domination, feminine empowerment and resistance, and feminist solidarity and coalition-building...Our interest in empowerment and resistance is in the power that women have to act in spite of or as a response to such domination. Our interest in solidarity and coalition-building is in the power that feminists exercise with each other and with men in allied social movements. (Allen, 2018, p. 123)

To conclude, it is understood that feminist critical dystopian fiction is written in response to the oppression and subordination of women in the patriarchal system. The novels under discussion present women silenced and objectified through totalitarian and religious regimes. As seen in the cases of *Red Clocks* and *Vox*, "taking control of her own language and voice is the first step towards articulating her subjectivity" (Pinakoulia, 2020, p. 200). While silencing women's voices in *Red Clocks* is metaphorical, in *Vox* it is quite literal, and in dystopian fiction, protagonists generally feel that something is wrong with society they live in, and this is why it focuses on the social critique of the time (Baccolini, 2022). Thus, these dystopias open up a space for individuals', in this case, women's criticism and resistance towards society and offer "potential for change and hope for the future" (MacKay Demerjian, 2016, p. 3). Since resistance is always linked with power according to Foucault, it is important to study the power relationships between genders in society and as it is understood while women get empowered by motherhood and solidarity, men generally use power as domination tool. Thus, Gerda Neyer and Laura Bernardi indicate that "post-structural feminists no longer rebuff motherhood in order to overcome power structures, but they seek for means to overcome power structures in order to allow motherhood" (Neyer&Bernardi, 2011, p. 167) because contrary to the common belief of second-wave feminists, motherhood essentially can be empowering for women if patriarchal society and beliefs do not confine women's motherhood into labels and traditional rules. Kawash concludes by saying:

Feminist theorists, scholars, and writers, as well as feminist mothers and activists, have a lot to say to each other, and a lot to learn from each other, about motherhood. Motherhood studies needs the perspective and commitment of feminism as well as the institutional resources that feminism and women's studies have

accumulated over the past four decades. At the same time, feminism cannot possibly hope to remain relevant without acknowledging motherhood in all its contradictions and complexities. (Kawash, 2011, p. 997)

Secondly, she puts forward that according to feminist critics, women also get empowered through “sisterhood”. However, she opposes this by stating that “sisterhood” is problematic in many respects and she expands the idea to “solidarity” since not all women support and get empowered by “sisterhood”. Thus, to be able to have a just and equal society, it is understood that we as men and women who support feminism and challenge patriarchy and oppression need to unite under the term “solidarity”. Therefore, both novels show the reader women’s resilience and strength in a feminist critical dystopia through motherhood and solidarity. The novels under discussion also achieve this by giving voice to women from different classes, races, and backgrounds through the convention of feminist critical dystopia. Zumas and Dalcher show that the future is not supposed to be dark, especially with its depiction of strong and rebellious women who are ready to take responsibility not only for their own lives but also for others. All women characters in *Red Clocks* and *Vox* manage to find strength, a glimpse of hope, and solace in a feminist critical dystopia. While women in *Vox* succeed to overthrow the patriarchal system and step into a more equal world together, Zumas in *Red Clocks* focuses more on all women’s characters’ personal triumph and progress in the dystopian world because “the acceptance of one’s responsibility and accountability, often worked through memory and the recovery of the past we bring the past into a living relationship with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for a utopian change” (Baccolini, 2004, p. 521). After all, the novel shows us that when we have resilient women who fight for their rights, we can always have hope for the future.

CONCLUSION

Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* and Christina Dalcher's *Vox* have been analyzed in light of motherhood theories which explore the women's expected roles in society, the inequality in the private sphere and workforce, and especially marginalized women's oppression in the patriarchal system. This thesis has also argued that women have not been silent against oppression and subordination for all these years, and especially women writers have mentioned women's issues in their novels. While women writers like Zumas and Dalcher explore women's problems that are still happening in the 21st century, they apply to the feminist critical dystopian genre not only to present the oppression but also to offer some hope and solution at the end.

