

“BLESSED BE THE FIGHT”: POLITICAL RADICALISM AND GENDER
OPPRESSION IN MARGARET ATWOOD’S “THE HANDMAID’S TALE” AND
“THE TESTAMENTS”



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BY
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PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis is a multidisciplinary study with two main objectives. Firstly, it aims to define the fictional Republic of Gilead from Margaret Atwood's novels *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* as a totalitarian, fascist regime, and contextualize it among the historical precedents from the WW2 and Cold War era. Secondly, it discusses the implementation and outcomes of various violative laws culminating with capital punishments in Gilead, through the often-overlooked male experience. The first chapter scrutinises the formative years of Gilead. Foucault's concept of "governmentality" helps to define some of Gilead's apparatuses, including the death penalty, which is critiqued through Foucault and Derrida; desubjectification and depoliticisation as argued in Arendt's various works; and the Handmaids' formation in conjecture with Kristeva's "abjection". The second chapter investigates the "later-term" and the second generation of Gilead via Foucault's "power/knowledge" and "biopolitics". Using the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, an in-depth study of Gilead's language reveals its influence on the Gileadean subjects' dispositions. The third chapter analyses the societal structure of Gilead through Bentham and Foucault's elaborations on panoptic models. Supplementarily, Foucault's elucidation of norms defines the methods for the divided social fabric of Gilead. The chapter also references various sources on male victimhood and its invisibility in critical studies and history. Moreover, Arendt's report on Eichmann's trial and Atwood's own remarks provide in-depth perspectives into the victimization of Gileadean men and the double-sided nature of the women as victim-victimizers.

Keywords: Gilead, totalitarianism, fascism, norm, biopower, biopolitics, power/knowledge, linguistic relativity, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, male victimhood

ÖZET

Bu tez, disiplinler arası bir çalışmayla iki ana hedef sunar. İlk olarak, Margaret Atwood'ın *The Handmaid's Tale* (Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü) ve *The Testaments* (Ahitler) romanlarındaki kurgusal Gilead devletini totaliter ve faşist bir rejim olarak tanımlayıp, İkinci Dünya Savaşı ve Soğuk Savaş dönemlerinden tarihi emsalleriyle konumlandırır. İkinci olarak, Gilead'deki ihlal edici kanunlarla, aşırı uygulanan idam cezalarını, çoğunlukla göz ardı edilen erkek deneyimi üzerinden örneklendirir. İlk bölüm, Gilead'in kuruluş yıllarını Foucault'nun "yönetimselliği"ni kullanarak rejimin bazı araçlarıyla inceler. Bu araçlardan bazıları, bölümün Foucault ve Derrida kullanarak eleştirdiği ölüm cezası; Arendt'in çeşitli eserlerinde tartıştığı edilgenleştirme ve apolitikleştirme; ve Kristeva'nın "abjection" konsepti üzerinden Handmaid (Damızlıklar)'lerin oluşumudur. İkinci bölüm, "geç dönem" Gilead'i ve rejimin ikinci jenerasyonunu Foucault'nun "güç/bilgi" ve "biyopolitika" terimleriyle inceler. Sapir-Whorf hipotezini kullanarak, Gilead'in dilinin vatandaşlarının kişiliklerinin oluşumu üzerindeki etkisini tartışır. Üçüncü bölüm, Gilead'in sosyal yapısını Bentham ve Foucault'nun panoptik model tartışmalarıyla inceler. Ek olarak, Gilead'in bölünmüş toplumsal dokusunu Foucault'nun normlar üzerine açıklamalarını temel alarak betimler. Bu bölüm ayrıca kritik çalışmalarda ve tarihi örneklerde erkek mağduriyeti ve temsilsizliği; Arendt'in Eichmann'ın yargı süreci üstüne raporu; ve Atwood'un kendi açıklamaları gibi çeşitli referanslarla Gilead'li erkeklerin mağduriyeti, ve kadınların mağdur-mağdur eden ikililiği üzerine kapsamlı bir perspektif sunar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Gilead, totalitaryanizm, faşizm, norm, biyogüç, biyopolitika, güç/bilgi, dilsel bağıntılılık, dilsel izafigyet, Sapir-Whorf hipotezi, erkek mağduriyeti



To Mama and Papa:
A pair of legends among legends.

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INTRODUCTION

Margaret Atwood admits that when she began writing *The Handmaid's Tale* in the spring of 1984, in West Berlin, still enclosed by the infamous Berlin Wall at the time, she did not anticipate the lasting influence her novel would make in the political activism scene (Atwood, 2018). Still hailed as “her most widely read novel” (Oates, 2006, p. 18), *The Handmaid's Tale* retains its relevancy thirty-six years after its 1985 publication. Evidently a topical issue, more recently, after the election of the forty-fifth president of the United States, Donald Trump, the “sales of [*The Handmaid's Tale*] have soared” (Williamson, 2017, p. 262).

With almost a decade left of Cold War at the time of the novel's creation, the tense climate undoubtedly influenced Atwood in the invention of Gilead, the fictional totalitarian state. Atwood also pointed out that “when [she] wrote ‘*The Handmaid's Tale*’, nothing went into it that had not happened in real life somewhere at some time” (MasterClass, 2018). Hence the genesis of the present thesis has its roots in a scholarly curiosity and a self-imposed challenge to chronicle the history of Gilead as a totalitarian state in conflict with enemies abroad and within, an attempt similar to that of the historians’ at the end of both *The Handmaid's Tale*, and its sequel, *The Testaments*. Considering the fact that the model and practices of Gilead are neither novel nor completely fictional, it is no coincidence that one of the Founding Fathers of the state has biographies of Nicolae Ceaușescu and Josef Stalin (Atwood, 2019, p.316), the dictators of the Romania and Soviet Union, respectively, on his shelf. This thesis engages with the historical precedents of WW2 and Cold War to scrutinize the cogs of the mechanisms of oppression. The chapters rely heavily on the often collaborative readings of the works of Michel Foucault (perhaps

under the influence of Cevizci's assessment of the twentieth century, as the "Age of Foucault"¹, 2018, p. 1128), and Hannah Arendt.

The first chapter attempts to inspect the circumstances under which the Republic of Gilead is formed, relating its early politics to examples in history. Firstly, the chapter aims to briefly define the term "fascism" as a political system of the monopoly of power and control, chiefly relying on the elucidations of various critics. Referencing several lectures, books and essays by Foucault and Arendt, the chapter argues for the similarities between the formation process of totalitarian states and Gilead. Among the changes in the country following the coup by the Sons of Jacob, the implication of death penalty which is performed widely and unduly in the fictional 'republic' will be emphasized. Furthermore, employing Foucault and Derrida's critiques, the chapter will denounce the practice as unethical and label the republic a "vindictive state" due to the heavy-handed system of punishments for various 'misconducts'. The reasons and process behind the formation of the Handmaids will be discussed in detail; in so doing, the institutes and the Aunts dedicated to educating and torturing women into accepting their new roles as child-bearers for the Commanders and their "barren" wives will be viewed as part of the arbitrary and unorthodox laws and "governmentality" (Foucault, 2009, p. 144) of the Republic. Borrowing Julia Kristeva's elucidation of the concept of "abject" and "abjection", the Handmaids will be studied firstly in their de-individualization through the new patronymic naming process in which the prefix "Of-" is followed by the name of the Commander who currently owns the Handmaid. A bottom-up study from Offred's confession that "[She is] abject" (Atwood, 2017, p. 275), which is also touched upon in Harold Bloom's homonymously titled study of the novel (2001, p.

¹ My translation; the original text in Turkish uses the term "Foucault Çağı".

93), to the general function of the Handmaids in the state will be offered. As a theocratic state, Gilead's institutionalized marginalization and legalized rape of the Handmaids coincide with Kristeva's exploration of the "religious answer to abjection", which is "defilement, taboo, or sin" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 48). Finally, but not least important, this first chapter will discuss the shortcomings of the currently discussed governmentality of terror and death. Therefore, with a different approach to totalitarianism and fascism, a change in the governmentality of Gilead will be put forth as the reason for the longevity of the state.

The second chapter offers a study of the first generation of Gileadeans born into and shaped according to the ecclesiastical and eugenic agenda of the republic. The aim of the state will be likened to what Foucault describes as the reform of the penal apparatuses: "not to punish less, but to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body" (Foucault, 1995, p. 82). Although the hangings do not cease, *The Testaments* illustrates the transformed governmentality of Gilead and its connection to Foucault's "power/knowledge" (1980, p. 72) and examines the exercise of power in disciplining subjects and controlling the masses as observed in the testimonies of Agnes Jemima. Another focus of the chapter proposes language as the major actualiser of Gilead's "biopower", defined by Foucault as the shift of emphasis from taking lives to shaping lives (1990, pp. 138-140). The link between Gilead's state-enforced language and the dispositions of those who are born into and influenced by it will be discussed, using the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which argues for the role of language in constructing realities and influencing the notions, dispositions, and attitudes of those who use it (Kay & Kempton, 1984, p. 66). Starting from Wilhelm von Humboldt,

who is credited as the architect of the theory (Deutscher, 2010, pp. 133-150), the chapter offers a thorough survey of the linguistic relativity theory, including the colour theory experiments conducted in substantiation of the hypothesis. Following that, the education system in Gilead, the everyday habits from nursery rhymes to vernaculars and slangs, and all else that is formed, conducted, and conveyed in Gileadean English scrutinized to uncover the subtly sinister motives behind them. The final objective of the chapter is to illustrate the influences and outcomes of the Gileadean language politics through the contrasting predispositions of the half-sisters, Nicole and Agnes Jemima as well as other key figures in their lives such as Becka, Shunammite, and Aunts Vidala and Lydia. In that exploration of the traits and temperaments formed, this part of the thesis will reveal the connection between the Gileadean subjects devoted to the regime and what Arendt regards as the blind followers, or, “fanatics” of any given totalitarian state (Arendt, 1973, p. 306).

The third and final chapter aims to address the inadequacy of criticism on the presence of men in both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. Although both novels have been read as perturbing displays of women's plight numerous times, it is crucial to consider the underlying presence of subversive men victimized twice fold: firstly, in the novels by Gilead, and secondly, in the critical works by overlooking scholars. While it may be easy to fall victim to the self-serving narratives of Offred and Lydia, it is crucial to remember that ultimately both novels and their heroines are elusive, or in John Updike's words, “subversive” (p. 126, 1986). Hence, in an attempt to reverse the prevalent tendency of idealizing the female heroes by sitting in judgment upon the male figures of the novels, this chapter proposes an alternative critical approach to the key female figures through the lens of victim-victimizer dichotomy, and the emphasis on certain male figures as the indispensable members

of the resistance and the victims of the state. Therefore, Gilead will be exposed as a grueling and dangerous space for the unprivileged, regardless of gender.

The chapter makes use of Jeremy Bentham's model for the prisons, the panopticon, and Michel Foucault's further elaboration(s) to liken Gilead to a prison with every aspect of daily life for Gileadeans modeled identical to carceral structures. Bentham describes the panoptic prison as "a machine for grinding rogues honest" (Bentham, 2011, p. 82 & Ignatieff, 1978, p. 76). However, Foucault furthers the model by elaborating a metaphorical all-seeing-eye beyond the model which was proposed strictly for prison architectures, and prisoners are made to be in paranoia that they are under constant surveillance, even when they are not (1995, p. 200). Therefore, Foucault details that panoptic structures are "omni-disciplinary" (1995, p. 236), and they can be used whenever the imposition of a certain behaviour or the mass controlling of the crowds are necessary (pp. 128-216). With those elaborations in mind, the chapter proposes that the strict class division in Gilead, signified by the distinct colours and shapes of garments assigned to each class resemble the uniform of a prisoner and serve to segregate and to easily monitor. In Atwood's words, red, the color assigned to the Handmaids, aside from the symbolic meanings behind the crimson, is "easier to see if you happen to be fleeing" (Atwood, 2017, p. XIII). A Foucauldian analysis of the state's society will reveal the individuals as strictly divided from one another, as part of a "normalizing judgment" (Foucault, 1995, p. 170). Special attention will be paid to "the power of the Norm" (Foucault, 1995, pp. 183-185) in relation to the normative judgment will, as well as the societal binary divisions and "branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal)" (Foucault, 1995, p. 199). While the text acknowledges the victimhood of women under the gruesome normative judgment enforced through the strict organization of

the society, it approaches the conditions of Gilead as a humanitarian plight, rather than the plight of a single sex or group. Before doing so, however, the text takes it as its duty to report on the “invisibility of men’s victimization” (Arttime et al., 2014, p. 313) in critical studies with citations including but not limited to the extensive studies of Karen G. Weiss.

In *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Margaret Atwood illustrates multiple victim positions. Hence to discuss Lydia, Vidala, and Serena Joy as victimizers, the chapter employs Atwood’s depiction of “Position One” which describes, in the broadest sense, a victim who refuses to acknowledge her victimhood, and in turn, trivializes the experience of other victims, and ultimately, victimizes others herself (2013, p. 36). Lydia mirrors Adolf Eichmann, one of the architects of the Holocaust in WW2 in terms of her attempt to absolve herself by placing the blame of her atrocities upon the social and political climate of Gilead at the time (which she self-admittedly helped create), and claiming to have obeyed the orders and carried out her duties. In this effort of investigating the female villains of Gilead, the chapter confirms what Atwood advocates for repeatedly on different occasions: “But female bad characters can also act as keys to doors we need to open, and as mirrors in which we can see more than just a pretty face” (Atwood, 1994, p. 39). Similarly, she reveals that “[She has] known a number of real women, not all of whom have been nicer or more noble or more long-suffering or less righteous and pompous than men” (Atwood, 2006, p. 35). After all, “There are no innocent victims” (J. Romaines quoted in Sartre, 1987, p. 56).

After having established women as more than passive victims, the chapter offers an intensive insight into the victimization of men. Using various examples of penalisation of men in Gilead, from the ‘lesser’ crimes such as performing abortions,

which is punished retroactively, and practicing any faith other than the official religion of the State, to “Gender Treachery” (Atwood, 2017, p. 55), which includes a cross-dressing man reported by his wife and consequently executed (Atwood, 2019, p. 337), to two guardians caught in homosexual conduct (2015, p. 55), this part of the thesis aims to underline the plight of the subversive and inconvertible men that often goes undiscussed. For that purpose, a variety of social and gender studies focused on the victimization of and the victim-blaming done to men will be referred. Thus, the male victims of Gilead will be revealed and the elusively sinister female figures will be held accountable for their contributions to a catalogue of horrors trapping the underprivileged and the nonconformists.

CHAPTER 1:

‘Gilibad’: Gilead as an Oppressive and Vindictive State

“No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says; he is always convinced that it says what he means.”

(George Bernard Shaw quoted in S. Winsten, 1949, p. 257)

Margaret Atwood’s fictional dystopian republic featured in the novels *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*, Gilead, at first glance, may seem too disastrous to be true. However, the singled out instances and practices rooted in the heart of its politics that this chapter will study are not unheard of in the history of humanity. After all, the author herself asserts that “When [she] wrote ‘*The Handmaid’s Tale*’, nothing went into it that had not happened in real life somewhere at some time” (MasterClass, 2018). From Arendt to Adorno, to Foucault, many names in the social science scene observed, dissected, and attempted to define the historical counterparts to the practices seen in Gilead in terms like “fascism” and “totalitarianism”. This chapter aims to define the terms and correlate them with the politics of Gilead, mainly using Foucault and Arendt’s studies on totalitarianism, and Kristeva’s concept of abjection. Firstly to define the term “totalitarianism” in Paxton’s words:

The word fascism has its root in the Italian fascio, literally a bundle or sheaf. More remotely, the word recalled the Latin fasces, an axe encased in a bundle of rods that was carried before the magistrates in Roman public processions to signify the authority and unity of the state. Before 1914, the symbolism of the

Roman fasces was usually appropriated by the Left. (...) At the end of World War I, Mussolini coined the term *fascismo* to describe the mood of the little band of nationalist ex-soldiers and pro-war syndicalist revolutionaries that he was gathering around himself. Even then, he had no monopoly on the word *fascio*, which remained in general use for activist groups of various political hues (Paxton, 2005, p. 12).

Similarly, the word totalitarianism, used first in 1926 in reference to the Italian fascism, derived from the Italian word *totalitarismo* has its roots in Latin *totus*, meaning “all”, and *tōtālis*, which means “entire” or “total”. Thus totalitarianism commonly used in reference to the governance era of Hitler and Mussolini in Germany and Italy respectively indicates a monopoly of control and power, hence, totalitarianism describes a political system where the state seeks to have absolute power and control (Arendt, 1973, p. 326; Brzezinski, 1956, p. 751; Bongiovanni & Rugman, 2005, p. 6).

To be able to thoroughly and accurately analyse the totalitarian power dynamics and its supplementing apparatus(es), which Michel Foucault would refer to as “governmentality” (2009, p. 144) of Gilead, one must explore the circumstances of its decisive rise to power. Moreover, to be able to inspect the Republic’s governmentality that shapes its politics, one must first understand what the term itself encompasses:

First, by “governmentality” I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and

apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. (...) Development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (appareils) on the one hand, [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges (savoirs) (Foucault, 2009, p. 144).

