
The Suppression of Female Voice: Power, Patriarchy, and Resistance in Christina Dalcher's *Vox*

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Abstract

Patriarchal systems deeply shape societal structures, often relegating women to the position of objects or commodities within cultural, political, and social spheres. This paper analyzes *Vox* by Christina Dalcher as a modern feminist dystopia that challenges the relationship between power, silence and control by men. By giving critical analysis of the novel's portrayal of linguistic repression where women are restricted to one hundred words per day, the paper examines how the silencing of the feminine voice is enforced by a greater historical and systematic gendered oppression. *Vox* reveals how institutions of patriarchy discipline feminine bodies to control speech and identity. The resistance in the novel, both personal and communal, also throws light on the transformational power of returning voice as a source of power. Finally, it is a thesis of this paper that *Vox* not only reinvigorates the female voice as a source of agency but also gives a strong warning about the vulnerability of the rights of women under patriarchy.

Key Terms: Feminine Voice, Patriarchy, Power, Silence, Linguistic Repression, Feminism, Women's Subjugation, Resistance.

Introduction

Christina Dalcher's *Vox* situates itself within the tradition of feminist dystopian fiction, offering a profound exploration of how patriarchal power infiltrates language, identity, and the very structure of daily life. The novel is set in a near-future United States that has fallen under the control of the ultra-conservative Pure Movement, in which women are limited to one hundred spoken words per day, which is an extreme but symbolic portrayal of the historical practice of policing, undermining, and erasing the voices of women. By making silence a state policy, Dalcher (2018) reveals the way in which patriarchal systems control the bodies of women and their ability to express themselves and respond to intellectual and political discourses. In this repressive society, speech is a battlefield, where power is negotiated and enforced as in the case of the wrist counter, which gives electric shocks to women who exceed the required daily quota, which can be considered as a symbolic representation of the conglomeration of technology and ideology to perpetuate patriarchal rule. The technological enforcement is mirrored in the larger society that disciplines women to become compliant, privileges male dominance and normalizes the silence of women as a natural state. Dalcher (2018) also questions voice as an essential feature of identity and agency that supports feminist theorists (Simone de Beauvoir, Helene Cixous, and Judith Butler) where the power of linguistic expression constructs women as

subjects of subjectivity. Through the tragic outcome of depriving women of their ability to speak, the novel shows how imposed silence destroys communication, relationality, and even the potential to stand up, with Jean McClellan acting as a symbol of restoring voice as a source of power. Meanwhile, the dystopian structure levels accusations against modern socio-political fears, such as increased fundamentalism, policing of reproduction, and resistance to feminist gains, by dramatizing a society where women are confined to the house and their expression cannot be openly considered. Finally, *Vox* emphasizes the vulnerability of women's liberties and the speed at which patriarchal thought patterns can take away rights that have been achieved when they are not challenged.

This study argues that *Vox* redefines the feminine voice as not necessarily a mode of verbal expression, but rather an effective tool of resistance, independence, and political action. The voice in the dystopian world created by Dalcher (2018) becomes the same as the self, the freedom and the right to engage in the formation of the social reality; therefore, its repression is the systematic elimination of the presence of women in the world of courts and intellectual, political arenas. Through its razor-sharp critique of enforced silence and the state machinery that upholds it, the novel exposes the ways in which patriarchal structures weaponize language—or its absence—to maintain control and reproduce gendered hierarchies. Simultaneously, *Vox* anticipates individual and communal resistance, exposing the way women reacquire their agency by refusing to be put into a state of muteness and demanding their right to voice. The example of Jean McClellan, who initially displayed the problem of passive compliance, and then moved on to the active resistance, helps to understand the power of voice as a tool of empowerment and the idea of collectivity that arises when women do not want to accept the silence as their assigned role. *Vox* is a cautionary yet profoundly relevant text that cautions against the perils of any sociopolitical system that aims to establish rules and regulations concerning who is allowed to speak and who is forced to keep silent. Finally, the novel makes modern readers realize the instability of women rights and the need to protect the areas where women voice can be heard, appreciated, and even justified.