In both novels, motherhood itself is revealed as an index of oppression for women. Traditional gender norms that imposed on women made them see motherhood as their sole purpose and source of identity and it is shown that these expected roles also reinforced the idea that women are primarily responsible for the children, and it is their duty to take care of the house, children, and husband. For example, Susan in *Red Clocks* always struggles with the expectations of motherhood placed on her. Even though Jean in *Vox* is a marginalized woman who stands up against the system throughout the novel, she also feels the obligation to abide to the patriarchal motherhood norms because as is seen, society divides women into good mothers and bad mothers, in other words, gatekeepers and pariahs. While women who follow the rules of the male-defined motherhood norms are seen as good mothers, marginalized mothers who stand against the male-defined rules and determine their way of living motherhood as their own rules are labeled as bad mothers. These pariahs as punishment are excluded from society and their mothering is questioned. Zumas and Dalcher also show that besides men, some women who are called gatekeepers also contribute to the oppression of women through their motherhood. Jessica Perfects in *Red Clocks* and Olivia in *Vox* are good examples of this. By defending and also dictating society's norms placed on mothers, some women also damage the feminist understanding of motherhood and they contribute to the system's subordination of women. Besides these, it is understood that the roles of mothers have also been reinforced by thinkers and theorists. For instance, Bowlby's "attachment theory" designated women as the sole responsible for the children, and the women who choose to work or hire help are seen as bad, neglected mothers in the eyes of society because this theory puts forward that children who are not raised by their mothers will likely to be criminals in the future.

Or, mothers were accused that women who choose to work deprived children's most essential needs. In *Red Clocks* and *Vox*, the women were accused of the same things. Susan "decided" to leave law school because she believed that she could not be a good mother while working full-time. In consequence, she quit her job and became a housewife. In *Vox*, in the same way, all women were prisoned at home by asserting that their primary goal was to raise children. Totalitarian leaders openly said that while working and providing for the house is the man's job, raising kids and taking care of the house is women's holiest duty since children need their mothers 24/7 at home.

The novels also demonstrate that women's condition in 21st century is far worse than the 1950s or 1960s because motherhood theorists assert that women in the 50s or 60s were only responsible for their children and houses. However, nowadays more expectations and responsibility weighs on the shoulders of women. Women are expected to be perfect mothers as well as providers. They are encouraged to work and earn money as long as they follow the norms of motherhood and cater to every need of the children. Thus, theorists argue that the "intensive mothering" of the 50s turned into "new momism" in the 21st century, and it made the oppression even worse for the mothers. In Dalcher's dystopia, women are already locked in their houses and follow the norms of "intensive mothering", but Zumas reveals that even though Susan quit her job to be a better mother, she continues to be judged. Some people judge her because she quit her job to be a mother. Some accuse her of not being a perfect stay-at-home mother. Thus, especially, in the 21st century it is argued that women's subjectivity is split. They are in great ambivalence and agony in this system, and when they become mothers, they get stuck between their hard-earned rights as a woman after feminist movements and the traditional norms of being a mother in the patriarchal society. One of the examples is the "maternal wall". Women who become mothers hit the "maternal wall" when they want to go back to the workforce. Studies also found out that even though men's lives do not change greatly after they have a baby, women's lives change drastically, and some of the time it results in dropping out of their education or losing their jobs. Susan as well as Jean hit this "maternal wall" in the novels under discussion.

As a result of these, women in the novels feel "maternal ambivalence" and "maternal regret" against their children. The love-hate feelings towards their children make mothers depressed and result in feeling guilty about their feelings. Mothers who are left alone and vulnerable in this system feel frustrated and overwhelmed and they start to feel regret about having