To understand the roots, aims, and motives of Gilead's politics, one must date it back to its formative days. In the new preface to *The Handmaid's Tale* written by Atwood, the author presents the political transformation as a coup that the liberal democrat USA has suffered and consequently became a republic of literal-minded dictatorship "built on a foundation of the seventeenth-century Puritan roots" (2017, p.12). The coup itself is never accounted for in detail in the novel. Though the events leading up to it, from the protests to violent acts of activism of denunciation of what they would classify as sinful; to the very first formative moments of the Republic, where women are forcibly removed from their workplaces and their bank accounts and properties are transferred to the closest male they have in their family, the 'revolution' reads more like an abrupt move of overpowering dominance, rather than in Arendt's words in reference to the communist revolution in Russia, a change welcomed by the majority of America. "Revolutions are not made intentionally and arbitrarily, but that they were always and everywhere the necessary result of circumstances entirely independent of the will and guidance of particular parties and whole classes" (Arendt, 1970, pp. 11–13). Moreover, a glance at one of the founding fathers of Gilead, and the leader of the Eyes, Commander Judd's room may offer a deeper insight into the influences that inspire the governmentality of Gilead. "Judd has a respectable collection of biographies and histories—Napoleon, Stalin, Ceaușescu, and various other leaders and controllers of men" (Atwood, 2019, p. 316). Among Judd's models are the dictators of the Soviet Union and Romania,

respectively. Similarly, one of the historians studying Gilead remarks that Commander Waterford is credited for “the design of the female costumes and for the suggestion that the Handmaids wear red, which he seems to have borrowed from the uniforms of German prisoners of war in Canadian “P.O.W.” camps of the Second World War era” (Atwood, 2017, p. 290). It is not surprising to detect how Gilead comes into power and the power functions when the historical instances, and the historical figures the Commanders, or the Sons of Jacob prior to the establishment of the Republic, look up to for their totalitarian regime are revealed. Sons of Jacob manipulated religious teachings like the revolutionary left in Arendt’s account; their ‘revolution’ wasn’t a natural progression; they forced it down upon others through violence and unlawful means. Following the bloody coup of the extremist religious section Sons of Jacob, the new life in Gilead in the novel is told from the perspective of a Handmaid, women whose lifestyles were disapproved by the religious doctrines of Gilead and now trained to be child-bearers for the “barren” families of the Commanders and Wives. The life in Gilead is strictly governed by arbitrary laws grounded in contorted religious norms, and the terror of constant surveillance and public executions reign over. The Republic of Gilead brings, as Arendt observes in the conflict between the free and the totalitarian world, “religion” back into the realm of public-political affairs from which it has been banished ever since the separation of Church and State” (Arendt, 2005, p. 368). From “doubt to belief”, the Sons of Jacob forced the citizens of America into a “violent resolution” in Arendt’s terminology (2005, p. 369); where the Republic was “no more world of doubt” (p. 369), but that of blind devotion to the Republic’s interpretation of religion; through violence and terror for those who resisted. The leaders of Gilead, Commanders, assume the role of theomorphic (derived from Greek theos, “god” and

morphē, “shape, form”: image of man as a (or the God) rulers of their subjects in the new America. Foucault chronicles the practice:

Pharaoh was an Egyptian shepherd. Indeed, he ritually received the herdsman's crook on his coronation day; and the term ‘shepherd of men’ was one of the Babylonian monarch's titles. But God was also a shepherd leading men to their grazing ground and ensuring them food. (Foucault, 1981, p. 227)

Not unlike such religious figures, Commanders assume total power over every aspect of the life of their subjects with heavily religious politics, effectively stripping away autonomy. People are to follow strict schedules accompanied by strict rules: no thinking or experiencing for themselves allowed, and their autonomy stripped as Gilead assesses and assigns its subjects to the rules best suited for them and the benefit of the rulers, Commanders. In the preface to Deleuze and Guattari's 1972 book, *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault's proposal to counteract any form of fascism is to not to “become enamored of power” (2000, p. xiv). Gilead, indeed, is “enamored of power”, to rule, to judge, and to execute based on convoluted religious discourses. A closer inspection of the Christianity-based politics of Gilead (Atwood, 2017, p. 14) would reveal the convoluted and hypocritical nature of the Republic, and the very basis of the inhumane, archaic practices of judgment and punishment. Foucault aptly circumscribes the role of Christianity in the countenance of dictatorship and violence:

Christianity was to give them considerable importance, both in the Middle Ages and in modern times. Among all the societies in history, ours - I mean, those that came into being at the end of Antiquity on the Western side of the European continent - have perhaps been the most aggressive and the most

conquering; they have been capable of the most stupefying violence, against themselves as well as against others. They invented a great many different political forms. They profoundly altered their legal structures several times. It must be kept in mind that they alone evolved a strange technology of power treating the vast majority of men as a flock with a few as shepherds (Foucault, 1981, pp. 230-231).

As the prophet-like shepherds of Gileadeans, Commanders assume complete rights over the lives and death of their subjects; their rough “justice” based on convoluted, carefully picked narratives of the Bible, of which they themselves are exempt from. Perhaps two of the most obvious examples of such religious hypocrisy that is quintessentially a part of Gileadean governmentality are the wide-spread, harrowing public spectacles of the death penalty, and the brothel Jezebel’s. Derrida discusses the hypocrisy of the religious believers by comparing one of the Ten Commandments and their reflections in action. The 7th commandment, “Thou shall not kill” (New International Version, 2011, Exodus 20:2-17) is his focus, as he argues that the moral imperative is seen as God inventing not a peaceful and pacifist approach but the death penalty, and they see it as “coming from God” (Derrida, 2013, p.38). With Jewish and Christian connections in mind, indeed for the hypocritical Gileadean religion, the death penalty comes from God; all non-believers are swiftly and harshly punished, their bodies made to be cautionary tales. “Let that be a reminder to us,” says the new Ofglen” (Atwood, 2017, p. 272). Offred observes new bodies hanging from the Wall on her regular walks (pp. 45-45 & p. 55 & p. 272), with garments and signs to indicate their crimes; people being executed for most crimes, if not all, is already a norm in the early stages of Gileadean life despite

the sixth Commandment. She notes that the bodies are “a reminder to us of the unjustness and brutality of the regime” (p. 272).

Similarly, despite the Biblical condemnation of adultery (also a grounds of death penalty in Gilead, even for the somewhat ‘above the law’ members of the society like the Wives of the Commanders), and the forcibly enforced modesty, most Commanders are revealed to be frequents of a brothel named Jezebel’s (Atwood, 2017, p. 194). Foucault also notes the stigma surrounding sexuality in the history of Christianity:

The meaning of the sexual act itself: it will be said that Christianity associated it with evil, sin, the Fall, and death, (...) Or the disallowance of relations between individuals of the same sex: it would seem that Christianity strictly excluded such relationships (Foucault, 1990, p. 14).

The legal system in Gilead completely banishes sexual freedom; on the surface, sex is reserved only for reproduction. Women are either Commander’s wives, Econowives, or Handmaids, assigned to men and to carry out their (sole) duties of bearing children, or at least, attempt to in the face of harsh punishment in case of failure. Marthas or Aunts are completely de-sexualized, forced into lives of servitude either as the butlers, maids, and cooks of the decorated Commanders’ households, or as the iron-fisted educators and overseers of the new Handmaids at the Rachel and Leah Centre respectively. However, Commander Fred Waterford reveals a new layer to the hypocrisy of Gilead when he brings Offred a skimpy, glittery dress, a pair of high heel shoes, and orders her to put on makeup and hands her a red lipstick (2017, p. 225), which are officially banned in Gilead in the name of modesty. Handmaids and other women are also not allowed to use any beauty or personal hygiene products in

Gilead, be it hand creams, lotions, moisturizers, or deodorants. Leading up to the coup, members of the Sons of Jacob gathered around in parks to burn magazines, lingerie, hosiery, and makeup products (2017, p. 51), and the remaining of the products that survived the protests were all supposedly destroyed in the early days of Gilead, having been replaced with uniform-like garments assigned for each class (more on that in chapter three). Consequently, Offred is surprised to find that such sinful artifacts of the past have survived (p. 225). Commander Waterford sneaks her out of the house at night to the brothel, as Handmaids are to follow strict schedules and are only allowed on paired walks with other Handmaids, following designated routes. There, Offred sees a glimpse of a space that has somewhat eluded the laws and norms of Gilead: women walk around in lingerie or skimpy, figure-hugging dresses, high heels with makeup on, their hairs showing and styled in ‘old world’ ways (as opposed to the Handmaids’ white “wings”, scarves of the Econo-Wives and the modest tight buns of all the rest of the women), cozying up to the Commanders to be taken to private rooms for sexual intercourse later, more brought in with Commanders as “evening rentals” (p. 228). Moreover, despite the Bible forbidding same-sex relationships, and Gilead reinforcing the prohibition with the death penalty, at Jezebel’s, “women on women sort of turns [the Commanders] on” (p. 244); a stark and hypocritical contrast to a spectacle Offred witnesses at one of her walks: two men, or rather, corpses, left to rot on the Wall, still in their Guardian’s uniforms with “purple placards hung around their necks: Gender Treachery” (p. 55). Not only Fred but his wife, Serena Joy also is prone to hypocritically breaking the religion-based laws she has helped create. When Commander Fred fails to impregnate Offred, Serena proposes a different partner (p. 200). Despite Offred’s opposition that it is illegal, Serena suggests that while she cannot do it officially, it is done in Gilead

frequently (p. 220). While Handmaids are seen as condemned, the sinners, they are also simultaneously seen as national resources and holy bodies that are able to conceive babies; no one is to look at them, nor should the Handmaids turn their gaze from the ground, no one should touch them, even the doctors that they must visit regularly, or Commanders during their rituals. However, Serena Joy reveals that most women, confronted with the perspective of being sent to the colonies, gulags where “unwomen” are sent to clean up radioactive waste until they die, choose to copulate with the doctors unofficially to deliver Commanders babies. It is worth remembering that among the six things God condemns, and that are an abomination to him is a lying tongue (Proverbs 6:16-19). Serena Joy’s hypocrisy shouldn’t come as a surprise, however, as Offred remembers her public presence from before the coup: “Her speeches were about the sanctity of the home, about how women should stay home. Serena Joy didn’t do this herself, she made speeches instead, but she presented this failure of hers as a sacrifice she was making for the good of all” (2017, p. 57). In a way, Serena embodies the corruption and the hypocrisy that lies at the heart of the upper echelons of the Republic: somewhat above from the law and above from the religious narratives and norms that produce terrified, terrorized, cookie-cutter subjects out of what were once autonomous individuals, now with death looming over them constantly.

It would be a fair assessment to say that “in the book, [Gilead’s] dominant “religion” is moving to seize doctrinal control” (Atwood, 2017, p. 12). Christianity, or the contorted Gileadean version of it, is just among the other Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses in Althusser’s formulation in the governmentality of the totalitarian Gilead. According to Althusser, the Repressive State Apparatuses include “the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, the

prisons, etc., (...) Repressive suggests that the state apparatus in question ‘functions by violence’” (Althusser, 2014, p. 243). Gilead makes use of both ideological and violent techniques to coerce cooperativeness and eliminate dissent. Therefore, Gilead is what Foucault would regard as “a society controlled by apparatuses” (Foucault, 2009, p. 145). Essentially, the republic’s governmentality relies on a series of unjust and arbitrary apparatuses (carceral structures, extreme punishment, terror, institutionalized abjection, etc.), and knowledge that takes its root in mock science as grounds for marginalization and executions. As *The Handmaid’s Tale* chronicles Offred’s struggles, it becomes clear that Gilead’s indoctrinations are rooted in what Foucault would refer to as “a science made up of evasions.” (Foucault, 1990, p. 51). A ‘science’ that in its inability or refusal to address sex, in Foucault’s theory, focuses on exceptions, anomalies, corruptions, immoralities, and deviations. Similarly, Arendt also observes arbitrary and oftentimes unorthodox norms and demands rooted in what she describes as “not science but pseudo-science,” (2014, p. 51) that constitutes the grounds for the institutionalized abjection of the Handmaids.

The fear-mongering rooted in false sciences prevalent in Gilead naturalizes the abjection, torture, and execution. Crushed under the pervasive power of the State, Offred claims that she is an “abject” (Atwood, 2017, p. 275). Then what is an “abject”? Originated in Latin word *abjectus* (inf. *abicere*), to ‘reject’; *ab-* ‘away’ and *jacere* ‘to throw’; Collins Dictionary defines the term as “utterly wretched or hopeless; miserable; forlorn; dejected; indicating humiliation; submissive; contemptible; despicable; servile” (HarperCollins, 2021). However, to define the abject and abjection concisely in relation to Julia Kristeva’s work, it is the reaction in the face of a breakdown in meaning. Where the boundaries between “me” and “the other” break down, the abject starts. Thus the abject is seen as a threat to the ‘self’,

and Gilead banishes those who are considered to be abjects in the way Kristeva describes as the religious answer to the abject question:

What is to be done with this ab-ject? Allow it to drift towards the libido so as to constitute an object of desire? Or towards symbolicity, to change it into a sign of love, hatred, enthusiasm, or damnation? The question might well remain undecided, undecidable. It is within that undecidable space, (...) that the religious answer to abjection breaks in: defilement, taboo, or sin. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 48)

Creed writes that the abjects are to be thoroughly removed from the order, banished to the other side of the metaphorical boundary which separates the self and the threat to the self: “Thus, we forcefully exclude the abject (...)” (Creed, 1993, p. 65). The forceful exclusion is carried out in a quite unorthodox manner in Gilead. For Kristeva, the act of seeing a corpse is the utmost experience of the abject, for it is the embodiment of the breakdown of the distinction between subject and object, a necessity for the formation of the “self”, and the transition from the semiotic to the symbolic order. The symbolic order is metaphorized in the Republic of Gilead; not unlike corpses, repeated mortification of women like Offred and Moira coincides with Foucault’s observation of the Christian mortification:

There is another transformation-maybe the most important. All those Christian techniques of examination, confession, guidance, obedience, have an aim: to get individuals to work at their own ‘mortification’ in this world. Mortification is not death, of course, but it is a renunciation of this world and of oneself: a kind of everyday death. A death which is supposed to provide life in another

world. (...) A strange game whose elements are life, death, truth, obedience, individuals, self-identity (Foucault, 1981, p. 239).

For Julia Kristeva, the abjection in our psychosexual development is the moment when the unity between a baby and the mother is separated into “me” and “the mother”: the first abjection. Separation from the mother, the entrance to the symbolic realm, is also the transition from the mother to the “law of the father”. The first abjection and its lasting effects are forever: abjects inspire fear but at the same time, the abject forces one to revisit the way of being before the “law of the father”.

A sense of wordlessness, helplessness; it is indeed this feeling of fear and identification the abjects inspire that is observed in the Commanders of Gilead. They despise women like Offred and Ofwarren because they remind the rulers of their vulnerability and dependence prior to the symbolic order. Paxton in his study on totalitarianism and fascism in history claims that “the image of the all-powerful dictator personalizes fascism” (2005, p. 18); and the facade of omnipotent power supposedly held by the rulers must be kept at all cost (pp. 18-19). Hence, confronting the abject is a traumatic experience for the rulers of the Republic of Gilead with a facade to keep up with. Thus, by abjecting the women into being Handmaids, they avoid such forced confrontations and push them outside the symbolic realm. Offred recalls her time in the Red Centre following her capture and the women inmates whose identities were obliterated. They were allowed to neither speak amongst themselves nor use their ‘old’ names anymore. Deborah Hooker interprets the new system of naming as a part of the process of abjection:

Perhaps the darkest technological implications arise from the way in which the numerical base of computing inscription mirrors the structure and signifiers for Gilead's most perverse and essential form of social exchange: the names

denoting the serialized sexual exchange of Gilead's handmaids-Of-warren, Of-glen, Of-fred-literally mimic the ones and zeros of that binary base. While the one, the masculine, receives the name and the power to direct these sexual exchanges, the abject status of the handmaids is signaled by the homology of her sex to the zero, the place, or as Irigaray would put it, when transposed to a sexual register dominated by sight, "the horror of nothing to see" (2006, pp. 292-293).

Women "salvaged" to be Handmaids are first and foremost removed forcefully from the symbolic order in their 'training': this marks the beginning of their process of life-long abjection in Gilead. Kristeva notes, however, that the abjects in their "jettisoned" state do not cease to disturb: "What is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded (...) And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 2). It is indeed this threat of challenge that makes Gilead take harsh steps in abjecting the women and ensuring their inability to retaliate, which can be related in manner and outcome to Foucault's definition of "the cycle of prohibition":

The cycle of prohibition: thou shalt not go near, thou shalt not touch, thou shalt not consume, thou shalt not experience pleasure, thou shalt not speak, thou shalt not show thyself; ultimately thou shalt not exist, except in darkness and secrecy. (...) Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; *do not appear if you do not want to disappear*. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification (Foucault, 1990, p. 84). (My italics)

The prohibition, the banishment, and the extreme avoidance are enforced upon the 'unwanted', 'undesirable' in Gilead – as such, the Handmaids, despite their

integral role in the posterity and prosperity of Gilead, are pushed out of the order as abjects. As Offred's account of her uniform also indicates:

The red gloves are lying on the bed. I pick them up, pull them onto my hands, finger by finger. Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. The skirt is ankle-length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, the sleeves are full. The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen (Atwood, 2017, p. 23).

It is not by coincidence that the Handmaids' uniforms are red. Kristeva associates the abject with what is repressed, what disturbs and disgusts; it is also strongly connected to bodily fluids. In the same way, the repulsion, the disgust at the blood, the feminine blood of menstruation and childbirth becomes the Handmaids' new identity as abjects.