Review of Literature

Patriarchy is a socially strong system where power, authority and privilege are largely located in the hands of men, and women and gender minorities are structurally marginalized in the cultural, economic, political, and family systems. It functions by naturalizing the concept of male dominance through traditions, laws, religious principles and social norms that connote leadership, rationality and control to masculinity, and dependence, obedience and care to femininity. Patriarchy manages to colonize women through control of their bodies, labor, sexuality, and movement, especially within the domestic realm of the family, and curtails their access to political and material resources, thus generating gender hierarchies as natural, normal, and uncontroversial (Guy Evans, 2024). “Patriarchal system has significantly influenced the societal status of women. It is inherently male-centric, being man-made, and it relegates women to the status of the ‘second sex,’ subaltern, and even slaves” (Qasim et al., 2024).

Feminism stands out as a critical movement, which exposes patriarchy as a historically assembled system of domination instead of a natural social order. It reveals the institutions that perpetuate gender hierarchies including family, religion, law, education, and media by justifying the legitimacy of masculine authority and the subordination of women (Mohajan, 2022). By focusing on the fact that the personal is political, feminism demonstrates the personal experience of inequality as embedded within the larger structural power relations and indicates its intersectional approach to the problem of patriarchy and its intersection with class, race, and colonial histories. By doing that, feminism presents a transformative criticism that is meant to break systems of gendered oppression under patriarchy (McAfee, 2023).

Vox is a frightening dystopian story where the novelist reveals the very extreme effects of the control of patriarchy. Its strength lies in the fact that the social critique brought about in the novel through gender oppression and authoritarianism and a systematic eradication of women's autonomy is believable. The readers

get to have a perspective of the resistance and resilience in an emotionally stimulating way through the protagonist, Jean McClellan. Nevertheless, the subsequent focus on action-oriented thriller elements in the story spoils the initial tension, and the immature characters, unrealistic development of the plot, and moralizing (Price, 2019). *Vox* presents a terrifying dystopia where women are deprived of voice and agency and they have to talk no more than 100 words a day, or they are electrically shocked. This creates a chilling and disturbingly plausible image of systemic oppression and the annulment of female freedom. The world-building and atmosphere are persuasive and corporeal and indicate the modern anxieties of totalitarianism and dominance by gender. Although bleak realism is quite a striking cautionary story, the emotional and political urgency of the novel also leaves some points of hope and resistance, encouraging readers to be aware of and fight against the suppression before it makes a new standard. (Harmony Kent, 2022). *Vox* pictures a nightmare dystopia in which women are literally gagged - reduced to a maximum of 100 words per day or face electric shocks - as a seismic change in the status of men and women. The novel is powerful in the chillness of its high concept and its unsettling quality: the limiting power of the word and the powerlessness that the mass imposition of misogyny, supported by political and religious extremism, can achieve in a remarkably brief period of time, lead to a living warning about how fast anti-feminism can take away the agency of women. Though the idea is hard and provocative, the author does not hesitate to consider its psychological and social consequences in the conflict of the main character, which makes *Vox* a powerful commentary about voice, identity, and resistance (Swirl & Thread, 2018).

Despite the fact that Dalcher's *Vox* can be treated as a feminist dystopian novel because the elements of gender inequality and language restriction are mentioned on its surface, the available body of scholarship is predominantly concerned with these aspects. The absence of a deeper analysis on the systematic implementation of patriarchal hegemony via the state control, surveillance and institutional complicity to curb female voice is conspicuous. Moreover, little has been done to highlight the subtle resistance that women have put across besides speaking words, such as silence, embodied resistance and covert resistance. This paper is a response to this gap by discussing *Vox* as a compound manifestation of power, patriarchy, and opposition in authoritarian gender systems.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The paper is based on a qualitative, interpretive methodology, and feminist literary criticism is employed to analyze *Vox* by Christina Dalcher. The analysis of thematic patterns through close reading divides the research into the following patterns: patriarchal control, restrictions on the voice of women, resistance, and redefinition of female identity. The major sections are analyzed in regards to the problem of feminism, specifically Beauvoir and her analysis of patriarchy, to provide the contextual background for the novel regarding the criticism of the gendered structure of power. This methodology focuses on how *Vox* depicts the social, political, and psychological aspects of the silencing and the empowerment of women.