children. They do not enjoy motherhood, on the contrary, they may feel great remorse like Susan in *Red Clocks*. She felt so overwhelmed and unhappy as a mother that she has even thought of killing herself and her children in a car accident. Jean also admitted that without her children, her life could be easier, and she sometimes regrets having children. Having children is already a big change for women and women in the patriarchal system are already marginalized and oppressed on a daily basis. Thereupon, once women become mothers, they get oppressed even more. Thus, the mothers who are judged and shamed in society wear “the mask of motherhood” to hide their anguish and show the world that they are perfect, blissed, and happy mothers with no problems because they are believed that if they admitted those feelings, they would also admit that they are bad mothers. However, the real experiences of mothers and the expectations of society clash all the time and cause mothers to feel miserable in their motherhoods since it is not possible to wear the mask for a long time. Feminist critics also put forward that patriarchal motherhood norms do not only hurt mothers but also children because children especially daughters who see their mothers weakened and powerless in society feel great resentment against their mothers. Since they are afraid of being like their mothers in the future, they feel “matrophobia” against their mothers. In *Red Clocks*, Eivør Mínervudóttir, for instance, observed her mother for years and decided that she would not be like her mother in the future. She thought that her mother was “beneath”. In the same way in *Vox*, even though Sonia is just a child, we can observe “matrophobia” in her drawings. Drawing Jean as the smallest in the family shows that she is aware of her mother’s position in the house and society. She sees Jean as a weaker family member. Although Jean is a respected scientist and pioneer in her field, Sonia intuitively feels that she does not have much power.

To defy the rules of society and regain the rights of mothers, it is crucial to “unmask the motherhood”. If mothers stop pretending and following the rules of patriarchy, both mothers and women who are not mothers will be empowered since defying the mandates of society means that mothers finally can be honest about their motherhood and mothering to each other. Thus, they will be more empowered as mothers. When Susan and Jean started to be honest about their motherhood and accepted that sometimes they were not “good” mothers as society dictates, they felt more relieved. As discussed above, feminist theorists put forward that women systematically were left alone and their bond was weakened compared to the past because in the past women were much closer and they were sharing all the information and they were empowering each other. However, nowadays women were cut down from their “motherline”, and this may be the other reason they

were oppressed. The novels under discussion clearly shows that women do not have a strong bond to bind them or empower them. Only one character, Gin Percival, has a strong “motherline” compared to other women and she is the only one who still has a bond with other women in her bloodline. All these show that “matricentric feminism” which defends the rights of mothers are needed because contrary to second-wave feminists’ beliefs, mothers need a separate feminism since motherhood is an index of oppression for most women as argued in “intersectional feminism” and women need feminism that defend the rights of mothers in this patriarchal system. Furthermore, although Zumas and Dalcher present normative women and mothers such as Susan in *Red Clocks* and Olivia in *Vox*, they do not support the essentialist ideology of patriarchal motherhood since both women go through transformative acts at the end of the novels such as leaving their wife role and going against the patriarchal ideology. In fact, both novels challenge the essentialist ideology of patriarchal motherhood in several ways. By exploring different aspects of motherhood, resisting reproductive control of the system, presenting multi-dimensional characters who defy the simplistic stereotypes of motherhood, both novels subvert the traditional essentialist views of motherhood.

Furthermore, in both novels, women live in a dystopian world where their rights are restricted, and they are silenced by a totalitarian leader. Both Zumas and Dalcher use feminist critical dystopian fiction to explore and challenge power structures. By portraying a society in which women’s oppression and subjugation are revealed, they aim to challenge the gender norms and question the society. In this way, the readers are forced to critically examine the society they live in and consider the implications. Zumas and Dalcher not only focus on the problems that women face in the patriarchal society but also offer hope in their works. Women in both novels do not give in the oppression. They defy the rules and resist the system because resistance is about power and women in the novels try and succeed to regain their power at the end. It is discussed that women and men have access to different kinds of power in society. While men, as seen in both novels, use power as domination or resource, women use power as empowerment. Totalitarian leaders in *Red Clocks* and *Vox* use power to dominate all women, prison them in their houses, and control their bodies. Women, on the other hand, use power to empower and get empowered. While men use power as power-over and power-to, it is argued that women use power as power-with. Motherhood, for example, is argued that is a site of resistance and empowerment for women. It is shown that although motherhood is used as oppression for women for years,