The formation of Gilead rests on the idea of abjection. Gilead itself is the first abjection; as baby abjects the mother, The Sons of Jacob abjects The U.S.; with the coup comes a totalitarian state of extreme punishment, fascism, and further abjection. Kristeva argues that abjection is an indispensable companion to all religions: "Abjection accompanies all religious structurings (...) It finally encounters, with Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word as a threatening otherness-but always nameable, always totalizeable" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 17). Identically, Gileadean politics are based heavily on religion, and being a totalitarian regime, it is in keeping with Kristeva's argument that names, labels, the women; everything is totalized. Wife, Aunt, Unwoman, Handmaid, Econowife, Gender Traitor: women like June, her mother, Moira, and Janine are reminders of a

way of life the Sons of Jacob disapproved of harshly, and thus they are abjected and are forced out of the symbolic order and back into the semiotic in their totalitarian state.

Women are not allowed to read or write on an extremely drastic scale in Gilead. As Offred discloses: “Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden” (Atwood, 2017, p. 52). The symbolic order is off the limits for the abjects. They cannot talk, they cannot read, they cannot write. Founding Commanders refuse them the right to enter the symbolic order in order to preserve their own sense of self and security. As Brabazon also details the fear towards the women in Gilead:

The deep repression, the indentured servitude and slavery, conveyed in the Handmaid’s Tale is shocking but confirms the fear of the feminine. The abject infiltrates: mutilated bodies, discarded body parts, severed fingers, congealed blood, gouging, and visible injuries are inflicted in the name of discipline and disobedience (Brabazon, 2019, p. 276).

Hence it is not a rational ground, nor a lawful one upon which the punishment (both preventative and punitive) in Gilead rests but an extremely unjust and arbitrary one made to serve the select few in the upper echelons.

Michel Foucault relates the punishment practices of yore: the reformers of the time fought for a system of punishment, not revenge. He describes old system as “the thirst for revenge, and ‘the cruel pleasure taken in punishing’” (Petion de Villeneuve, 641, Quoted in Foucault, p.73). Significantly, Gilead also rules according to the old system and punishes women not necessarily because they are criminals by law, but because the Sons of Jacob found their way of living disagreeable. Foucault also

further condemns the system of revenge as a “dysfunction of power [that] was related to a central excess: what might be called the monarchical ‘super-power’, which identified the right to punish with the personal power of the sovereign” (Foucault, 1995, p. 73). It is indeed this monarchical super-power that is enforced in Gilead. Women are punished not because they are objectively breaking the law, but because they have opted to challenge the Republic; their abjection is achieved in Gilead through series of excessive, arbitrary, and vengeful punishments – along with the fact that the process of abjection itself is an inhumane punishment in itself. In Foucault’s formulation: “we pass sentence, but this sentence is not in direct relation to the crime” (Foucault, 1995, p. 22). The Handmaids are the painful, traumatic experience the men in power would go to great lengths to avoid, and so they do. Handmaids are forced to embody their abjection, clad in the colour of blood, they are terrorized into remaining silent in what was once their home, now a gulag of sorts. Kristeva’s argument for the grounds of abjection also supports Foucault’s in the inconsistency of the crime and punishment:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. (...) The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior (...) Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law (...) (Kristeva, 1980, p. 4)

The fragility of the law upon which Gilead is founded paves the path for the institutionalized persecution of its subjects; as Tyler also detects in similar regimes from history: “(...) if the state power relies on the production of abject subjects to constitute itself and draw its borders, the state is also that which it abjects” (Tyler, 2013 p.49). Precisely, Gilead depends on the abjection of what they consider to be

irritants. The Republic's rise to power and its indefinite reign are closely connected to abjection among other practices as one of their apparatuses of power and punishment. The precarity of the rights in the novel is also noted by other scholars:

The Handmaid's Tale makes me feel things; it reminds me of how precarious my human rights and privileges are, and, somewhat despite itself, how abundant they still somehow are at the same time (...) I know it's fiction, but I also know that it isn't (Marx, 2018, p. 4).

The fragility of the law dictates that what Gilead considers to be a crime can be something as simple as being a woman who had a job and was on birth control plan in the old America. The unorthodox legal system of Gilead resembles Foucault's argument in which he elucidates that "[The] legal system itself was merely a way of exerting violence, of appropriating that violence for the benefit of the few, and of exploiting the dissymmetries and injustices of domination under cover of general law" (Foucault, 1990, p.88). The violence, the exertion of fascist power, and extreme punishment are all carried out in the disguise of the 'law' based on the mock science and the arbitrary norms in Gilead. Foucault also writes that the role of this mock science is to provide a "distant and quite fictitious guarantee: a blanket guarantee under cover of which moral obstacles, economic or political options, and traditional fears could be recast in a scientific-sounding vocabulary" (Foucault, 1990, p. 55). As Derrida would also argue, it is based on "a shameful but intractable intolerance:" for anything but purity. A "demand is neither ethical, political, nor social (...) It simply exposes me to suffering when someone, who can be myself, happens to fall short of it. I suffer even further when I catch myself or am caught 'red-handed' in the act" (1992, p. 46). This unorthodox demand for purity, for unattainable and unreasonable chasteness starts out not as a fact or 'science' but similar to how Arendt traces

arbitrary norms and laws to emerge in totalitarian regimes: “first appears as a hypothesis (...) turns immediately, usually after a few paragraphs, into a “fact,” which then gives birth to a whole string of similar non-facts, with the result that the purely speculative character of the whole enterprise is forgotten” (Arendt, 1970, pp. 6-7). A chain reaction of made-up laws and unlawful demands follows, establishing an order that is in accord with the regime and is only benefitted by the founders and other privileged rulers. The convoluted norms presented as God-given in Gilead are supported by the prohibition of reading and writing for most of its subjects: they cannot think to question or protest the fascist and totalitarian politics if they are forcibly kept ignorant.

Gilead considers some women traitors: fellow women, such as Aunts and Wives feel betrayed in the way Handmaids, Unwomen, and Gender-Traitors conducted themselves and lived prior to the establishment of the Republic. Gilead thinks women like Moira and June are traitors and they are the reason for all the wrong and immoral things that carried over from the old, corrupt and decadent America before The Sons of Jacob took over. Justifying the atrocities committed as merciful, beneficial, and lawful acts, Aunts agonize and tyrannize over the Handmaids. Their participation in the predicament of the Handmaids corresponds to Kristeva’s definition of abjection as something “immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles (...) a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you (...)” (1980, p. 4). Some Aunts like Vidala think they are betrayed by their fellow women and they in turn, work in Red Centers to brainwash the fertile women into what Gilead desires them to be: compliant abjects. As Kristeva would argue: “(...) one does not get rid of the impure; one can, however, bring it into being a second time, and differently from the original impurity.” (1980,

p.28). Some (mostly fertile) women are not executed; instead, they are brought into being again when America falls and Gilead takes over. The useful ones, chiefly the fertile ones, are re-formed into docile bodies that exist to serve the benefit of the rulers as incubators, however, Handmaids are still looked down upon as dirty and sinful despite their forcible transformations. Furthermore, Kristeva chronicles the history of “purification” rituals similar to that of Gilead’s:

In a number of primitive societies religious rites are purification rites whose function is to separate this or that social, sexual, or age group from another one, by means of prohibiting a filthy, defiling element. It is as if dividing lines were built up between society and a certain nature, as well as within the social aggregate, on the basis of the simple logic of excluding filth, which, promoted to the ritual level of defilement, founded the “self and clean” of each social group if not of each subject. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 65)

In the transition from America to Gilead, the men and women whose lifestyles were not in accord with Gilead’s standards were stigmatized and branded as defiled, and abominated as objects. It is not accidental that these dated rituals of the primitive societies are identical to Gilead’s, as Gilead is founded upon archaic notions enforced through antediluvian practices. The function of such rituals is to separate, according to Kristeva, and to establish dividing lines in society. The chora of Kristeva’s reading, of where the repressed are kept, is a fragile place for the men of Gilead. To keep the “repressed” in check and securely away, they employ a series of practices that divide and push the irritant individuals into abjection. Aside from the naming process, Gilead refuses the Handmaids identities through motherhood. As Kristeva proposes: “The child can serve its mother as token of her own’

authentication” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 13). Oliver’s reading of Kristeva also confirms the link between abjection and hindered motherhood:

Kristeva suggests that women’s oppression can be partially attributed to our discourses on mother-hood and misplaced abjection. Without a way of conceiving of the mother that allows us to abject her and come to terms with that abjection, we abject all women (Oliver, 1993, p. 105).

Handmaids are sent off to different stations after—or rather, if—they manage to give birth. Their babies are subsequently taken away from them, sometimes even before they are weaned. This process leaves Handmaids in a shattered state of identity—a vicious cycle: they are sent to a new Commander to give birth again but they are never allowed to fill the role of the mother properly.

“Religion, Morality, Law. Obviously always arbitrary, more or less; unfailingly oppressive, rather more than less; laboriously prevailing, more and more so” (1980, p. 16), argues Kristeva. Identically, Gilead is formed on bits and pieces taken from Old and New Testaments, manipulated to fit a certain agenda that constitutes a bricolage of appropriations. The manufactured scriptures are also employed in justifying the inhumane rules and punishments imposed on the Republic’s subjects. The fall of America symbolizes the abjection of the mother; Gilead takes over and establishes the symbolic order: old monuments, cultural and historical locations are either repurposed with no resemblance to their previous uses or destroyed completely. The independent women of Old America are consequently forced into slavery, a forceful transition from one life to another, from the old, Dead America to the New Gilead. Thus, Gilead uses religion as a way of imposing normalizing judgment. It is through their version of the Bible that people are divided, labelled,

and persecuted. Gilead forces its normalizing judgment on people and constructs an arbitrary threshold of what is acceptable and what is illegal. As detailed by Foucault, people are measured according to the norms and forced into bearing labels for either conforming to them or transgressing against them:

On the one hand, the criminal designated as the enemy of all, whom it is in the interest of all to track down, falls outside the pact, disqualifies himself as a citizen and emerges, bearing within him as it were, a wild fragment of nature; he appears as a villain, a monster, a madman, perhaps, a sick and, before long, 'abnormal' individual. It is as such that, one day, he will belong to a scientific objectification and to the 'treatment' that is correlative to it. On the other hand, the need to measure, from within, the effects of the punitive power prescribes tactics of intervention over all criminals, actual or potential: the organization of a field of prevention, the calculation of interests, the circulation of representations and signs (...) (Foucault, 1995, p. 101).

Women and men who used to live ordinary lives are demonized and persecuted: institutionalized abjection in Gilead functions through the judgment of normality. Individuals are punished for transgressing strict and arbitrary norms. The punishment can be defined in reference to Foucault: “The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes” (Foucault, 1995, p. 183). Foucault’s observation of the normalizing process during which individuals are compared to one another, or to the ideal norm, differentiated, hierarchized, and excluded conjoins to Kristeva’s concept of abjection during which a similar, if not identical process takes place.

Once upon blotted-out time, the abject must have been a magnetized pole of covetousness. But the ashes of oblivion now serve as a screen and reflect aversion, repugnance. The clean and proper (in the sense of incorporated and incorporable) becomes filthy, the sought-after turns into the banished, fascination into shame (Kristeva, 1980, p. 8).

What was clean and proper in the old days becomes filthy in Gilead; the sought after turns into the banished, and fascination into shame. The dynamics and hierarchies changes in Gilead and the norms follow; and in this change, the punitive functions changes targets, now basing guilt, crime, and punishment on an entirely different set of norms. Thus, abjection combined with Foucault's account of normalizing punishment define the discriminatory behaviour manifested in misogyny, homophobia, and genocide that occurs in Gilead. Even executions are segregated in Gilead, as evidenced by Offred's remarks on the district salvaging of women (2017, pp. 165-166). The salvaging is held at what was previously the yard of Harvard. Offred marks that the paths they take to get to the salvaging were used by students, and the buildings claimed by the Eyes were lecture halls and dormitories before (p. 261). As Foucault argues that schools are resembling prisons, his observation takes on flesh in Gilead.

The high wall, no longer the wall that surrounds and protects, no longer the wall that stands for power and wealth, but the meticulously sealed wall, uncrossable in either direction, closed in upon the now mysterious work of punishment, will become, near at hand, sometimes even at the very centre of the cities of the nineteenth century, the monotonous figure, at once: material and symbolic, of the power to punish (Foucault, 1995, p. 116).

The emphasis on the function of the “wall” in normalizing punishment is significant, as, throughout the novel, Offred gazes at the Harvard wall from which executed bodies are hung for all to see. She wonders if her husband, Luke, is imprisoned behind the Wall and notes that the school building now functions as a prison of sorts. The six corpses she sees on one of her regular walks wear signs of fetuses; it signifies that they performed abortions *before* Gilead was formed, and they are now executed for it. Their executions show the radical change of the norms; even though abortions were not illegal before Gilead, doctors are executed for performing what had been legal before retroactively because it transgresses the norms of the current state. Though neither just nor reasonable, this is an example of what Foucault describes as “the power of the Norm” (1995, p. 184).

Aside from the corpses hanging from the wall, the Handmaids’ bodies are also an essential element of the punitive systems of Gilead as it is the indispensable element of abjection as well. Foucault also notes the importance of bodies in punishments:

In our societies, the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain ‘political economy’ of the body: even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use ‘lenient’ methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue—the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission (Foucault, 1995, p. 25)

The Handmaids’ bodies are abused, used, and distributed as Gilead sees fit. Essentially, Gilead is an open-air prison where people are abjected as a way of punishment laced with 18th-century predisposition to exact revenge on behalf of the

state. Offred is brought to the Rachel and Leah Center to be abjectified into a Handmaid. At the building, just like a soldier, she is expected to break out of her “civilian” habits, and she is put under excessive control constantly before she is deemed ready to be shipped off to her station at Commander Waterford’s house.

The excessive power imposed on women deemed to be “abnormals” in the Red Centers and the institutionalized abjection of Gilead complete each other. They form an impenetrable front of force for the women where Gilead’s inhumane and unacceptable practices are normalized, and the attempts at rebellion are snuffed out. Their practices are never outright called “abjection” by Gilead, although, having resisted for a while, Offred eventually yields and admits that she is an abject by the end of the novel: “I resign my body freely, to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject” (Atwood, 2017, p. 275). When her walking partner and a member of the resistance, Ofglen, commits suicide, she feels thankful that she did instead of being taken by the Eyes. Harold Bloom interprets this as an event that “contributes to [Offred’s] own abjection” (2001, p. 93). Pettersson also notes that “The effective Gilead discourse has made Offred “betray” her comrade Ofglen, by feeling relief rather than sadness. She becomes aware that the regime’s power has really affected her mind” (2010, p. 12).

Similar to abjection practices never being termed officially by the state as such, Gilead prisons are never called “prisons”, nor Red Centers “schools”. This is what Foucault argues to be the “the normalization of the power of normalization” (1995, p.296), which functions as a legitimizing force:

But perhaps the most important effect of the carceral system and of its extension well beyond legal imprisonment is that it succeeds in making the

power to punish natural and legitimate, in lowering at least the threshold of tolerance to penalty (Foucault, 1995, p. 301).

Handmaids' abjection is regarded by Gilead as a favour; a chance to begin again, to be cleansed. As Offred remembers: "Where I am is not a prison but a privilege, as Aunt Lydia said" (Atwood, 2017, p.23). Indeed, Aunt Lydia remarks that before Gilead, women like June had the freedom *to*, but now they have freedom *from* the temptation of sin (Atwood, 2017, p. 39). Gilead sees women as inferior beings in need of constant ruling over. Commander Judd discloses to Lydia before she was appointed as an Aunt that it was a "cruelty to promise [women] equality (...) since by their nature they can never achieve it" (Atwood, 2019, p. 175). Jones' study resonates with Gilead's agenda in keeping women as weak and inferior beings:

A culture that perceives females as weak and in need of protection re-inscribes regulatory practices on her body that are intended to protect her from the threat of the "masculine" (outside), as well as those qualities she herself may exhibit that are perceived as a threat to her own well-being (inside) (2007, p. 63).

Gilead prides itself in protecting women from the ways of old America. By limiting their freedom, the Aunts boast of freeing women from the temptation and dangers of sins. Aunt Lydia reminds Offred that women are not raped anymore "thanks to" the regulations and laws in Gilead when she complains about how her freedom had been taken away forcibly (Atwood, 2017, p. 40). Similarly, Foucault argues that power demands submissions but also simultaneously conceals it as a necessary, beneficial practice to coerce it (1990, p.78-90). The 'benefit' discourse in Gilead aims to normalize the atrocities committed. In Versluis' words on totalitarian regimes and their similar rhetorics:

It is only a short step from this to the belief that one's duty is to impose the doctrines on everyone else, and that such an imposition is for "their own good," or for the "good of society." From this point, it is not far to persecuting the recalcitrant and, in the frenzy of persecution, only a small further step to rationalize even mass murder under the guise of "the greater good (2006, p. 142).

The subjective concept of benefit in Gilead is as arbitrary as the laws: harsh laws and brutal punishments are justified as favours and betterment of the masses. The fascist practices such as the curtailing of freedom and unreasonable and volatile laws as well as their normalization through the discourse of benefit only serve the founders and rulers of Gilead. For instance, the Particicution ceremony where Handmaids gather around and kill the convicted is defended as being good for them as well, as they get to "let off some steam" (p.291), when in reality Gilead simply uses its subjects against one another in murders. Throughout history, examples of tyrannical power resemble one another, as they are also identical to Gilead's:

Aristotle argues that it is possible to distinguish between the three forms of power on the basis of who gains from exercising it. Parental power is exercised in the interest of the children; the master's, or despotic power, is in the interest of the master; political power is in the interests of those who govern and those who are governed (so that the corrupt form of political regime is where the ruler, having become a tyrant, rules only in his or her own interest)" (Bobbio, 1989, p.72).