Feminism started with the problem of women's status in the family and the right of women to vote. The foundation of feminist theory in modern times (1960-1970) was centered on reproductive rights and economic freedom. The historical subordination of women and rejection of their social, political, and economic rights was the stimulus of feminism, which achieved formal acuity in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries together with liberal democracy movements and social reform movements (Brunell, 2026). The pioneering feminist scholars and activists opposed the fact that women lacked access to education, property ownership, and political representation, especially the right to vote, which became the precursor to what many refer to as first-wave feminism (Fiveable Content Team, 2025). Gradually, because of various successive waves, feminism expanded to cover not only legal imbalances but also cultural norms, economic exploitation, and intersectional forms of oppression, becoming a range of theoretical and political movements (Mohajan, 2022). Fundamentally, feminism can be described as a movement and a system of thought which aims at attaining gender equality by targeting systems that generate and perpetuate oppression against women. It seeks to break

the patriarchal structures of power that favor masculinity and exclude women and gender minorities in the public and private realms. Patriarchy is criticized by feminism as a historically constructed structure instead of a natural one; it reveals the ways in which institutions like family, religion, law, education, and media internalize male dominance and control the bodies, work, and identity of women. Feminism exposes the basis of daily forms of inequality in structural power relations, and therefore its criticism of patriarchy is central to its overall social justice and human liberation agenda by stating that the personal is political (Bhandari, 2024). Feminism also criticizes patriarchy through its intersectional lens, where it is connected to class exploitation, racial hierarchy, and colonial experiences. Thus, the confrontation of patriarchy becomes a transformational movement for social justice and equality (Bonu Rosenkranz, 2024).

One of the pioneer feminists of feminist theory, Simone de Beauvoir, created a very deep study of patriarchy in her masterpiece *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir (1949) suggests that patriarchy is instilled within cultural, social, and existential constructs that declare women to be the Other in contrast to the male, who is constructed as the default universal human subject. She claims that women's oppression is not innate but rather socially constructed: society creates restrictive roles and expectations that restrict women to domesticity, passivity, and dependence, and give men freedom, agency, and authority. This process of Othering makes male dominance seem natural and unchallenged, a normal and commonplace state of affairs, and helps to establish patriarchal ranks in both social and intimate realms. When discussing how culture, tradition, and ideology perpetuate female subordination, Beauvoir (1949) establishes a philosophical basis for comprehending patriarchy as a system--a pervasive and socially enhanced system of power, not a natural or an inalienable condition. She points out that men are regarded as default, autonomous, and universal human subject, but women are characterized in contrast to men, as secondary, dependent, and subordinate. Beauvoir (1949) claims that this duality is deeply ingrained in social norms, traditions, religion, laws, and cultural narratives that all perpetuate gender hierarchies. In this sense, patriarchy is not just a system of practices but a widespread worldview that influences the way in which both men and women understand, expect, and perform gender roles.

Beauvoir (1949) also emphasizes that women are oppressed socially and historically and not biologically. She is critical of how society relegates women to household and child-bearing positions, restricts their economic and educational opportunities, and makes them psychologically dependent on men to uphold male dominance and subjugate women. Patriarchy presents feminine passivity and masculine agency as ordinary and natural, normalizing their relations as unequal. Notably, Beauvoir (1949) unites this social commentary with the philosophy of existentialism and claims that the subjugation of women restricts their liberty and their ability to determine themselves as free individuals. Women are socialized to embrace their Otherness and internalize the constraints that limit their aspirations, their self-expression, and self-determination. To Beauvoir (1949), women need to be able to declare their agency, to refuse identities imposed upon them, and to engage as equal subjects in society.