women may actually get empowered by their motherhood. Thus, it is not mothering that weakens women, but the motherhood norms of society do. Women in both novels turn into “mamazon” when it is about the lives or the well-being of their children. They use their motherhood as an act of resistance against the system because activist mothers in both novels show that oppression and subordination are not only politics. It hurts the living bodies which is called “embodied activism”, this is why Olivia’s way of dying with recorded words for her daughter shows that women’s political resistance also derives from the loss or the suffering of their children. Thus, it is argued that the mothers use their motherlove as a motivation to resist the system and this resistance of mothers may be labeled as “politics of heart” since it derives from mothers’ primal instinct to defend and protect. Also, in this way, mothers may turn “maternalism” which highlights essentialism at its core into “strategic essentialism” as a tool of resistance. In both novels, Jean, Olivia, and Susan all use “maternalism” as a tool of resistance. They deconstruct the expected roles of normative mothers to be able to protest against the normative motherhood mandates. For instance, when totalitarian leaders came into Jean’s house, she wore aprons to pretend as a “good” mother and wife to ask for the removal of her bracelet and her daughter’s. Although Jean tries to resist society’s pressure on mothers, she is sometimes forced to submit to it: “I put on my Mother and Wife face when I walk through our back door” (127). Or she says: “I let the blinds fall back into place and I return to the kitchen, ready to put on my best Donna Reed face (an apron will have to do) and be the picture of domestic bliss” (47). Even though she is aware of the manipulative doctrines put on women and mothers, she still feels the need of pretending following the rules.

Besides, it is discussed that women also get empowered through “sisterhood”. Sisterhood, however, is a problematic concept since although women may get empowered through other women, not all women support the feminist cause, and as seen in the novels, there are women who support the totalitarian system and oppression against women. Roberta states that there are a lot of women who support the “Personhood Amendment” since they claim that they believe in the sanctity of the family, and they agree that abortion is a crime. In the same way, in *Vox*, there are many “Pure Women” who actively support and help the wrongdoings of the totalitarian religious leader. Thus, instead of the notion of “sisterhood”, “solidarity” as a collective power must be celebrated. The idea is that women get empowered through men and women who share the same dream and goal since women and men are interrelated, and what happens to women in society directly affects men. Thus, against injustice, inequality, or oppression, men and women need to

resist together under the notion of feminism. Zumas and Dalcher reveal the importance of collective power in their novels. In *Red Clocks*, it is shown that there is resistance against the system with the help of both men and women. Also, there are people secretly working who help pregnant women to get abortions in a safe way. In *Vox*, in the same way, the reader understands that there are women and men who secretly work to overthrow the totalitarian regime through the pages. Also, in the end, men and women, husbands and wives come together and finally overthrow the totalitarian regime. Dalcher cleverly shows that the totalitarian regime that targets only women in the beginning further starts to silence gay men and then men who are against the system. Thus, she reveals that even though oppression first targets women and marginalized groups, men also can be the next target of the regime, that is why, men and women need to resist oppressive structures together in unity and cooperation to foster collective solidarity.

In conclusion, this thesis has analyzed women's oppression under the patriarchal motherhood mandates and showed that although mothering is a site of empowerment, women systematically get subordinated and that feminism which supports mothers' rights and resistance to patriarchal motherhood norms is needed for women who are mothers and also for women who are not. Furthermore, this thesis showed that women are not silent against the system and women get empowered through their motherhood and solidarity. Both texts present the possibility to have hope and solace in a dystopian world for women. Marginalized women in both novels who rebel against the norms of patriarchy have accomplished some kind of success at the end of the novels. Both novels revealed that there are women who do not wish to be a mother, or they may be unhappy as a mother. Evidently, Zumas and Dalcher not only show the reader that unlike the patriarchal mandate of essentialization, not every woman wants to be a mother, but also maternal desire is not innate to all women. Both novels also showed that women find different ways of living their motherhood and the notion of patriarchal motherhood which dictates all mothers love their children unconditionally or women who are happy with their motherhood roles is fictive and ideological constructions that need to be deconstructed. Thus, *Red Clocks* and *Vox* challenge these conventions of patriarchal motherhood that confine women to the role of giving birth to a child and mothering and show that marginalized womxn and activist mothers who are labeled as "bad" is the power we need to overthrow the norms.

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