Gilead's 'beneficial' tyrannical practices are rooted in selfish reasons: the selfish and unjust power practiced harshly upon its subjects and benefitted by only

the select few classifies Gilead as a tyrannical, totalitarian state. The arbitrarily selfish practices and impositions of unlawful power are common practices in the republic, as they are as common in the history of tyrannical power: “A tradition dating back to the eighteenth or nineteenth century has accustomed us to place absolute monarchic power on the side of the unlawful: arbitrariness, abuse, caprice, willfulness, privileges and exceptions” (Foucault, 1990, p. 87). The justified, normalized instances of power etched on the side of the unlawful but the vocal, stronger, harsher, and abusive is the political overlook of Gilead. Furthermore, Foucault’s study on punishment asserts that the legality of such practices can be ambiguous in certain points in reference to the others when carried out in such political climates:

I have tried to see in what ways punishment and the power of punishment are effectively embodied in a certain number of local, regional, material institutions, which are concerned with torture or imprisonment (...) In other words, one should try to locate power at the extreme points of its exercise, where it is always less legal in character (Foucault, 1980, pp. 96-97).

Despite Gilead’s attempt at legalizing and legitimizing the abusive power asserted through violence, it is always illegal and unlawful in nature as argued by Arendt in relation to its precedents in history: “Violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate” (Arendt, 1970, p. 52). For Arendt, power and violence are not inseparable. It is a conscious choice to employ violence (p. 52-53)². Gilead exercises it by choice, not out of necessity. Furthermore, Arendt also argues that “Power is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not. Violence is by

² But for Arendt, also “Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy (...) Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it” (1969, p. 56). “Politically, loss of power tempts men to substitute violence for power (p.122).

nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues” (1970, p.51). States require power to continue violence (Arendt, 1972, p. 143), and in a sense, then, violence and power go hand in hand in Gilead. Arendt proposes that “If the essence of power is the effectiveness of command, then there is no greater power than that which grows out of the barrel of a gun (...)” (1970, p.37). Gilead’s overpowering violence works in establishing the new order, however, as far as sustaining the obtained power goes, rolling heads and rising numbers of bodies diminish in effectiveness to solidify the State.

Unlawful in peace, Gilead is also unlawful in crisis. Having established a set of arbitrary norms and rules rooted in selfish power, Gilead seeks out retributive justice against those who transgress in various ways. As Foucault would formulate: “Methods of retribution which will range from punishment to reeducation” (1980, p.28). As a vindictive state, aside from reeducation (repurposing of women because one does not get rid of the impure³; as well as men), Gilead punishes to assert and maintain power and dominance. Death penalty, according to Foucault, is “the clearest form of” power against subjects who go against the will and whims of the state (1980, p. 96-99). Foucault also studies fines as a punishment, in that they have a function of identifying and marking the guilty, and more importantly “setting on him the visible mark of the sovereignty of power” (2015, p. 9). To comply and pay is to “bow before this power relationship that means that someone, an authority, can actually constrain you” (2015, p. 9). He then finds it identical to capital punishment: “We could say the same about the death penalty” (2015, p.10). His elaboration continues:

³ Complete quote can be found on page 25, and a more in-depth discussion of the topic in Chapter 3

Death is a specific physical operation, a work on the body, a ritualized way of inscribing on the individual's body the marks of power, the individual's guilty status, or at least of inscribing the memory of the offense in the spectator's terror (Foucault, 2015, p. 10).

Accordingly, the death penalty in Gilead is a vindictive tool of imposing power and subjugating subjects. The docile, hollowed-out bodies in Gilead carry the marks of power: from uniform-like totalitarianized outfits to the Wall where the executed bodies hang, bodies are an apparatus of power and vindictive justice. Making a spectacle out of the condemned functions as a reminder of the state power, and a cautionary message for similar dissidents. It carries what Arendt would formulate as "the propaganda value of evil deeds" (Arendt, 1973, p.307). Capital and rough justice, and drastic measures are not unheard of in the history of America, of course. Southern Colonies imposed death penalty on slaves for as much as preparing medicine or striking a white person should a bruise is resulted, similarly destroying grain or enticing other slaves to run away all ended in hanging from the gallows (Banner, 2003, p. 8-10). This is an all-too-common spectacle in Gilead. Offred notes that women are hung, or in Gileadean terms, salvaged for "Unchastity" (p.264). Moreover, during the Particicution ceremony that follows, Ofglen reveals that the Guardian accused of rape of a pregnant Handmaid at gunpoint and her murder was falsely accused: his real crime was that he was only *suspected* of being a spy for the Mayday. The "consensus" regarding the grounds and necessity of capital punishment dictates "that if the death penalty is to be used at all it should be reserved for those who commit the gravest crimes" (Banner, 2003, p. 5). However, the criminal code is too severe in Gilead to follow the consensus; and consequently, what is practiced is not justice but could be described as "retributive impulse" (Banner, 2003, p. 311).

The state power of Gilead, borrowing from Derrida to situate within its historical precedents, is “like all sovereignty, is marked by the right of life and death over the citizen, by the power of deciding, laying down the law, judging, and executing the order at the same time as the condemned one” (Derrida, 2013, p. 38). Moreover, Derrida further argues that the right to kill leaves individuals at the mercy of those who decide on the exceptions (p. 38). As the earlier part of the chapter discussed, select few in Gilead can freely commit crimes, go against the rules and laws of Christianity themselves as an exception because ultimately, they decide who hangs for and who gets away with the crime. The rest of the ‘ordinary’ Gileadeans, however, are hypocritically, unreasonably, arbitrarily, and unethically at the mercy of their rulers.

As well as the norms that govern the everyday life in Gilead, death penalty itself finds its grounds in religion. Derrida’s reading of Camus resonates with this claim: “Camus’s text “Reflections on the Guillotine,” which showed that the death penalty could find its justification and possibility, in the end, only in a religious culture (...)” (Derrida, 2017, p. 272). For Derrida, the afterlife is possible in religious cultures, thus, the death penalty is justified “only if we think that the last judgment is beyond, that what happens here below when one executes someone is not irreversible” (p. 277). In a corrupted, convoluted way, Gilead executes while stripping the severity and the irrevocability of the penalty: execution is not the final judgment but a fair, balanced punishment and a cautionary tale, for the ultimate judgment is God’s. Such an argument is effective in minimizing the horror and casting off responsibility and accountability. Moreover, for Derrida “question of the death penalty is not a question of life or death, of the difference between living and dying, or even between killing and not killing;” but a question of the state’s way of

imposing its authority and power by eliminating certain subjects (p. 38). In a totalitarian 'republic' like Gilead, certain subjects include but are not limited to simple voices of dissent and transgression. Their executions are apparatuses for affirming the power of the state; enemies are created and disposed of, inducing terror in others, all in the service of the totalitarian power. As argued by Arendt: "Terror becomes total when it becomes independent of all opposition; it rules supreme when nobody any longer stands in its way (...) [if] lawlessness is the essence of tyranny, then terror is the essence of totalitarian domination" (Arendt, 1973, p. 464). Just like any other totalitarian regime, the terror of the colonies, district salvaging, Particutions, and the Wall rule over the subdued and subjugated population because "in a tyranny, the principle of action is fear" (Arendt, 2005, p. 330). It becomes the irrational law guiding and manipulating every aspect of a subject's personal and public life. Baehr similarly argues that "Totalitarian domination rules through total terror; pursues, by means of the secret police, "objective enemies" or "enemies of the people" who are typically not subjective opponents of, or genuine threats to, the regime" (2002, p. 811). The secret police and the inquisitors of Gilead, The Eye agents, are figures of mystery and terror. Their van with dark windows and a single eye painted on the side shows up, takes a person away and he or she disappears never to be seen again. The fear of the Eyes is too much that, as the earlier paragraphs discussed, Offred's walking partner decides to commit suicide just because she suspects the Eyes are looking into her illegal activities involving Mayday. Gilead creates enemies first, and then gets rid of them in a process that eliminates not only the arbitrarily chosen 'enemy', but any dissent to follow it up with overbearing terror. Thus totalitarian, fascist Gilead destroys the life of a person as a person, who becomes a mere means to an end either as a subject or as an enemy of the state. As

Arendt puts it: “The distinction between and the dilemma of citizen and individual (...) are eliminated by the totalitarian claim to the total domination of man” (Arendt, 2005, p. 333); and as Versluis further argues:

The dynamics of the secret police and informants, of surveillance and of constant fear; of secret trials and of the absence of habeas corpus protections or other civil liberties or human rights; of indefinite detention of dissenters or “heretics” in gulags or concentration camps; and, finally, the dynamics of industrialized murder of millions, whether through mass starvation or outright slaughter (murder even if it is given the juridical patina of the cold word execution). What is it that makes all this inhumanity possible? (2006, p. 141-142)

Aside from terrorizing apologia politics, totalitarian mass crimes are made possible by the accomplice of the subjects (unwitting or otherwise) who are purposefully left ignorant, and in Arendt’s words in another context:

Normal men don’t know that everything is possible, refuse to believe their eyes and ears in face of the monstrous, (...) The reason why the totalitarian regimes can get so far toward realizing a fictitious, topsy-turvy world is that the outside nontotalitarian world, which always comprises a great part of the population of the totalitarian country itself, indulges also in wishful thinking and shirks reality in the face of real insanity just as much as the masses do in the face of the normal world (Arendt, 1973, p. 436-437).

In Gilead, people are shaped and influenced by terror and propaganda: the regime makes the politics of the state the norm while painting the outside world as dangerous, irrational and absurd. Gileadeans are taught that the outside world is

infested with sin and needs to be avoided at all cost. Furthermore, as Arendt argues to be observed in similar regimes in history, this manufactured reality is not one-sided: both nontotalitarian and totalitarian countries take part in that “wishful thinking” (1973, p. 436-437). So, not only the Gileadeans are in refusal of the reality of the Republic’s politics, but the rest of the world is in denial, to a degree, of the crimes committed within the borders of the state. Canada, in particular, refrains from actively opposing Gilead in international politics, and only civil organizations in connection with the resistance groups within the state attempt to help the victims.

When the old America was deconstructed not at once with a hammer but gradually with a butter knife, it was easier to abolish the rights of the people. The change had not come immediately: it was introduced and normalized with small protests that eventually turned into riots that ultimately paved the way for the coup. Offred remembers how Gilead was not built in a day but instead gradually, starting with protests against abortions and makeup, ending with the fall of the Congress and Gilead’s rise to power (pp. 174-178). Offred also remembers how one morning, her usual corner shop refused to sell her cigarettes because women were forbidden to smoke; furthermore, a few days after, right before the coup, all the bank accounts of women were disabled, travel bans were imposed and all women were laid off from their jobs. The series of disfranchisement aimed at the citizens of America coincides with Arendt’s commentary on totalitarianism: “Totalitarianism is the most radical denial of freedom” (Arendt, 2005, p. 328). LeFay’s interpretation of Arendt’s works further confirms the fragility and the impermanence of the rights:

[Arendt] casts rights as something inherently fragile, as precious goods that cannot be taken for granted. Rights are artifice, man-made, and hence, cannot

be considered eternal: just as we can construct political rights, so too can they be demolished. (LaFay, 2014, p. 116)

Moreover, Arendt also further argues that power is instrumental in compelling masses to behave in a certain way:

And power, it turns out, is an instrument of rule, while rule, we are told, owes its existence to "the instinct of domination." We are immediately reminded of what Sartre said about violence when we read in Jouvenel that "a man feels himself more of a man when he is imposing himself and making others the instruments of his will," which gives him "incomparable pleasure." "Power," said Voltaire, "consists in making others act as I choose"; it is present wherever I have the chance "to assert my own will against the resistance" of others, said Max Weber (Arendt, 1970, p. 36).

The citizens of America are terrorized and traumatized into giving up on resistance; dominated into submission and surrendering their autonomy. They are transformed from individuals to silent subjects of the state forcibly where they are only allowed to think, speak, and behave as Gilead deems fit. Gilead exercises unorthodox power, a sort of power that in Habermas' formulation: "power in terms of the ability to force one's will on the behaviour of others" (Habermas 1977, p. 3 cited in Koyama, 2012, p. 71); the power of and to coerce submission. On the widespread function of power in state-enforced coercion, Bobbio also has this to note: "To say that 'fire has the power to melt metals' is the same as to say that sovereigns have the power to make laws and in so doing to influence the conduct of their subjects" (1989, p. 71). Power lends itself to apparatuses within the Gileadean

governmentality in various shapes and mediums, seeping into different aspects of everyday life. These apparatuses of Gilead that function in violence, especially in the early days of Gilead, prove to be instrumental to the establishment of the new regime. However, violence and executions can only cull the herd for so long before the state runs out of subjects to kill. Gilead's solution to the problem is to transform and introduce apparatuses aimed at a governmentality that favours varied approaches. As Paxton elaborates, fascism is not term used in reference to a singular enforcement of power and, in fact, may emerge in various shapes and forms:

Fascism presents itself to us in vivid primary images: a chauvinist demagogue haranguing an ecstatic crowd; disciplined ranks of marching youths; colored-shirted militants beating up members of some demonized minority; surprise invasions at dawn; and fit soldiers parading through a captured city (Paxton, 2005, p. 18).

Fascism has many facades, though while the facades are transforming, the core reality of fascism and totalitarianism persists. Totalitarianism does not exclusively manifest itself in executions and terror; totalitarian movement, according to Arendt, aims to organize the masses (1973, pp. 45-50) as well. Gilead is unjust, unethical, unreasonable, inhumane, and archaic: it would not be surprising to see the cracks forming within the power of the state, and its struggle to remain in power showing through. In the face of such struggles, Gilead coins new technologies and strategies for its longevity. After all, one can coerce its subjects into submission through violence only as long as one does not run out of subjects to execute as cautionary tales; one needs to *convince* them. Though the eugenic agenda has always been a part of Gilead's governmentality—from the very beginning (hinted at the discourse of 'for your benefit') to its ultimate collapse—the naturalization through means aside

from violence and death takes the priority and becomes a new focus for Gilead in the formative years of its young, second-generation subjects.

CHAPTER 2:

Blessed Be the Coward and the Convert: Gilead as a Persisting State

“Doubt grows with knowledge.”

(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1826, “Art and Antiquity” in Maxims and Reflections, n. 281)

Following up the events of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Testaments* sheds light on the new generation of the Republic of Gilead and with them, the somewhat transformed governmentality of the totalitarian state. Discussing *The Testaments*, Atwood explains that her interest in the second generation of Gileadeans was “because second generations in revolutionary regimes are quite different from first generations”; and that “They’re not engaged in the violent part of the affair. A form of order has been restored” (Atwood, 2019, para. 10). Thus this chapter aims to anatomize the politics of Gilead concerning the first generation of native Gileadeans, mainly focusing on Arendt and Foucault’s studies, as well as the Sapir-Whorf theory of language.

The totalitarian ‘Republic’ of Gilead enforces a discursive policy alongside the persisting mass executions as a supplement to the formation and the continuation of the disciplinary society. In the transformed state, the public executions for the dissidents still exist, however, as the children kidnapped from their families and

placed in the Commanders' families, and the babies born in the Commander's households reach their formative ages, Gilead employs a subtler form of discipline and molding in the form of discourse. The shift in the focus of the state's governmentality marks the efforts in raising collaborationists. For Foucault, power and knowledge are inextricably connected: the exercise of power constitutes knowledge and the existence of knowledge serves power (1980, p. 52); and inescapably, an individual is a product of what he, then, terms the power/knowledge. (p. 72). Hence, the Foucauldian discourse analysis offers a reading in which the social changes and power relations in any given society are studied with an emphasis on language. Consequently, different structures of meaning or discourses struggle for societal authority, and as a result, changes in society can be conceptualized as shifts in the power dynamics of discourses (Sharp & Richardson, 2001, p. 169). Therefore, a Foucauldian discourse analysis of Gilead in its creation of a State-sanctioned language and its enforcement in usage for the normalization and sustenance of power emphasizes the collaboration of language in maintaining the state power and coaxing cooperation. Correlatively, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis proposes the power of language in constructing realities and influencing the notions and dispositions of individuals using it (Kay & Kempton, 1984, p. 66). Edward Sapir binds culture, notions, dispositions of individuals, and consequently, what is perceived as the truth with their creator, language (1949 & 1961), and claims that humans "are very much at the mercy of the particular language" (1929, p. 209). Identically, in what would be regarded as the "locus classicus" of the hypothesis (Carroll 1956, p. 27), Whorf regards language as the basis for culture and perception (1940a); and as the "shaper" of notions, claiming further that the world is perceived and organized in and by language (1940b, p. 212). Hence this attempt at dissecting the language of Gilead to

connect it to the state's plans for sustainability draws from the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of language to illustrate the complacency of the newer and 'purer' generation as a result of brainwashing discourses carried through the invented language of Gilead.

Allen and Gordon claim that recent philosophical and social science studies emphasize some concurrences and overlaps between the works of Foucault and Arendt, in spite of the fact that they have never referred to one another (Allen, 2002; Gordon, 2002, quoted in Braun, 2007, p. 6). Furthermore, Braun contrasts the approaches of two names:

Arendt provides an in-depth study on the functioning principles of totalitarian rule and the nexus between shaping, regulating, and enhancing the *Volkskörper* and classifying and killing people marked as 'life not worth living', Foucault's works, as Milchman and Rosenberg (1998) point out, rather shed light on the formative stages of this nexus. (Braun, 2007, p. 7)

Foucault chronicles that throughout the time, the objectives of power have transitioned from the feudal "right to kill" to "right to live". The right to decide death, according to Foucault, dates back to "the ancient *patria potestas* that granted the father of the Roman family the right to "dispose" of the life of his children and his slaves" (1990, p. 135). Over time the dynamics have changed and "the old power of death that symbolized sovereign was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (p. 139). The new power to emerge from the shift of the focus, which he refers to as "biopower" places the emphasis on the influencing and shaping of lives, rather than taking (pp. 138-140). However, it is worth noting that Robert Esposito explains that Foucault did not

invent the term and that its origins are traced to the early twentieth century (2008, pp. 13-44). Additionally, Esposito's reading of Foucault's lectures within the framework of totalitarianism argues that biopolitics compared to the sovereignty shows important distinctions between them:

As such, biopolitics is juxtaposed in Foucault's analysis to sovereignty, leading to the important distinction between them: "It is the power to make live. Sovereignty took life and let live. And now we have the emergence of a power that I would call the power of regularization, and it, in contrast, consists in making live and letting die." Biopolitics thus is that which guarantees the continuous living of the human species (2008, p. 639).