As Beauvoir (1949) describes, patriarchy maintains a hierarchical rift between men and women, with the latter being left on "the lowest tier of society" (p. 390) and reinforcing systemic power imbalances across all areas of life. This disparity is neither accidental nor natural; it is created and sustained by historical, cultural, and ideological means to favor men and disfavor women. In this context, women are created as the Other, a category whose identity, experience, and agency is established against men who take the default role as the self. According to Beauvoir (1949), this construction is key to the ideology of patriarchy since it makes people focus on the idea that women are to be seen in relationship to man, which reduces their independent subjectivity. Placing women in contrast to a brilliant ideal of man, patriarchy defines women as inferior and men as superior, as a result of which social, political, and cultural inequalities are justified and established within society. As a result, the position of women as subordinate is internalized into everyday life, the system of institutions, and narratives of cultures. According to Beauvoir (1949), these circumstances subject women "to a mutilated and frozen existence" (p. 390) where they cannot exercise autonomy, self-expression, and

involvement in the life of the world. This is a mutilated existence that involves not only material restrictions but also psychological and existential restrictions that is emphasized by an external definition of expectations. The totality of cultural norms, institutional practices and internalized social expectations limit women to the full realization of their potential and independent subjectivity. True liberation, Beauvoir (1949) insists, must be total economic and social equality, which will entail an inner change, and it is important to note that structural changes need to be followed by deep-seated changes of consciousness and self-image. Equality, in its turn, involves reversing the ingrained cultural perceptions, so that women may become capable of overcoming their position of the other and regain the right to choose who they are and what they aspire to be and how to live in a world.

In short, the notion of women as the Other as put forward by Beauvoir explains how women identity is framed and constrained by the patriarchal power. In *Vox*, this is reflected in the systemic silencing of women's voices and agency. Beauvoir's theory highlights that oppression is not inherent, it is socially constructed, and protest is an expression of freedom.

Textual Analysis

In a patriarchal society, "women are often relegated to traditional roles as caregivers, homemakers, and subordinate members of the family, while men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and decision-makers" (Hiwarkhedka & Sharma, 2024, p. 1228). As in the dystopian tradition, *Vox* by Dalcher introduces a society in which the liberty of women is highly limited and regulated in both social and domestic realms. In fact, the first-person narration of Jean creates an impression of the inexorable nature of how the totalitarian regime punishes the female body. All women's movements are monitored by installed cameras, which are also characterized as "waiting to catch any gesture that might be seen as sign language, even the most rudimentary form of nonverbal communication" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 30). Such cameras create the effect of panopticism, where women are constantly watched and any possible offence is immediately noticed. The fact that Jean notes that "the black eye of a camera stares at me from the bus door" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 31) personifies the camera and makes it a silent but ever-present power that instills fear and promotes submissiveness. This surveillance is not limited to public spaces but is implemented into the apparently personal space of the home. As Jean and her daughter are made to wear the metal wrist counters, she remembers how their home was invaded: "a crew would come to the house... to install cameras at the front and back doors, lock my computer away, and pack up our books" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 56). Conventionally, the Western home represents an individual and secure place, a sort of "domestic sanctuary" that offers order, safety, and liberty (Dalcher, 2018, p. 45). The cameras and the seizure of personal objects do not only destroy the sovereignty of the home but leave its inhabitants (mostly women) in a state of imprisonment, with few opportunities for privacy or autonomy. Through such systemic encroachment, the lines between inside and outside, public and private, are blurred, and the domestic space becomes a controversial arena of power, political struggle, and negotiation.

The metal counters attached to the wrists of women, in *Vox*, also represent the presence of oppression and the objectification of the female body, which is connected to linguistic control and disciplinary practices. This linguistic domination is manifested by the metal counters, which confine women to only a few words per day. Jean cogitates that "we became shackled by these tiny little bracelets" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 29), framing it as a literal and metaphorical tool of control. The story also shows how women adjust to these limitations with the help of metalinguistic strategies and extremely orchestrated lexical options. Only some forms of questions and answers are allowed: "closed-ended [questions], requiring only a nod or a shake of the head," "yes/no interrogatives and finite answer sets," and a very limited number of "open-ended questions" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 2). Nonetheless, although being monitored, Jean confesses, despite of "my year of practice, the extra words leak out before I can stop them" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 3). These instances demonstrate that the metal wrists are not only a communication deterrent but also a form of self-discipline that compels women to internalize the

power to control their speech, body, and agency. In this regard, language emerges as a channel for the operation of patriarchal power that colonizes the female body and its ability to express itself independently.