Biopolitics "endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply [life], subjecting [life] to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault, 1990, p. 137). Moreover, according to York, "In Foucault's works Fascism had its origins in biopolitics" (2018, p. 6). As a matter of fact, Foucault indeed observes the conjunction of biopower and sovereign power in Nazi Germany (2003, p.259). Foucault defines biopower and biopolitics as the emergence of various techniques "for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (p.140). Thus, with his definition in mind, it is fair to assume that the era of rudimentary biopower in Gilead is marked by the multiplicity of apparatuses, many of which less violent and more sinister on the surface than the ones used in the establishment of the state, employed to control its subjects, but more importantly, to shape the newer generation of Giledeans as the model citizens. Agamben defines a subject as the result of a fight "between living things and apparatuses" (2009, p. 14). Furthermore, "desubjectification" power of the apparatus indicates that it is "a machine that

produces subjectifications” (p.20)⁴. In light of that, it would be accurate to assume that Gilead’s aim in creating model and loyal subjects inextricably relies on a language carefully constructed not only for that end but also to normalize the aim itself as well as justifying its harsh means. As Commander Judd puts the objective of Gilead for its new generation of subjects: “The corrupt and blood-smeared fingerprints of the past must be wiped away to create a clean space for the morally pure generation that is surely about to arrive” (Atwood, 2019, p. 4). What looms over the youth of Gilead is not death as the way it did for the contemporaries of Offred, but an overbearing power that dictates and molds. However, the biopolitics of Gilead is not to be taken as rational or humane, on the contrary, Foucault argues that mass murders find justification and support in biopolitics:

If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population (Foucault, 1990, p. 137)

Massacres and war crimes are not obliterated, they are simply normalized; thus, according to Frost’s study on apparatus, “the death of any particular individual is insignificant, as life continues at the level of the population” (2019, p. 154). As long as a society created and sustained in Gilead’s image exists, tortures and executions are insignificant, and deemed a natural part of everyday life. Hence, unlike June or Moira who knew the life before Gilead, for the younger generations of Gilead the capital punishment and mass murder are not arbitrary or unlawful; for

⁴ The French term *dispositif*, translated as apparatus and deployment, is also a vital term frequently used in Foucault’s theories, which he first defined in a 1977 interview titled “The Confession of the Flesh”.

them, it is justified in order to defend their way of living against the threats, both within and from abroad.

This new order of things, nevertheless, requires a justification, or the attempt to achieve one. Why the shift in politics? Why would Gilead not keep violence as the exclusive apparatus of the state? Why not consider the reign of terror and mass murders suffice for the continuity of the state? According to Hannah Arendt, the contrast between the “violent and non-violent action” is that the first only destroys the old whereas the latter works for the “establishment of something new” (2014, p. 122). Thus, having destroyed the old America radically (See Appendix A), Gilead finds itself in need of a trowel to sift through the rubble and create something new, something that is not compliant by force but by the heart and will: a model subject. According to Arendt’s definition of a model totalitarian subject:

The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist (Arendt, 1973, p. 474).

The ideal subject of the totalitarian state is not a convinced one, but one for whom the distinctions between two oppositions do not exist: a ‘convinced’ subject connotes a choice. To convince also connotes that there are multiple facts or narratives, possibly contradicting ones, to sway a person from. An individual with agency chooses on his/her own accord to subscribe to an ideology. However, what Gilead needs and aims to manufacture is the “One Man” (Arendt, 1972, p. 466), that is groups of people whose sole purpose of existence is to serve the state. When an individual becomes a subject or an object, he or she becomes the apparatus of the

state, hence, no more thinking, no more questioning, doubting, or resisting. Gilead's aim is to create a "hallmark" that in Arendt's commentary of the totalitarian states "is unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey; neither coercion nor persuasion is needed" (p. 45). When the new generation of Gileadeans are brought up entirely cut off from the rest of the world, and their formative years are spent being indoctrinated on the only narrative of the Republic, they do not require to be asked or convinced, they simply serve the benefit of the State as part of their nature.

Another conundrum that emerges from the reformed governmentality of Gilead is related to the necessity of the leaders to depend on compliant subjects to survive rather than increasing the terror politics and silencing the dissent. Coincidentally, Paxton's study on fascism proposes that the image of an omnipotent leader personalizes the regime, "and creates the false impression that we can understand it fully by scrutinizing the leader alone" (2005, p. 18). However, power is never alone. The image of a sole leader diverts the attention from the groups and institutions that the rulers root their power in. A subtler model of fascism, according to Paxton, would explore "the interaction between Leader and Nation, and between Party and civil society" (2005, p. 18). What one could discover by exploring it would align with Arendt's understanding of power. "For power itself in its true sense can never be possessed by one man alone; power comes, as it were, into being whenever men act "'in concert'" and disappears when the ruler is left alone (2005, pp. 337-338). Gilead depends on support for sustenance. Consequently, an apparatus not entirely new but sidelined up until now gains immense importance: language. Gilead creates a new, totalizing discourse that aims "not to state the truth but to prevent its very emergence" (Foucault, 1990, p. 55). The truth that the founding fathers of Gilead have committed numerous war crimes and that the Republic is a totalitarian state is

ironically suppressed through language. The purpose of that discourse is “no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real (...)” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 10). The reality of Gilead’s atrocities and its crimes against humanity are concealed: the techniques and outcomes that govern the state are all legalized and justified through discourse. Even after its fall, Gilead is hellbent on maintaining a totalizing metadiscourse that eliminates even the possibility of multiple, contradicting ones challenging the ideology of the state. The historians note that agents from Gilead destroyed records from libraries “that might conflict with their own” (Atwood, 2019, p. 409). The totalizing discourse serves Gilead in two ways: firstly to brainwash the young generation of Gilead in their formative years as discussed above and secondly to normalize and rationalize the atrocious crimes committed to retain absolute power. Foucault considers the word “rationalization” precarious and hazardous:

I think that the word “rationalisation” is a dangerous one. The main problem when people try to rationalise something is not to investigate whether or not they conform to principles of rationality, but to discover which kind of rationality they are using. (1981, p. 226)

Chapter 1 has discussed that the ‘Republic’ bases its rationality and finds its justification in corrupted, convoluted religious narratives. The corruption of reality through language in Gilead has a long history, thus the backbone of the ideology of the Republic cannot be divorced from the element it co-exists with. Furthermore, as Baudrillard would concur, “Ideology only corresponds to a corruption of reality through signs” (1995, p. 20). Language as a carefully constructed system of signs is pivotal to the formation and sustainability of an ideology that serves the state. As such, Baudrillard argues that power is consonant with ideological discourses (1981,

p. 20). Therefore, it is only natural that Gilead would put considerable emphasis on language as one of its apparatuses instead of persisting on sustained torture and executions as the exclusive apparatuses. Arendt also notes a similar practice in the Nazi Germany.

“Language rule,” which in this instance consisted of a lie (...) The net effect of this language system was not to keep these people ignorant of what they were doing, but to prevent them from equating it with their old, “normal” knowledge of murder and lies (Arendt, 1963, pp. 85-86)

As Chapter 1 touched upon, Gilead embellishes the atrocities as benefits and favours. Before Lydia was appointed as an Aunt, she was subjected to extensive physical and mental torture. When she finally gave in, she was granted a meeting with the Leader of the Eyes, Commander Judd. “It wears you down. All that needless suffering of women. We intend to eliminate that. I am sure you approve” (Atwood, 2019, p.171). Commander Judd establishes their war crimes as favours that come from a place of care and compassion for women. He claims that they are building a society corresponding to the “Divine Order—a city upon a hill, a light to all nations—and we are acting out of charitable care and concern” (p. 174). He further claims that Lydia was chosen to help the founders in easing the distress of women that has been caused by the corruption and the decadence of the society that they are dismantling. His discourse carries the fundamental trope of paternalism (“pater” for father in Latin): infringement of the rights and freedom of others with the intentions or justification that it is for their benefit (Aycan, 2006, pp. 445-466), a “benevolent dictatorship” (Northouse 2001, p.39). Evidenced in history, the Southern States in pre-Civil War America used paternalism as a means to legitimize and justify slavery (Mulligan, 2012, para. 3-18). Identical to the Gileadean politics, the rights of slaves,

including that of property ownership and reproduction were managed by the slaveowners (Cole, 2006, pp. 37-38). Furthermore, John Stuart Mill claims that paternalism practiced on adults hinders the development of autonomy and individuality and that it would only be acceptable in cases where the individual is a threat to himself and to the society (1991, pp. 13-15). Akin to paternalism, Lakoff describes the strict father family model as the authority of the father to decide on the governing policies of the family. His commands are to be obeyed due to his “moral authority” (1999, p. 281). He teaches his children “by setting strict rules for their behavior” and he enforces them with punishment. Moreover, the father earns the cooperation of the children by showing affection. “But children must not be coddled, lest they become spoiled.” (p. 282). Additionally, the mother has the responsibility of endorsing the father’s authority: “Children must respect and obey their parents, because of the parents' moral authority” (pp. 281-82). Gilead’s politics resembles this model: fathers of the population, the Commanders, rationalize the crimes as benevolence through fallacious discourses, as Judd does with Lydia. Interestingly, his question “You wish to help?” (p. 175) implies that Lydia has a choice, whereas she was brought in to see Judd only after she had already yielded and accepted the role of an Aunt. She was warned that if she refused the role and survived the torture, she would be shot by the others who have accepted Aunthood as a part of their initiation ritual. It was only a rhetorical question, however, the underlying implication was that Lydia chose *motu proprio*, she was presented with a choice, not forced into a role, and she willingly took part in the politics of Gilead.

The objective to brainwash the young Gileadean generations in their formative years on what is practiced there is correct, lawful, and beneficial to them bears its fruits. Young Agnes in her depositions sings praises to Gilead and having

internalized it fully, she echoes the totalizing narrative wholeheartedly with sincere faith and devotion.

[The founders and older Aunts]’d had struggles we had been spared (...) But we hadn’t been forced to undergo such ordeals. We’d been protected, we hadn’t needed to deal with the harshness of the world at large. We were the beneficiaries of the sacrifices made by our forebears. We were constantly reminded of this, and ordered to be grateful (Atwood, 2019, pp. 287-288).

Gilead breeds fanatics; according to Arendt’s definition of the term, fanaticized groups completely identify with movements (Arendt, 1973, p. 306), in a “victory of masterful and lying propaganda over ignorance and stupidity” (Arendt, 1973, p. 306). As Chapter 1 discusses, Gileadeans are forbidden from reading and writing. As a result, ignorance rules over the majority of its population whose sole sources of information are the ideologically charged discourses relayed from authorities by means of language. However, when released from the ideology that governs it, language can be a self-determining entity (Foucault, 2002, pp. 300-307). Therefore, Gilead is concerned with not only employing language as one of its apparatuses but also with governing it strictly and closely, overseeing its form and usage in “a deep inquisition pattern – model “inquisitorial” (Foucault 1994: 391) – relation not only towards the body, but also towards the speech” (Ristić & Marinković, 2016, p. 39). Hence for Gilead, language must be under complete control because “language affects one's perception of the world” (Thierry et al., 2009, p. 4567). To exemplify, the Commanders and the Aunts who are entrusted with the girls’ education decide on removing geography as an object of study, justifying it with: “[Their] own neighbourhood should be enough for [them], and what Wife needed more?” (Atwood, 2019, p. 224). As a result of the indoctrinations, when Agnes gets out of

Gilead, she feels lost and afraid, and echoes what Gilead has embedded in her mind. “We go outside Gilead? Isn’t it scary to be that far away? Isn’t Gilead really big?” It would be like falling out of the world, for surely Gilead had no edges” (p. 291). Her perception of Gilead as well as the world outside is shaped and limited completely by the discourse she was brought up with.

The linguistic relativity thesis, which is chiefly referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, puts forth the crucial role of language in shaping the ideas and attitudes of individuals, though recent studies credit Wilhelm von Humboldt as the architect of the theory to come a century after his time (Deutscher, 2010, pp. 133-150). Although according to Koerner, Whorf only referred to Boas and Sapir as his sole sources on the subject (1992, p. 178), Humboldt asserts that “Language is deeply entangled in the spiritual evolution of mankind” (1988, p. 24). Koerner in his translation of Humboldt’s *Essai sur les langues du Nouveau Continent* from 1812 shows that according to Humboldt “(...) [the world in which we live (...)] is exactly that into which the language we speak transplants us] (1904[1812]:332)” (1992, p. 179). Furthermore, Aarsleff in the preface to the 1988 edition of Humboldt’s work also puts forth that “language is the organ of thought” (p. xix). Additionally, Underhill in his study on Humboldt builds upon his theory by claiming that language is not a worldview, but it creates a world (2009, p. 7); since men express their notions in a language it simultaneously influences the way they think (p. 60). Blair proposes that the “influence of language on our thought not only shapes our thought in language, but it also shapes our non-linguistic thought (...)” (2006, p. 40). This notion intersects with Hudson’s study in which he further asserts that Humboldt’s theory includes not only the instances involving the active use of language.

Whorf's claim is that we do not only apply these distinctions when putting thoughts into words, but they affect the way the way in which we understand our experiences at all times, whether or not we are using language (1980, p. 69).

When Becka, going by the name of Aunt Immortelle, is ordered to create a distraction for her friends to escape Gilead, she blocks the water outlet in the cistern. The inspections upon the water outage in the building and the foul smell reveal her corpse, and Aunt Lydia depicts the scene in her holographs.

The frugal child had removed her outer clothing so as to save it for someone else's future use; it was found, neatly folded, on the top rung of the ladder. She'd retained her undergarments for purposes of modesty. It's how I would have expected her to behave (Atwood, 2019, p. 389).

Becka is only told to create a distraction, yet even in death, and on her own, she behaves according to the teachings and indoctrinations of Gilead. Despite the circumstances, she holds extreme charity, sparingness, modesty; and Gilead which that has done nothing but harm to her above all, even herself. It is evidenced in Aunt Immortelle's commitment to the ideals that Gilead has accomplished its aim of molding the younger generation into its model citizens.

Roger Langham Brown's interpretation of Humboldt further affirms that language is crucial to the perception, as well as asserting that consequent to that argument, different languages create variations in attitude and how one perceives the world (1967, pp. 90-93). Gilead creates a language of its own within English: terms like Handmaid (Atwood, 2017, p. 34), Unwoman (p. 25), Martha (p. 24), and Gender Traitor (p. 243) are created to define people according to Gilead's norms and limit

their freedom in accordance with their newly appointed identities. Similarly, Offred notes that the word infertile is illegal, replaced by the word “Barren” to signify that women are the only ones who are unable to conceive (p. 72). The Gileadean English also no more includes words like “free” (p. 66), and the old world sayings like “hello” for greetings (p. 141) are replaced with “Blessed be the fruit” which is responded with “May the Lord open” (p. 241); goodbyes are replaced with “Under His Eye,” which is “the right farewell.” (p. 56). The language structured around religion supplements the state politics by creating an undisputable discourse and thereupon, an unopposable reality.

In disciplining the younger generation, Gilead relies on language first, and actual, physical punishment second. According to Baudrillard, simulation is more effective than the real. The simulation of a nuclear catastrophe is the result of the undertaking of deterrence because it attunes people to the ideology and the discipline of the state (1995, p. 39). Gallay traces this practice anachronistically in southern states of America before the Civil War and claims that “diplomacy and the threat of force rather than actual violence governed relations” were prevalent in the slaveholding colonies (1987, p. 370). The role of language as the instrument of the threat of punishment and violence, and warning is affirmed in Foucault’s study as well as he quotes Beccaria’s notion to establish what he calls the “obstacle-sign”:

Let the idea of torture and execution be ever present in the heart of the weak man and dominate the feeling that drives him to crime' (Beccaria, 119). These obstacle-signs must constitute the new arsenal of penalties, just as the old public executions were organized around a system of retaliatory marks. (1995, p. 104).

Foucault develops his assertion further by claiming that the “art of punishing” must rely upon representation (1995, p. 104). Because, as argued, the representation and the threat of punishment through language are more effective than the physical violence itself, the obstacle-sign constitutes a significant part of the fundamentals of Gilead’s education system. The obstacle-sign produces a system where the crime and its punishment are represented together to create deterrence: the punishment is to occur to one immediately as soon as one thinks of committing a crime (1995, pp. 104-108). Thus, the obstacle-sign works to “reduce the desire that makes the crime attractive; increase the interest that makes the penalty be feared; (...) so that the representation of the penalty and its disadvantages is more lively than that of the crime and its pleasures” (p. 106). The model of obstacle-signs builds the “theatre of punishments” (p. 106), in which the punishment, similar to what Baudrillard calls a simulation, is not real but a representation that aims to inhibit future crimes.

One of Aunt Vidala’s religious teachings at the Rubies Premarital Preparatory is that of the “Concubine Cut into Twelve Pieces”. A concubine who had run away from her “owner” back to her father’s house was retrieved by her owner, as her father agreed that his daughter’s disobedience was unacceptable. On their way back home, they took refuge in a town where the residents wanted to do “shameful” things to the man, but because “that would have been especially wicked between men,” the concubine volunteers bravely and selflessly to go out instead. They find her dead in the morning. Aunt Vidala concludes that women should always be obedient to the authority of the men in charge lest they share the same fate (Atwood, 2019, pp. 82-84). This instance of an obstacle-sign where the crime is presented alongside the punishment mirrors Gilead’s biopolitics: rather than eliminating the criminals, Gilead works to create subjects who are too afraid to commit a crime against the state. They

are shown the possible outcome of a non-compliance to the point of trauma from an early age, and have the threat of and the vivid simulation of penalty etched in their minds. Additionally, Foucault enunciates that the connection between the crime and punishment must be in close proximity and as “unarbitrary” as possible (1995, p.104). Thus, Gilead’s highhanded and extreme punishments are normalized and a bond between the offense and penalty is formed through language: “God always made the punishment fit the crime” (Atwood, 2019, p. 83). Young girls are filled with the idea that punishment comes from God, and the voice and the representation of God, men, and Aunts of Gilead, are not to be questioned or rebelled against if they wish to avoid the demise of the deviants. This naturalizes the harsh, unfair and vindictive punishments like torturing girls to the point of insanity (like Janine), mutilation like gouging out eyes, cutting off fingers, sewing mouths shut, and more. Aunt Lydia admits her responsibility in regards to the maimed and executed Handmaids: “Some have missing fingers, some have one foot, some have one eye. Some have ropes around their necks. I have judged them, I have passed sentence(…)” (p. 169). It is integral that the power and its supporting apparatuses are naturalized, because according to Foucault, “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself”: the success of power depends on its ability to conceal its devices (1990, p. 86). Hence a naturalizing narrative succeeds in a way that Foucault would regard as “not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control” (p. 89). The punishment in Gilead comes from God, and God (and his representatives) are always just and fair in their judgment and execution, so the punishment is to be taken without rebellion according to Gileadean teachings. Aside from Becka, who is traumatized by the story of the concubine to the point of attempting suicide, young Agnes, even though she is from a formidable household,

feels very vulnerable and scared due to her constant exposure to obstacle-signs as well (p. 21 & 80) Even Aunt Lydia, after receiving the news of Becka's attempted suicide due to the phobia of penises and sexual intercourse the classes have developed in her, and that she was forced into an arranged marriage (pp. 166-208), complains that it is a common case in Gilead because of how traumatizing the education system is. "Perhaps we need to change our educational curriculum, [she] thought: less fear-mongering (...)" Though she adds that it must be done so carefully so as not to put too much emphasis on the delights of sex as that would be followed by "moral degeneracy and public stonings" (p. 214). It is essential for the authority figures of Gilead to manage the balance of the obstacle-signs for too much emphasis on one counterpart over the other would yield unexpected and unwanted results. If one side of the binaries receives more emphasis than the other, either the biopolitics is reverted to the vindictive penalties as the sole apparatus of the state, or the fear-mongering traumatizes and breaks subjects beyond any use and benefit for the state.

The sinister motives of Gilead in creating a language system that constructs the reality and influences the perception of its young generation are revealed when Becka and Agnes are recruited as Aunts. Becka exposes the manipulation tactics in using the 'Gileadean Bible' and forcing disturbing teachings on children in order to shape them into unwaveringly loyal and absolutely blind subjects. Before Agnes is finally presented with the Bible, Becka warns her that "[The Bible] doesn't say what they say it says" (Atwood, 2019, p. 302). She tells Agnes to read the story of the Concubine, which traumatized Becka so much back at the Vidala School. Agnes does so, and she is shocked to find that Aunt Estée and Vidala's version was manipulated and almost entirely fabricated to fit their narratives and to influence the minds of the young girls. Agnes recounts that she looked for the "brave and noble

part” that described the sacrifice of the concubine, as well as “the choice”, but they were not in the book. “The girl was simply shoved out the door and raped to death, then cut up like a cow by a man who’d treated her like a purchased animal when she’d been alive” (p. 300). Agnes continues that she understands why the girl had run away, and is angry that the aunts had lied to them about the truth that was not noble, but shocking and abhorrent. She admits that she has been a firm believer in Gilead’s teachings up until that moment, and in the face of solid, undeniable proof of Gilead’s lies and manipulations, Agnes blames herself for the seeds of doubt planted in her mind (p. 303).

Up until that time I had not seriously doubted the rightness and especially the truthfulness of Gilead’s theology. If I’d failed at perfection, I’d concluded that the fault was mine. But as I discovered what had been changed by Gilead, what had been added, and what had been omitted, I feared I might lose my faith (p. 303).

Foucault also describes obstacle-signs as the “art of establishing representations of pairs of opposing values” (1995, p. 104). Opposing values, contraposition, in other words, binary oppositions are represented together in obstacle-signs. Ferdinand de Saussure asserts that language by nature derives meaning from the oppositions between terms (1959, pp. 22 & 88). Then, although Gilead aims to eliminate contradicting elements and discourses to establish a totalizing, unrivalled state discourse through a national language, language itself cannot be without binary oppositions. Correspondingly, Gilead eliminates the contradicting elements in language and discourses, and creates a discourse based on opposing values where the hierarchy would be in favour of the state. Becka recognizes this practice after reading the Bible. “Everyone at the top of Gilead has

lied to us. (...) God isn't what they say, (...) you could believe in Gilead or you could believe in God, but not both" (Atwood, 2019, pp. 303-304). After all, as the girls acknowledge, "being able to read and write did not provide the answers to all questions. It led to other questions, and then to others" (p. 299). Becka is granted access to a copy of Bible before Agnes, and she warns Agnes of the totalizing lies Gilead has built its state politics on. "They want God to be only one thing, (...) They leave things out. It says in the Bible we're in God's image, male and female both" (p. 295). However, it is worth noting that even the Aunts are not allowed to read freely. The books in Reading Room are prohibited, and in their Bible studies, they are only permitted to read the sections allowed to them. A supplicant, Aunt Lily had been subjected to cruel and inhumane "Corrections" by fellow Aunts, including spending a month in a dark cellar on her own, subsisting on nothing but bread and water for reading too much too early to the point of being unable to function beyond uttering "yes" and "no", as Becka shares in terror (p. 292). Strikingly, Becka also defends the torture by saying that the Corrections are different, and that they are actually good for the young supplicants (p. 209). What Gilead tries to impose as the natural order of things, of Divine or God's Will are revealed to Becka as omissions of truth and radically manipulated texts to coerce compliance from the masses. However, even then, Aunt Immortelle, defends the practice because it so naturalized that no one thinks about criticizing them. No one feels the need to as they are convinced that it is for their benefit, and that they deserve it for as little as reading books in the Reading Room without permission because they contain volatile narrations and information.

Gilead's language inevitably consists of binary oppositions that reflect the ideals of manipulating the reality and the perception of its subjects. Gökçen regards the Gileadean state policy as the invention of "tools of control by means of language

(...)” (2014, p. 144). New words to replace and describe situations and people are coined into the language: barren instead of infertile; Econo-Wife, Commander’s Wife, Aunt, Martha, Handmaid, Unwomen, and Gender Traitor to further juxtapose them against the ideals and models of the state. All of a sudden, a feminist activist from the old America is an Unwoman to be sent to the colonies, a mother of one and a part-time librarian is an abhorrible sinner, a Handmaid, and a decorated lawyer is a rifle and then a cattle prod wielding discipliner, judge and executioner of Handmaid candidates, an Aunt. Hence in a language where there are specific terms for individuals to be juxtaposed against the ideals as well as thoroughly categorized and grouped (and potentially persecuted); the notions, approaches, as well as the reality are inevitably shaped around said terms. This observed influence of language in one’s psyche is echoed in Saussure’s theory. “Does language (...) serve at least to characterize the mind of the social group that speaks it? A popular notion is that a language reflects the psychology of a nation” (1959, p. 277). His theory further elaborates that social facts with no additional factors can construct a linguistic system (p. 113). To exemplify, Gilead language contains terms especially coined to assess, define and juxtapose the subjects of the state. Additionally, according to Saussure, external effects of politics can influence language, as well as various institutions. In turn, language is positively favored by the circles and institutions that influenced it (p. 150). The relationship between the state and language is also noted by Foucault; thus, the legal code system is “a binary division between the permitted and the prohibited, and a coupling, comprising the code, between a type of prohibited action and a type of punishment” (1978, p. 20). In that sense, binary oppositions that are essential to the meaning-making process of language constitute the basis of Gilead’s punitive politics. Furthermore, Lecercle’s reading of Rancière coincides

with Saussure and Foucault's theories on language and the state. Lecercle asserts that language constructs politics and concepts as binaries. Based on his reading of Rancière, Lecercle claims that the relationship of politics and language is reciprocal: both are constitutive of one another, while also being pervaded by the other (2016, p. 10). Through this claim, Lecercle further explains the role of language in the manifestation and construction of binaries.

[Language] allows the construction of the hierarchies on which society (the family and the state) is based, (...) (master and slave, husband and wife, parents and children – one who commands and one who obeys), one may expect that language will not only facilitate the construction of social relationships but express and bolster up the rapports de forces (power relations) that structure them (p. 10).

The critical claims above help to support the present argument about the controlled and carefully crafted binary oppositions in the national, official discourses of Gilead serving to solidify the state power as well as to contribute to the further segregation and prosecution of its subjects. The parallels between language and the politics and social life of Gilead function as an answer to Saussure's inquiry into the issue of language working as a characterizing factor of the groups speaking it. According to Robert Godel, Saussure's approach to language is a philosophical one. His study continues to claim that "this may well surprise present-day linguists, who are used to relying on methodical observation, statistics, or even mathematical devices, to describe, or to account for, linguistic reality" (1984, p. 85). Therefore, it can be argued that language is not strictly a matter of methodical science. There can be no totalizing approaches nor meta-explanations. Language is a complex matter that encompasses many aspects that at first sight might elude one as pertaining to the

entirety of its functionality. One of its functions, that of shaping and influencing the perception of reality, though touched upon by Saussure, is widely referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, though neither of the scholars named Saussure as the architect of their theory. Edward Sapir's observation of the effects of language on social groups particularly intersects with Saussure's where he claims that without language, there can be no thoughts, no pre-existing ideas, only a "vague, uncharted nebula" (Saussure, 1959, p. 112):

[Human beings] are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (1929, p. 207).

Furthermore, in a later study, Sapir elaborates his claim with the notion that it would be misleading to assume that one would perceive reality without using language, and to assume that language is merely a tool for specific instances of communication. The "real world", then, in his theory, is "unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group" (1949, pp. 69-70). Hence in turn, language is "a guide to social reality" (p. 68) and the "symbolic guide to culture" (p.70). Ahearn similarly claims that linguistic interactions can provide important clues in agency and that "language and culture are so tightly intervoven" (2001, p. 131). Hence it would be accurate to suppose that language, culture and reality cannot be examined

separately – they are inseparable. Sapir adds on to the hypothesis by also claiming that even seemingly insignificant, simple acts of perception are dependent on words more than one might suppose. He illustrates this point with an instantiation: a dozen lines drawn in different shapes. “(...) one perceives them as divisible into such categories as ‘straight,’ ‘crooked,’ ‘curved’: ‘zigzag’ because of the classificatory suggestiveness of the linguistic terms themselves.” He concludes that one experiences and interprets as one does because of the language habits of the communities one belongs to (p. 69).

In this context, the language in Gilead functions as an apparatus of separation and normative judgment: the distinction between a Handmaid and an Econo-Wife exists because the terms are arbitrarily coined for the purpose of classification. The distinction between a Handmaid and an Econo-Wife exists solely within Gilead because it is the politics of the state, and the language serves to naturalize and solidify the ideas and ideals of the rulers. Lakoff argues that “the conceptual frames that inhabit our cognitive unconscious contribute semantically to the meanings of words and sentences” Hence, according to him, a waiter is defined only relative to the restaurant frame (1999, p. 110). Therefore, while Gilead is dependent on language as an apparatus of power, the newly created language is also inextricably connected to the new regime. Terms like Handmaid, Econo-Wife, et cetera would only have solid signification within the boundaries of Gilead.

The corresponding contributor of the linguistic hypothesis that serves as this chapter’s framework, Benjamin Lee Whorf, argues for notions that parallel his mentor, Sapir’s studies. Whorf took interest in linguistics and was suggested to be influenced by Einstein’s physical relativity theory when he named his linguistic claims as linguistic relativity (Heynick, 1983 quoted in Koerner, 1992, p. 180).

According to Whorf, linguistic system of each language is not simply a tool for verbalizing notions, but it is “itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual’s mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade.” The formulation of ideas, then, varies radically between different languages. Similar to Sapir’s assertion, Whorf, on multiple occasions, establishes that one separates what is in unity in nature through language: the categories and types created in language isolate elements from the world of phenomena (1940, pp. 212-214):

We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way — an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language (Whorf, 1940, p. 213).

Whorf concludes that one cannot speak at all unless subscribed to the classification of data in language (1940, p. 214). Therefore, the immense emphasis on language as an apparatus in Gilead builds a system where it is essentially impossible for the younger generation of Gileadeans to speak or think outside the indoctrinations of the state. Their thoughts are permeated by the teachings and threatening persuasion of the Republic. When alone in her room, Agnes is distressed by the change in her body. She finds the signs of puberty “alarming”, and even when on her own, she tries to refrain from thinking about her body parts. “I had begun to sprout hair on areas of my body that we were not supposed to dwell on: legs, armpits, and the shameful part of many elusive names.” She echoes the teachings of the Vidala School by thinking that once puberty has happened to a girl “she was no longer a precious flower but a much more dangerous creature” (Atwood, 2019, p. 82). Because she was brought up by the extensive brainwashing discourses of Gilead,

she cannot think otherwise: she lacks the means to in multiple ways. The language is carefully constructed to support the totalizing regime, and the brainwashing discourses are accompanied by obstacle-signs to eliminate the possibility of dissidence. Language and naming in Gilead make it so that instead of puberty, young girls would see their transition into a dangerous creature: the state ensures longevity not through capital punishment but through the rearranged language that eliminates the possibility of noncompliance. If one no longer knows the name for a natural stage of life, one would be convinced into calling oneself a dangerous creature threatening men with the invitation to sin. Becka, even though she was so taken aback and disgusted with the notion back at the Vidala School, proves to be subscribed to it when she reminds Agnes in Ardua Hall that “[she] shouldn’t entice men, (...) what happens if you do is partly your fault” (p. 327). Ahearn argues that grammatical categories within languages construct the roles of subjects, and it would be beneficial to consider the role of language in “how people attribute responsibility, credit, or blame for an event” (2001, p. 131). Therefore, in light of Ahearn’s claim, it is more likely successful brainwashing on Gilead’s part rather than Becka’s choice, as she also holds herself responsible for being sexually abused, as well as the execution of her abuser due to this archaic indoctrination. The same notion that women are responsible for sexual abuse is also the reason Janine was driven to insanity. At the Rachel and Leah Centre, she was surrounded by Handmaids and taser-equipped Aunts who forced them to chant that it was her fault that she was “gang-raped as a teenager”, that she had led them on (Atwood, 2017, p. 13). “But whose fault was it? Aunt Helena says, holding up one plump finger. Her fault, her fault, her fault, we chant in unison. Who led them on? Aunt Helena beams, pleased with us. She did. She did. She did” (p. 82) Similarly, the Handmaids are often referred to as sluts.

Girls are taught that they had been sluts in their previous lives before taken to the Rachel and Leah Centre to be converted. Some girls like Shunammite insists that they are still sluts and looks down upon them, claiming that they do not deserve names or any other rights (Atwood, 2019, p. 85), an infectious thought that eventually spreads to Agnes Jemima's thoughts and words. Last but not least, throughout the novel, Shunammite proves herself to be a model Gileadean in thought and action. She echoes the teachings of the state to her peers vigorously and viciously (Atwood, 2019, p. 81 & 161). Her approach to the prospect of an arranged marriage to a Commander three times her age is a stark contrast to Becka's.

Shunammite dons the colours of a Wife and acts like one immediately after receiving the news of the arrangement. Hill and Mannheim claim that cultural scenarios about marriage formed in and shared through language can play a significant part in one's reasoning about and approach to the institution (1992, p. 394). The cultural construct of marriage and how it is the highest honour for a young girl to be wed to an elder Commander in Gilead takes its root in Shunammite's mind from a young age at the Vidala School. Agnes notes that Shunammite looked forward to marriage, and she constantly talked about how exciting it was that marrying a Commander meant having Guardians, Marthas, and even as many Handmaids as they needed (p. 165). She even claims that marrying Commander Judd is "practically marrying God" (p. 231). Especially when compared to Becka and Agnes Jemima's approach to marriage, Shunammite proves that if and when the teachings of Gilead take root, subjects are turned into loyal and devoted vassals of the state.

Dan Slobin's studies have concurred with and built upon the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in the field of language acquisition in children as well as their psycholinguistic development. According to Hill and Mannheim, "Slobin (206, 207)

endorses a limited neo-Whorfian position.” Slobin and his colleagues conducted a survey on children’s narratives built upon pictures in which they have discovered that children who spoke different languages approached the pictures in different ways; “in a way that seems to reflect habitual ways of encoding experience in their languages” (1992, p. 394).