Dalcher (2018) also highlights the physical and psychological abuse of women's bodies through the metal shackles. In addition to warning of linguistic transgression, these metal wrists are a real "torture device" that delivers pain and electroshock if women exceed their daily word limits and fail to follow the imposed rules (Dalcher, 2018, p. 55). This is clearly depicted when Jean narrates the horror of overstepping the mark: "My words flew out, unbridled, automatic... The pain knocked me flat. Our bodies have a mechanism, a way to forget physical trauma..." (Dalcher, 2018, p. 56). Jean's recollection highlights how women are taught to speak within the limited constraints of female speech, which they learn through bodily pain. The repetitive enactment of the "Electrocuted Female" creates a picture of a dehumanized body which has to be punished and subjected to unbearable pain to instill docility and obedience (Dalcher, 2018, p. 64). Consequently, the female body ceases to function as a private domain, and instead becomes an object controlled by the state. Linguistic control and physical punishment strip women of autonomy over their bodies. The patriarchal and religious ideologies of the totalitarian government are also strengthened by violence. According to Reverend Carl, "bracelets... will help put [females] in the mood, understand the fundamentals" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 82). The black bracelets impose the reading of doctrines that are used to build an approved truth about the social status of women and create a condition of sublimation and disenfranchisement of their freedom and agency. Jean thinks, "[we] are called as women to keep silence and to be under obedience... for it is shameful that a woman question God-ordained male leadership... we acknowledge that the head of every man is Christ, and that the head of every woman is the man" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 83). This shows the conscious attempt of the state to brainwash women, making them the voiceless Other, inferior and submissive to male power.

In this regard, religion is used to justify patriarchal dominance and the subjugation of women. The idea of God-appointed leadership presupposes that men have divine authority and that all female disobedience is a civil and religious sin. The novel brings out the binary stereotypes of women that existed in the nineteenth century, between the angel of the house and the monster, which is apparent when Jean says, "We've turned into necessary evils, objects to be fucked and not heard" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 29). In this case, patriarchal discourses create the female Other, which is perceived as a threat and an evil and, therefore, has to be controlled and sexually subdued. This ideological and material repression is supported by institutional machines like schools. Sonia, the daughter of Jean, does not talk at school to get rewards, which proves that forced silence is socially praised. The curriculum also integrates discipline with religious education; students are advised or forced to take up AP Religious Studies so that they can understand their roles that divinely assigned roles. Women are taught that they are the goddess-appointed keeper of the home and that their duty "as wife and mother, and the angel of the home, is the holiest, most responsible..." (Dalcher, 2018, p. 50). This type of discourse supports the Victorian gender stereotypes, implying women to domesticity and making the latter look like the most sacred and the ultimate goal that can be achieved by mortals: "Dismiss all ambition for anything higher as there is nothing else here so high for mortals" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 52). Religious and moral reasoning, therefore, become a means of systematic oppression of women even in the educational areas. The story of novel culminates in the humiliation of Julia. Although she is a young follower of the Pure Movement, her teenage lover, Steve, accuses her of having illicit sexual relations with her. Gendered double standards are also depicted by the fact that in this totalitarian society, women are the only ones who are prohibited to engage in premarital or extramarital sexual activity. The punishment of Julia is also described in detail: "She's in drab gray smock, long-sleeved and down to her ankles, even in this heat, and her hair is cut" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 159), with Reverend Carl reciting the Pure manifesto beside her: "If you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are you. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 159). This scene epitomizes the convergence of physical, social, and religious violence, rendering the female body entirely subjected to patriarchal authority. This scene is the most symbolic one, as it combines physical, social, and religious violence, which makes the female body completely a subject of patriarchal

power. The ritualistic punishment and publicity help to emphasize how religious performance is mobilized as a control and violence mechanism and women are powerless to resist.

Vox is not just a story of oppression, but it is also a story of the female body as a place of struggle, bargaining and fight. Although Jean is forced to adhere to the patriarchal practices at first, the control of her language and body is the main focus of her reclaiming of her subjectivity and agency. Such deviation is evidenced by minor acts of rebellion on the part of Jean: “‘Pink would be most appropriate for a little girl,’ they said. I pointed to silver for myself and blood red for Sonia. A trivial act of defiance” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 56). This is a symbolic protest against the efforts of the state to turn the counter wrists, a symbol of oppression and torture, into playful “fashion accessories” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 55). Symbolically, silver reminds of handcuffs and shackles, red is a sign of pain and blood caused by electroshock, especially underlining the danger that future generations of girls will have to endure.

Even language itself is both a means of oppression and a way of regaining agency. The control of voice by Jean is the key to redefining her freedom. When she is pressured by Reverend Carl to develop the Wernicke project, a cure to fluent aphasia and brain injury, she makes conditions that allow her and her daughter to be autonomous: “I can do this... I want three things Mr. Presi. I want my daughter’s counter removed. I want her excused from school; I’ll teach her at home Friday through Monday” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 95). This declaration of agency in the public is the turning point in her struggle, as it shows that the power of language directly transfers to the power of the body and selfhood. Her opposition is also expressed when she says, “I want to fight, and I don’t know how” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 152), which indicates the appearance of the rebellious thinking and bargaining of the boundaries set by the patriarchal regime. Here, the body of Jean is a place of constant subject/object, interior/ exterior, thinking/sensation, self/ world, and how language, agency, and body intersect as instruments of resistance in the novel. The locus of the ongoing negotiation of Jean makes her place her in the liminal space in the totalitarian society. She crosses the physical and psychological boundaries that are placed on her by working on the Wernicke project by the government and “bring[ing] the president down” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 1). Quite on the contrary, Jean is an active and submissive subject as she manages to move around the periphery of the prison-house, oscillating between the intimate world of her family and the exterior world of the government laboratory. This re-spatialization enables her to create her agency. She thinks about it, and as she does, “I sort of like her, this new Jean” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 282). In the case of Jean, she is both an insider and outsider since she is a member of their project in the government and is a subversive agent. This mobility connects the female body with the exercise of power and disrupts the hegemonic discourses of patriarchal institution and finally allows her to unveil the secret project of the government to transform a cure into a curse and to organize resistance.

Dalcher (2018) also uses narrative to describe the reclaiming of voice and agency by Jean. Breaking the traditional linear format, *Vox* tells the story of Jean in the first person, where the narrations alternate between the current events, flashbacks, and memories, creating the tensions between the past and the present. These revisitations introduce the relations of Jean with Jackie, whose cautions on government oppression provoke immediate response to the violation of women rights: “You have no idea, ladies. No goddamned idea. We’re on a slippery side to prehistory, girls. Think about it... Think about words like ‘spousal permission’ and ‘paternal consent’...” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 10). Jackie represents a politically active feminist awareness, which points to Jean being passive previously, such as her inability to vote and participate in political protest. Returning to her past and contemplating memory, Jean becomes stronger in her opposition to the government and slowly learns to find her own strength with the help of words. Jean often breaks her narration with her inner thoughts, thus indicating the presence of multiple voices at the same time. She says, “[w]hen we disconnect, I’m left with Jackie’s words. One step at a time, Jeanie. Start small. I don’t know how to start, big or small...” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 156). The italics are used to emphasize the active role played by Jean in her situation and how she criticizes the present and goes back to the past to oppose the control of language. These reflexive, critical, and re-creative strategies of reflection, criticism and reconstruction of the past and present