Moreover, further validation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is the experiments and studies conducted on the colour theory. It has been widely accepted that “color perception has been a traditional test-case of Whorf’s principle of linguistic relativity (5-7)” (Thierry et al., 2009, p. 4567). Colour theory implies that some languages have a wider range and variety of words for colours, while others group similar shades into one encompassing term; and this diverge in languages influence the speakers’ perception of the colours (Özgen, 2004, p. 95). Various experiments conducted on the matter identically conclude in reinforcing the concept: ultimately, the speakers of languages with more terms to define colours more precisely could indeed perceive colours as more differing than those who did not (Özgen, 2004, p. 69; Thierry et al., 2009, pp. 4567-4569). Lastly, color theory, parallel to Saussure’s linguistic theory in which signs gain signification and meaning through binary oppositions (1963, p. 87), proposes that shades of colors are determined by the other colour(s) it is juxtaposed with: colours are determined in a structural relationship. So, the colour red on its own has no meaning, however, in relation to blue, red becomes a separate value (Phillips, 2005, p. 344). More importantly, Phillips claims that Chevreul details the colour perception theory further by using “color vision as a model for mental perception” (p. 346). In that sense, red does not remain only as a colour and transforms to represent blood, impurity, and sin in Gilead, and in juxtaposition, blue of the Wives stands for the purity and holiness of Virgin Mary.

Therefore, in light of the experiments and studies done on the linguistic relativity theory, the fundamental role of language and speech in the formative years of young Gileadeans can be observed more patently. Markedly, in a private conversation between Agnes and Aunt Lydia, the difference between a converted Gileadean and a “pure” breed is relevant. The newly erected statue of Aunt Lydia at the Ardua Hall yard is littered with oranges as a show of respect; oranges are extremely rare and expensive in Gilead. When Lydia invites Agnes to her quarters, she takes out one of the oranges she has pocketed, offering half of it to Agnes. She is stupefied at the offer, turning her offer down on the grounds that it is wrong because it is a sacred offering. She almost reproves Lydia silently that she ate the whole fruit, whereas Lydia is nonchalant, sceptical, and even sarcastic as she mocks the extreme reverence that is shown to a stone statue and a fruit (Atwood, 2019, p. 359).

However, Agnes’ reaction should not come as a surprise; Foucault claims that exercise of power includes “guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome” (1982, p. 789). Because Agnes is indoctrinated to be the model Gilead citizen, she cannot even think about stepping outside the arbitrary boundaries she has been brainwashed to accept. Markedly, the tremendous influence of the indoctrinations of the state becomes more apparent while Agnes, Jemima and Daisy, or Baby Nicole, are reunited. The personalities of the two half-sisters could not be any more different. Even the food in Gilead is alien to Nicole. She is extremely disgusted by the soup served at Ardua Hall made from the leftover scraps and refuses to eat, to which Agnes scolds her by saying that she should be thankful for what she is given, and she cannot stomach the pretend doughnuts Agnes traded with food tokens at the bus station (pp.317 & 357). Identically, when offered breakfast sandwiches with fake cheese on the escape boat, their attitudes are

extremely contrary. Agnes silently accepts and offers gratitude, whereas Nicole mocks the food and Agnes' submissive nature formed in Gilead. Where Nicole approaches everything with a questioning manner and is not afraid to talk back, Agnes is terrified on the behalf of her headstrong disposition. On the other hand, Nicole notes Agnes' behaviour to be similar to all the other pious Aunts and that of a quintessential Gileadean, she also notices how dissimilar they are despite being siblings. "It was weird to think of [Agnes] as my sister; we were so unlike" (p. 357).

On their way out of Gilead, the starkly different half-sisters are juxtaposed further, especially in two instances. The first is when they take off their Pearl Girl uniforms and change into casual outfits. Nicole notes that she feels more like herself again, whereas Agnes finds "the clothing provided for [them] disagreeable in the extreme" (p. 365). Agnes is highly uncomfortable, and complains that the provided clothes are "men's garments." Nicole frustratedly corrects her by saying that those are girls' jeans and points out that they are cut differently and are adorned with feminine patches. However, Agnes is not convinced, and she worries that no one in Gilead would believe it, and she would be flogged for it, if not worse (p. 365). The fear and paranoia that is instilled in them through obstacle-signs continue to operate even outside the boundaries of the State and away from the authority figures: through trauma and fear, the threat of brutal punishment remains in her mind even in the most relaxed of spaces. Agnes cannot believe the possibility of an alternative way of living outside of the Gileadean way: she is afraid of the figuratively cold, vindictive hand of Gilead on her back, reminding of her "crimes" and impending punishment. Gilead is still within her, even though she is physically out of the state. Indeed, this is exactly what Gilead desired: the Commanders could not manage to do it with the first generation of people since they were not brought up in their formative years with

Gilead's way of living and their brainwashing, but the younger, newer generation has not seen any other way. They believe the world is Gilead, that their entire life is what Gilead dictates it should be. Nicole notices that in her sister as well as she reflects on Agnes' behavioural and verbal habits.

I thought of asking her how long we had to keep it up, this Gilead way of talking—couldn't we stop and act natural, now that we were escaping? But then, maybe for her it was natural. Maybe she didn't know another way (p. 361).

Agnes's linguistic tendencies and predisposition is palpably different from Nicole's, and the second point of juxtaposition between the two half-sisters stems from that. When Agnes is uncomfortable with the plan of sneaking out of Gilead, Nicole tells her sibling to "suck it up", a retort that confuses Agnes who admits that she usually has a difficult time understand what her sister says. "We are going to a place where [Nicole] will understand the language, I thought. And I will not" (Atwood, 2019, p. 365). Despite speaking English, Nicole's language is alien to Agnes. The juxtaposition is not simply on formal aspects of their speech, but the implications that come with their languages. Clearly, "language is not "pure syntax, pure form insulated from and independent of all meaning, context, perception, emotion, memory, attention, action, and the dynamic nature of communication" (Lakoff, 1999, p. 17). The totalizing language of Gilead, its effect on knowledge, and notions and social life of individuals exemplified by Agnes are contrasted to the Canadian English and the upbringing of Nicole. Even divorced from the slang and the vernacular, the way they behave and speak are very different: Agnes is soft-spoken, offers gratitude to people almost incessantly and she has a child-like innocence and curiosity whereas Nicole is very sarcastic, quick-witted, and cynical:

“Great,” said Nicole. “Fog. That’s all we need.” “It may be a blessing,” [Agnes] said” (p. 383). The younger half-sibling embodies a disposition that can be defined as sardonic, cynical, and skeptical. Despite Nicole’s misanthropic nature, Agnes attempts to befriend her and urges her to be more lenient and forbearing. Two instances in particular highlight the opposite temperaments of the half-siblings. Once they board the ship and see the filthy sleeping bags, and secondly when Nicole falls sick (pp. 368 & 381), Agnes shows gratitude and contents herself with what she is given, whereas Nicole is extremely scornful and vitriolic. Agnes also feels more at ease when she can continue practicing her religion and Gileadean habits, both in speech and in act, as evidenced in their exchange about the effect of prayers (p. 381), and Nicole’s dissident behaviour unsettles her deeply. Subsequently, when Nicole asks an ordinary question to the captain, Agnes is deeply disturbed as a woman does not look a man in the eye and ask a question directly. “My sister nudged me: bad manners again. You avoided blunt questions in Gilead” (p. 368).

Ultimately, Nicole admits that despite Agnes being the older sibling, she feels older than her because of their fundamental differences and because Agnes has missed out on so much that her contemporaries in Canada are privy to. She is too ignorant, and too innocent for her age according to Nicole. She pities her older sister as well: “We were almost outside Gilead now, and the rules were changing. She was going to a new place where she wouldn’t know how things were done, but I was going home” (p. 368). The dynamics of comfort change as they leave Gilead and head for Canada. Agnes admits to being homesick, of missing her childhood home and her Marthas, and feels sad that she would never get to see Aunt Lydia who had been like a mother, albeit a strict one. Presumably, it is a sentiment that neither her biological mother, June, nor her half-sister would share with her. Therefore,

evidently, through carefully designed and violently enforced tactics, nurture wins over nature in Gilead. Despite being a half-sister born from the same mother, if Agnes has no alternative way of considering things, of questioning, of thinking, and knowing, she will not do so even in the company of an individual capable of autonomy. The extent and power of perceptual bias, blindness, and parochialism established through indoctrinating discourses are to be reckoned with.

Although not tied to language exclusively, the testament to perceptual subjectivity and blindness is a theme that surrounds the myth of invisible ships. The phenomenon follows Captain Cook, Columbus, or Magellan, depending on the version of the story, as his ship lands on the coast of Australia, Cuba, or South America respectively. Though it has been estimated that the source, or the inspiration of the myth is Captain James Cook's journals from his voyage of 1770 where he notes that the fishermen went about their days as Cook's ship passed by them closely, not even glancing up at it. The natives were seemingly blinded and deafened to its existence simply because they have never seen a ship like his before, and their minds failed to acknowledge its existence (Ball, 2016, p. 163). Hence, similar to the fishermen on the shore, Agnes can neither perceive nor comprehend an alternative to what Baudrillard, de-contextualized, would refer to as Gilead's "radical authenticity" of the 'truth' (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 21). The radically authentic truth of Gilead is not allowed to be questioned or criticized on its legitimacy, it is not debatable.

A question posed throughout the history is echoed in the additional introduction to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, penned by Mark Seem:

'How could the masses be made to desire their own repression?' This is a question which the English and Americans are reluctant to deal with directly,

tending too often to respond: “Fascism is a phenomenon that took place elsewhere, something that could only happen to others, but not to us; it's their problem (2000, p. xvi).

In the light of the two half-sisters and Aunt Lydia, it can be attempted to be answered in relation to Gilead's politics. Accordingly, for Gilead, fascism and a life filled with decadence and moral corruption were the regime before, during America; not anymore under the new banner of the ‘Republic’. Canada and the rest of the world are the sinners and fascists because of their inappropriate lifestyles compared to the religious Gileadean teachings. One of the Pearl Girl missionaries calls Nicole brave for heading into “Sodom” that is Canada, and Nicole thinks that “the idea of Canada being Sodom was hilarious, considering how boring and ordinary it mostly was (Atwood, 2019, p. 362). For the citizens of Canada, Gilead is a hellish state of inhumane horrors, but for Gileadeans Canada is Sodom, and Gilead is a haven, a City Upon a Hill. It is widely accepted by many linguists, and this chapter also discussed in detail that the cognitive meaning can be influenced by language, and that “meaning [is] defined not internally in the mind or body, but by reference to things in the external world” (Lakoff, 1999, p. 17). As the creation of binary oppositions is the fundamental process of meaning-making put forth by Saussure, Gilead's language creates a system where the outside world and the way of old America are demonized through language in a (successful) attempt to brainwash the younger generation in their formative years. Hence, language as an apparatus of shaping and disciplining gains immense importance in the later politics of Gilead. As Derrida would later claim: “everything became discourse” (2002, p. 354).

As a result, children are conditioned to believe the ideology of the state and that they are safe in Gilead, and they are righteous: neither they nor their leaders can

be fascists. According to Althusser, “the ideology serves the rulers” (2014, p. 245), and “education instills the ideology necessary for the reproduction of the current system” (p. 252). However potent the disciplining powers of language and education may be, and despite the extreme measures the state employs in silencing and eliminating the contrariety in the society, the voices of the victims, both women and men, still emerge through the cracks.



CHAPTER 3:

‘Better Never Means Better for Everyone’: Strict Class Division and Men as Victims of Gilead

“It is a little embarrassing that, after forty-five years of research and study, the best advice I can give to people is to be a little kinder to each other.”

(Aldous Huxley Quoted in Harold Bloom, 2003, p.6)

“God has abandoned the guilty man to the mercy of his fellow creatures.”

(Michel Foucault, 1995, p.46)

The Handmaid’s Tale jumpstarts Offred’s narrative with a shocking display of the new life under the banner of Gilead. Much like the heroine, the audience is disoriented and perplexed, following the Handmaid as she looks back on her forcible initiation into the role of a child-bearing slave (Herman, 2017 & Bradley, 2018). Though she leads a very restricted and isolated life in the Waterford house, the spectacles Offred has been exposed to hint at a life still worse than hers. Similarly, the overprotected daughters of Offred in The Testaments are faced with glimpses of the grittier side of life which the state scrupulously expels into invisibility. With these considerations in mind, this chapter aims to uncover the devices and practices through which the subjects of the Republic of Gilead are separated from one another, the determining criterion of the segregation, and its ruinous outcomes. The elucidation of the points borrows from and relies on Michel Foucault’s concept of norms and abnormality and interpretation of Bentham’s panopticon, and Hannah

Arendt's theory on masses formed under totalitarian rules. The closer inspection of the male experience in Gilead conjoins Arendt and Foucault with studies conducted on the inadequacy of research and representation of male victimization and its tell-tale signs and results.

The first objective of this chapter is to inspect yet another one of Gilead's apparatuses employed in establishing a new order and enforcing it: the panopticon. Derived from the Greek words "pan" for "all", and "optikon" (neuter of optikos) meaning "of or for sight", the term corresponds to Jeremy Bentham's model for prisons (Bentham, 2011). In his model, criminals are seen as "defective mechanisms" and the panoptic prison is "a machine for grinding rogues honest" (Bentham quoted in Ignatieff, 1978, p. 68). Michel Foucault revisits the model in *Discipline and Punish*: Bentham's panopticon for Foucault is a paradigmatic design for prisons with the purpose of disciplinary power. The model proposes a building where inmates are isolated in cells and constantly observed by a central tower. The idea is not only that of constant surveillance, but the possibility (and its generated paranoia) that they might be. Because the inmates have no way of determining whether they are being watched or not at any given time, they behave all the time as if they are actively watched, resulting in self-governing tendencies and habits (1995, p. 200). Since the inmates are "subjected to a field of visibility" which they are aware of, they understand and accept the reach of power over them, they internalize the panoptic tower, and police themselves, subsequently becoming "the principle of [their] own subjection" (pp. 202-203). In turn, the carceral structure's success in the internalization of the power contributes to "the normalization of the power of normalization" (p. 296). With the power being internalized, legitimated and justified, it is expected that the society would be more compliant and less likely to rebel

against the inhumane practices and unjust laws. Although Gilead aims for a new society of compliant subjects, inevitably, certain members of the society would not respond as well to the brainwashing; thus, the contingency plan of the panoptic carceral aims at both reforming when possible, and exterminating as the last resort. According to Foucault, the prison has complete power over individuals and it is “omni-disciplinary” (1995, p. 236), which means it assumes control over every aspect of one’s life from the physical training to everyday schedules, moral and religious affinity and psyche (pp. 235-236). As Rosen and Santesso commentate on Foucault’s interpretation of the model:

In [Foucault and other prominent interpreters’] view, Bentham’s prison, with its abject inmates and unremitting observers, allowed the State to invade and rewrite the very structure of the human mind, where previously it could only exert crude pressure through physical violence (2010, p. 1041).

Indeed, as Foucault would argue, Bentham’s panoptic principle was more than architectural, since it was meant to target the body and more importantly, the human mind (1995, p. 216). The model, therefore, is suitable for “whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behavior must be imposed” (p.205), and aimed at producing “obedient subject[s]” (p. 128). The panoptic society does not only punish the misdemeanant during the process of creating obedient subjects but also aims at deterrence. Bentham notes that the “terror of example” prevents others from committing similar offences, and that this is the “main end of all punishment, and consequently of the particular mode [panopticon]” (1843, p. 122).

In Atwood's novels, this function of the panopticon coincides with the horrifying spectacles of bodies hung from the Wall to rot that Offred sees during her walks. Similarly, numerous Salvagings and Particutions Offred recounts operate as cautionary tales and warnings served in blood. It should come as no surprise, then, that Offred likens the bodies hanging from the Wall after the Men's Salvaging to scarecrows: "(...) in a way [a scarecrow] is what they are, since they are meant to scare" (Atwood, 2017, p. 47). In the same vein, Foucault asserts that "(...) the guilty person is only one of the targets of punishment. For punishment is directed above all at others, at all the potentially guilty" (Foucault, 1995, p. 108). By the same token, Angela Laflen reads the state's public executions with Foucault's concept of surveillance in mind: "Gilead uses public executions to foster identification between the audience and the regime. According to Foucault, in the society of the spectacle an audience was essential to public executions in order to witness the restoration of social order" (2009, p. 107). Her study goes on to illustrate that the executioner represents the state, and by forcing its subjects to take on the role of the executioner, Gilead forces them to represent itself. Indeed, in two accounts, Offred remembers being forced into participating in two mandatory public executions: once a Salvaging where she had to pull the rope that hung a woman to prove her "complicity in the death of [her]" (2017, p. 265); and second during the Particution of a Guardian by the Handmaids. A similar Particution occurs in *The Testaments* where Aunt Lydia remembers that after two minutes of the blow of the whistle, all that had left of the condemned dentist were his bloodied hair torn from the roots by the furious Handmaids (2019, p. 277). Foucault attributes this practice to the power and the agency of punishment: they seek to "get all citizens to participate in the punishment of the social enemy" (1995, p. 129). Ultimately, Garland epitomises Foucault's

rhetoric by claiming that it “describes modern society as “the disciplinary society” - a “society of surveillance” in which we are all subjected to “infinite examination” in the “panoptic machine” (1990, p. 146). In the same vein, Laflen regards Gilead as a “panoptic society that resurrects the spectacle of the scaffold” (p. 106) and links the paradigms of mandatory executions with Foucault’s concept of panoptic surveillance.

(...) the executions are effective both as a means of inculcating Gilead's system of punishment into the ‘spectators’ and also as a way of identifying those whose allegiance to Gilead is not complete. Thus, Gilead again weaves surveillance into its practice of spectacle, demonstrating its power (2009, p. 107).