events enable her to reclaim control of her voice and self. Her inner voices, such as “Think about what you need to do to stay free” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 242), can be seen as technologies of the self because they direct her actions against the oppression of the government and help her to control her body and language. The strength of the female body as an agency is also expressed in the relationship that Jean has with her colleague Lorenzo. Lorenzo is a figure of rebellion, bravery, and opposition to authoritarian rule, unlike her husband Patrick, who remains passive and submissive, Lorenzo embodies rebellion, courage, and resistance to authoritarian control. The affair with Lorenzo gives Jean a platform and resources to rebel against the harsh limitations that are placed on her life. In the society where extramarital relationships are criminalized as sin and punishable offense, their need to have forbidden love is a way of rebellion: “the only method... of saying ‘Fuck you’ to the system” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 121). Their sexual relationship is more of a declaration of individual autonomy and a rebellion against the state hegemonic dominance of domestic space, personal relationships, and the female body. In these acts, Jean shows that the female body can be a potent location of freedom negotiation, subjectivity assertion and oppressive patriarchal subversion.

Motherhood also encourages the agency and resistance of totalitarian control that Jean negotiates. The most important social role in the novel is prescriptive of motherhood, which is dictated by patriarchal and religious discourses and at the same time controls female sexuality and prohibits reproductive autonomy. Women are confined in the domestic area of the home since the reproductive functions of women are considered essential to capitalism in terms of supplying fresh labour force. However, in *Vox*, motherhood is the driving force that brings Jean to freedom and active opposition: “If I’m going to trade my words for brain, I’ll do it for her” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 55). She focuses on the safety and freedom of her daughter, Sonia, and an unborn child because oppressive laws and wrist-counter regulations endanger their lives and voices: no parent would select a wrist-counter colour to a three-month-old baby, and no parent would want to send a girl to such a system. The care given by Jean is an ethics of care, which is the perception, interpretation and action of care needs. The motherly desire to secure a superior, freer future of her children, especially her daughter, is the key element of resistance in Jean. The presidential decree directly affects Sonia who loses her freedom to have a wide education. She is locked up in sewing and cooking classes, which is an indication of how girls are discriminated and deprived of equal education opportunities with boys. These restrictions deny Sonia a chance to reach her full potential and support gender inequality, which places women in the secondary role. This division of sexes makes sure that the girls are only trained to work in the home where they are taught to cook, sew, and clean, and thus, this is a continuation of the societal expectation that women should be in the home. Girls are also more disadvantaged by the classroom dynamics, as they are more self-conscious. The experience of Sonia is also demonstrated when she comes to the sewing classroom: “Here’s the sewing room,” our group leader said, opening a set of double doors... She’ll listen to stories, practice numbers, and help in the kitchen... This is what school is now, and what school will be for some time. Maybe forever” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 201). All these illustrate how institutionalized educational practices restrict the development of girls, reproduce gender roles and train them to be mainly involved in domestic labour, but not in the wider social and intellectual life.

The story of novel ends at a place of mass struggle against the repressive regime. Jean learns that the Wernicke project is aiming to create a bioweapon that causes aphasia to those who disobey the government, but she also learns of an underground resistance group that opposes the government. Another female character assures her: “There’s always a resistance” (Dalcher, 2018, p.165). *Vox* shows that resistance against totalitarianism needs to be a group effort, both women and men, and therefore, the state with its strict gender distinctions is challenged. The novel ends with the introduction of the democratic rule and the emancipation of the female voices: “I enjoy watching the women here. They talk with their hands and their bodies and their souls, and they sing” (Dalcher, 2018, p.326). This final image emphasizes the close relationship between agency and voice because the recovery of bodily movement and verbal expression is an indication of autonomy, freedom, and the victory of female resistance against systemic oppression.

The patriarchal culture is based on the idea that women have an innate role of passivity and submission because men believe that women are weak and naturally inferior. Such a perception helps men to impose their authority on women and make them obedient. Women are taught to keep silence and to be under obedience. “If we must learn, let us ask our husbands in the closeness of the home... it is shameful that a woman question God-ordained male leadership... When we obey male leadership with humility and submission, we acknowledge that the head of every man is Christ...” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 201). The subordination of women is justified by Reverend Carl with references to the Bible, which is an indication of how the religious discourse promotes the domination of men. According to Stanton, it is true that Church and state; priests and legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have taught that woman was created after man, of man, and to man, an inferior creature, to be subject to man. This shows that biblical traditions have been historically used to strengthen the male dominance and defining female subordination in the family, social, and state. The normative interpretation of holy books has always placed men as the first point of decision-making, thus making gender hierarchies institutionalized beyond the home into the policy and the legal norms. The effects of this patriarchal domination are very clear in the case of Sonia and her education. She is not allowed to receive a full-fledged curriculum and is restricted to learning how to sew and cook, thus, a perfect example of gendered discrimination in schools. These limitations suppress the potential development of Sonia and create a deep-rooted inequality that keeps women in their subservient positions. Sex-segregated education makes sure that girls are trained to do the chores mainly at home as the society expects women to be at home. Girls are also more disadvantaged by classroom dynamics since they are more self-conscious. Sonia has limited education and this is further brought out when she enters the sewing classroom: “Here’s the sewing room,” our group leader said, opening a set of double doors... She’ll listen to stories, practice numbers, and help in the kitchen... This is what school is now, and what school will be for some time” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 208). These instances highlight the constraining effect of institutionalized educational practices on the growth of girls, the reenactment of traditional gender roles, and the positioning of girls towards household work as opposed to the wider intellectual or social interests.

Jean sees the extreme effects of patriarchal dominance when her son Steven admits that he had sex with Julia before marriage. Soon Julia is kidnapped by an armored car: “Her hair was cut, she was paraded around the TV in a gray dress, and she was shamed for having premarital sex... She would spend the rest of her days as a mute slave” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 2018). Steven, on the other hand, is not punished, which is a sign of the gendered two-sidedness. On being asked, “What if you told them it was Steven’s fault? Can you do that?” Steven responds, “That would be a lie... I don’t care” (Dalcher, 2018), thus, demonstrating the objectification of Julia. Julia is degraded into a sexual object, humiliated, and deprived of agency, which is a manifestation of how gender discrimination is practiced by the patriarchal systems via media and law.

The duties that Jean performs towards her children, husband, and house are indicative of the patriarchal division of labor where wives do the household chores as men earn money. Her labor is also exploitative since it is governed by her husband and it is not paid as housewives tend to work longer hours than their husbands. The segregation of domestic labor is the primary source of disparity between men and women, which influences other social relations and supports the systemic inequality. Jean also notes the disproportionate amount of domestic work: “You know, like about how hard it is on kids when both their parents work, how we’ve gotten to this place where people forget about simple things... How about you save some of this for your brothers’ breakfast? And what simple things? The only people who aren’t out at work are women” (Dalcher, 2018, p. 2018). This throws light on the unfair distribution of household duties among women, which brings out the issue of exploitation and the continuation of gender division of labor.

Conclusion

Vox is a dystopian cautionary tale that explores the systematic silencing and oppression of women under a theocratic regime while highlighting their acts of resistance. Dalcher (2018) critiques patriarchal power by

dramatizing how linguistic restrictions, surveillance, and physical punishment constrain women's voices, bodies, and agency. Jean McClellan's struggle to reclaim her voice demonstrates that language, identity, and empowerment are inseparable, and that speaking becomes both a personal and political act of defiance. The novel situates individual oppression within broader societal structures, including unequal education, domestic labor, and sexual objectification, emphasizing how systemic inequalities reinforce male dominance. Yet, it also foregrounds the female body as a site of negotiation and transformation, showing that agency emerges through both individual and collective resistance. Finally, *Vox* asserts that reclaiming speech, memory, and bodily autonomy is central to challenging patriarchy, presenting the feminine voice as a vital instrument of resilience, empowerment, and social change. The novelist makes modern readers realize the instability of women rights and the need to protect the areas where women voice can be heard, appreciated, and even justified.

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