The deterrent function of the carceral system and its inherent omniscience noted by Foucault are further elaborated in various studies, one of which connecting the deterrence with “the omnipresence and omniscience of the ‘all seeing eye’” (Kumar, 2015, p. 346). The study proposes that the prisoners of a panoptic prison are deterred from transgression “by the fiction of God. (...) The fiction of God is created in the Panopticon by (...) a gaze and a voice” (p. 346). The presence of the gaze and voice is corroborated in Bentham’s theory as they take on flesh to detail the way through which they operate over the inmates:

I will single out one of the most untoward of the prisoners. I will keep an unintermitted watch upon him. I will watch until I observe a transgression. I will minute it down. I will wait for another: I will note that down too. I will lie by for a whole day: he shall do as he pleases that day, so long as he does not venture at something too serious to be endured. The next day I produce the list

to him- You thought yourself undiscovered: you abused my indulgence: see how you were mistaken. Another time, you may have rope for two days, ten days: the longer it is, the heavier it will fall upon you. Learn from this, all of you, that in this house transgression may never be safe (Bentham, 2011, p. 16).

Considering that Gilead's *modus operandi* is religion and the Commanders fashion themselves as the representatives of God, it is not coincidental that part of the fiction of God in the state is created through the panopticon. The fiction is imposed on the subjects with the personification of the 'gaze and voice': the Eyes. Lydia remembers being dragged through buildings in the process of their imposed transformation when a particular sign stands out to her: an eye with wings on each side hung up on the entrance of the old police station. The Eyes are the police spies shrouded in mystery. Their headquarters have boarded up windows where the citizens fear to walk close by, and even a brief mention of their names terrifies people. The Eyes function in secret, and certainly above the law, as Foucault traces in certain practices of power: "Secret punishments and punishments not specified in the legal code, a power to punish exercised in the shadows according to criteria and with instruments that elude control" (1995, p. 129). As the first chapter mentions, Offred's walking partner who was closely connected to the resistance commits suicide in order not to be taken in by them. Offred observes them in action during one of her routine walks. She watches as the Eyes' van slowly drives down the street, although it does not have a siren on, the other cars avoid it. The van is described by her as black-painted, "with the winged eye in white on the side. The windows of the vans are dark-tinted, and the men in the front seats wear dark glasses: a double obscurity" (Atwood, 2017, p. 36). Seeing it again driving close by terrorizes Offred because of her recent involvement in Mayday: "[She] freeze[s], cold travels through

[her], down to [her] feet. There must have been microphones, they've heard [them] after all. Ofglen, under cover of her sleeve, grips [Offred's] elbow: "Keep moving," she whispers: "Pretend not to see" (p. 169). The van pulls up in front of the pair of Handmaids, two Eyes spies in grey suits come out to grab an unexceptional-looking man and drive away. This encounter and the fright it instills in Offred illustrate the function of the panopticon: constant terror of being watched, in this case by a literal 'Eye', while not being able to watch back, and fear that the eye and the voice will deem one's behaviour as less than appropriate, with the lethal consequence of being escorted away in a van, never to be seen again. Comparable to the Gileadeans' fear of the Eyes, Peter Baehr considers the power of terror "to the extent that no one knows who will be the next victim, no matter how compliant they are" (2010, p. 12).

Foucault further elaborates that the panopticon breaks the borders of prisons, pervades other aspects of life, and becomes the model for control of an entire society, with factories, hospitals, and schools modeled on the modern prison: "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (1995, p. 228) Johnson's study on Foucault further confirms the statement while connecting the urban transformation to biopolitics: "Discipline and biopower have much in common. Prisons were, from the onset, congruent with hospitals, factories and schools. Penal techniques subjugate bodies and control populations" (2014, p. 16). Although one might speculate that it is not because every building has a similar architecture to prisons, but because they all fulfil similar functions of surveillance and punishment, the repurposed buildings in Gilead share a myriad of similarities with the prison. Offred observes the barbed wire weaved around the Rachel and Leah Centre, with the football field where the Handmaid candidates are taken out for paired walks under constant surveillance from the Aunts, Guardians,

and towers. Moldovan also points out the similarities between the Red Center and a quintessential prison (2020, p. 108). Her study also further remarks that the environment of Gilead serves as a “constant reminder of their condition as prisoners who can be killed at any moment whereas their bodies displayed on the wall serve as a warning to those who disobey” (p. 108). Foucault further states that the panopticon is “destined to spread throughout the social body (...) become a generalized function” (1995, p. 207), and that the entire society is a “part of its mechanism” (p. 217). Gilead propagates the carceral structure through constant surveillance and the accompanying paranoia in every aspect of daily life, private and public; as well as through the spectacles of coerced obedience and punishment, and ultimately, the bodies of its subjects. Kiss considers the division in Gileadean society in two aspects: “Division entails the physical division of Gilead into subgroups – Handmaids, Wives, etc. – along with the mental division created by distrust among people, harnessed to forestall rebellion” (2020, p. 57). People in Gilead live in constant paranoia and terror of being monitored for any deviance from the strict impositions of the state. Throughout their friendship, Ofglen and Offred are constantly in fear of being watched, so much so that during one of their walks Ofglen reprimands Offred for looking at her, telling her that “they’re watching” (Atwood, 2017, p. 269). The paranoia of the Eyes watching her every move pervades Offred’s life: she suspects everyone to be an Eye. She claims that her walking partner is her spy, and she is hers (2017, p. 26), similarly, she often suspects that Nick is an Eye stationed to watch and test her (p. 33). It is near impossible to know who is an Eye as they are positioned in every group and part of Gilead. Offred even notices that the interpreters guiding the Japanese tourists are Eyes and she turns down their request to take her picture in case it was another test, and forces herself to smile and eulogise Gilead (p. 42-44), a smart

decision, considering that in her attempt to escape, Moira tries to seduce a guardian who ends up reporting her to the authorities. Correspondingly, Foucault argues that the panopticon even supervises its agents and mechanism: the director may observe the employees, the doctors, teachers, wardens are all judged while judging, even the director himself can be observed (1995, p. 204). In that sense, no one is safe from the all-seeing eye. The Eyes report to their directors and the founder, Commander Judd; the lower ranking Commanders fear their superiors, the same as Aunts. Atwood's both novels also often mention Commanders and their households being executed in salvagings due to their failure of meeting the norms of the state.

Foucault maintains that the panopticon is a space of "distribution of individuals in relation to one another" (p. 205) and that "whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used" (p. 205). Hence, the imposition of a certain set of actions on groups of people extends beyond the original circumscription of the prison and the delinquents and expands into everyone in every stage of life. Referencing back to the root of the model, Foucault writes that "Bentham was surprised that panoptic institutions could be so light: there were no more bars, no more chains, no more heavy locks; all that was needed was that the separations should be clear (...)" (p. 202). The everyday life of Gilead requires no bars or cages, but distinct modes of separation because the mechanisms of the panopticon construct "spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately" (p. 200). Consequently, to separate and recognize its subjects immediately, Gilead segregates the society into groups based on their roles and functions. In one of her lectures justifying the segregated society to the young girls, Aunt Lise claims that while everyone in Gilead has their respective places and

were “equal[s]”, some has different “gifts”, and that “If the various gifts were confused and everyone tried to be everything, only chaos and harm could result. No one should expect a cow to be a bird!” (Atwood, 2019, p. 164) Aunt Lise’s lecture resembles Foucault’s disciplinary power, where individuals are assessed and separated thoroughly. As Foucault observes, in modern societies, “Instead of bending all its subjects into a single uniform mass, [disciplinary power] separates, analyses, differentiates” (1995, p. 170). Additionally, Cooper regards Gilead as a state where “a culture's sexual unease is expressed through rigid social arrangements — Foucauldian disciplinary procedures actuated by power (...)” (1997, p. 94). This interpretation of the Republic coincides with Wilhelm Reich’s study of fascism in which he asserts that people who have repressed sexualities to an extent that they are not even aware of its existence anymore “not only tolerate their economic dependence without conflict, but even affirm it” (1946, p. 19). To extend it to the entirety of society, it could be argued that Gilead attempts to use what Reich would term as the fascist sexual suppression (pp. 19-20) to blind its subjects not only to their economic slavery, but to their institutionalized proscription and disfranchisement.

The strict class division in Gilead is signified with the colours assigned to each class for quicker and easier identification, not unlike an inmate’s outfit, or a soldier’s uniform. Foucault defines a soldier as “someone who could be recognized from afar” (1995, p. 135). In the new preface to *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Atwood explains the significance of the colours assigned to various social strata in keeping the subjects of Gilead in check and under unwavering surveillance.

The modesty costumes worn by the women of Gilead are derived from Western religious iconography – the Wives wear the blue of purity, from the Virgin

Mary, the Handmaids wear red, from the blood of parturition, but also from Mary Magdalene. Also, red is easier to see if you happen to be fleeing. The wives of men lower in the social scale are called Econowives, and wear stripes(...) Many totalitarianisms have used clothing, both forbidden and enforced, to identify and control people – think of yellow stars and Roman purple – and many have ruled behind a religious front. It makes the creation of heretics that much easier (Atwood, 2017, p. XIII).

Offred also notes the assigned umbrellas with their respective colours, blue for Serena Joy, red for her, and black for Commander Waterford (p. 24). Econowives' clothes are striped in red, green, and blue to signify the fact that they fulfill all three roles of the Wife, Handmaid, and Martha (p. 15), though they switch out to an all-black version when they are widowed (p. 39). Offred also notes that the Marthas' dresses are dull green like the surgeons' from before the coup (p. 24); and Aunts in charge of the Red Centre are assigned khaki dresses (2019, p. 117). In *The Testaments*, Agnes reveals two different classes of the state: Commanders' young daughters wear white (2019, p. 213), though once they enroll in the Rubies Premarital Preparatory, their wardrobe changes to all green (p. 164). Lastly, the Pearl Girl missionaries wear "silvery dresses and pearls" (p. 55) even outside the state and in countries where they perform their duties. Moreover, Handmaids are even tattooed on their ankles with four digits and an eye to ensure they can never run away and hide from the authorities (2017, p. 76). Similar to the tattoos of the concentration camps operated under Nazi Germany, the Handmaids are branded and de-subjectified, reduced to uniforms and numbers. Agnes and Becka note that no one could see the faces of the Handmaids because of the white wings, or hats, that they are forced to wear outside, consequently, "they all looked the same" (Atwood, 2019,

p. 16). Additionally, in her deposition, Agnes mentions Marthas: “All the Marthas were known as Martha because that’s what they were, and they all wore the same kind of clothing (...)” (p. 20). Her definement of the Gileadean social structure resonates with Foucault’s chronicle of soldiers. The training process and their uniforms play a significant part in their transformation from an individual to a part of the whole with no identity or distinctive features that may make them stand out. The strict enforcement of the colours is also illustrated in one of Agnes’ Rubies Premarital Preparatory classes: she remembers that Becka was scolded by Aunt Vidala during a lesson where the girls coloured drawings to learn the colours associated with the classes. Becka had painted a Handmaid purple (p. 107).

According to Foucault, culture, and inevitably the society are “a hierarchical organization of values, (...) the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion” (2005, p. 173). Furthermore, a science subordinated to morality “under the guise of the (...) norm” claims to speak the truth and engages with the fears of the society, while the norm warns the society of “an imaginary dynasty of evils” that poses danger for the whole society (Foucault, 1990, pp. 53-54). In that sense, the norm becomes the ground upon which the segregation of the society is founded in Gilead. A significant feature of modern control, that is, disciplinary control, is the observation of what people lack, fail to do, or where they fail in meeting the requirements of the norm (Foucault, 1995, p. 199). Hence, by understanding the norm as an agent of detecting and correcting deviant behaviour, one can bridge it with Foucault’s claim of the act of reforming individuals primarily meaning “coming to live by society’s standards or norms (p. 234), and the panopticon “as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals” (p. 230). Within the same context, though in a different source, Foucault also mentions

“dividing practices” where “people are divided either within themselves or from others.” The basis for the division is the norm, and the groups to which people are assigned to are formed in binaries such as “sane and insane or criminals or good citizens” (1981, pp. 777-778). Foucault further elucidates the connection between norms and divisions in societies by detailing what he refers to as “binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal)” (1995, p. 199). Thus, every individual is subjected to the assessment based on the division between the “normal and the abnormal,” and the focus is on the abnormal to “brand him and to alter him” (p. 220). Handmaids in Gilead are branded as the abnormals, though they are not the only group to be done so. Nevertheless, at the Vidala School, the young girls are taught to alienate the Handmaids, and perpetuate the marginalization of them by further affirming them as ‘the other’ of the Gilead.

(...) we were not supposed to look at them because it was rude to stare at them, said Aunt Estée, just as it was rude to stare at cripples or anyone else who was different. We were not allowed to ask questions about the Handmaids either (Atwood, 2019, p. 16).

The modern society, within Foucault’s formulation, rethinks the subjects within the binary boundaries of normality and abnormality.

If you are not like everybody else, then you are abnormal; if you are abnormal, then you are sick. These three categories, not being like everybody else, not being normal and being sick are in fact very different but have been reduced to the same thing (Foucault, 2004, p. 95).

In conjunction with the negative connotations attributed to abnormality as asserted by Foucault, Peter Elbow’s critique of binarism corroborates the hierarchical

nature of the concept: “Binary thinking almost always builds in dominance or privilege- sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly” (1993, p. 51). The hierarchal nature of normative binarism in the societal arrangement inevitably brings forth the “normalizing judgment” (Foucault, 1995, p. 170). The term refers to a form of practice embodying the juxtaposition of the individuals and assessment of them based on the norm and placement of them in the hierarchical order, exposing the abnormals in the process. The normalizing judgment, thus, establishes the “penalty” and “the power of the Norm” (Foucault, 1995, pp. 183-185). In keeping with the panopticism pervading every aspect of society, “the judges of normality are present everywhere”; and the domination of the normativity depends on it (Foucault, 1995, p. 304). Predictably, according to Foucault, the normative judgment is not concerned with a crime in a conventional understanding but reinterprets the term.

(...) the sentence, even if it is always formulated in terms of legal punishment, implies, more or less obscurely, judgements of normality, (...) And the sentence that condemns or acquits is not simply a judgement of guilt, a legal decision that lays down punishment; it bears within it an assessment of normality and a technical prescription for a possible normalization (Foucault 1995, pp. 20-21).

The judgment of normality is inextricably connected to the assessment of failure to meet the norms throughout history. Foucault traces the practices back to the 18th and 19th centuries: the focus on sexuality had shifted from what was legal and allowed to the deviance and perversion from the normative sexuality. As a result, those who did not fit the norm were branded as “perverts”, and with it came the satisfaction of power to judge and categorise. Foucault also notes that societies’ hypercriticism meant that the ‘judges’ indulged in perversion while restricting the

spaces of 'allowed' perversion (1990, pp. 35-52). This bears an uncanny resemblance to the Jezebel's in Gilead, and the closed doors of the Commanders' study rooms. To recall Foucault's soldier analogy within the context of failure to meet the norms:

The soldier commits an 'offence' whenever he does not reach the level required; a pupil's 'offence' is not only a minor infraction, but also an inability to carry out his tasks. The regulations for the Prussian infantry ordered that a soldier who had not correctly learnt to handle his rifle should be treated with the 'greatest severity' (Foucault, 1995, p. 179).

With that insight in mind, the basis for segregation in Gilead can be read more accurately: women who had their tubes tied are forced into endless servitude as Marthas; the feminist activists of the old times are branded as Unwomen and shipped off to the colonies to clean up radioactive waste until they die along with the Handmaids who fail to conceive in an allocated time. The Econo-class are forced into physical labor in exchange for their lives, and the failure to meet the (arbitrarily) set standards for each class means execution. Ultimately, Aunt Lydia advises, "Think of [being in Gilead] as being in the army" (Atwood, 2017, p. 16). As Cavalcanti also argues, "Dressing according to a rigidly assigned colour code publicly marks the status of women, and those who do not fit into this social grid are forced into life risking work" (2000, p. 166). Through their strict colour-coded clothes, it becomes easier to identify and assess people: a woman clad in red cannot step outside her dedicated walking path without being detected by one of the Guardians posted on every corner. Furthermore, an Econowife cannot mix in with the Commanders' Wives, nor a Martha could be mistaken for an Aunt. The urban spaces and daily habits in Gilead are shaped around the strict class division of the state as well. Offred notes that one can never see a Commander's Wife on the sidewalk as they only ride

in cars (Atwood, 2017, p. 39); and “even at Prayvaganzas there are different galleries for different classes” (p. 209). Furthermore, the colours come to define the individuals: as Atwood herself reveals in the new preface, the blue comes to signify the purity while the red implies immorality and sin. Offred comments on one of the Marthas, Rita’s disdain for her: “But the frown isn’t personal: it’s the red dress she disapproves of, and what it stands for” (Atwood, 2017, p. 24). Similarly, even when Offred and Ofglen offer silent condolence to the widowed Econowives, “the first one scowls at us. One of the others turns aside, spits on the sidewalk” (p. 56). Significantly, the condolence is silent, because the subjects of Gilead are not to talk with each other, even Handmaids walking in pairs are forced to whisper in secret.

Hannah Arendt regards segregation of the masses and the transformation of the crowds into masses as a distinctive characteristic of totalitarian regimes. Arendt describes the segregated masses as “a colossal herd, obedient to the arbitrary will of one man, ruled neither by law nor interest, but kept together solely by the cohesive force of their numbers and the conviction of their own holiness.” Her definition implies a lack of individuality and autonomy: a group of people de-subjectified and merged into an all-encompassing class. Arendt further examines the masses and argues that masses stem from societies where individuals are isolated, cut off from one another, subsequently forming a mass rather than a society in solidarity (1973, p. 248). Poulantzas also claims that the inability of certain classes to assert their hegemony and the inability to form allegiance characterize totalitarianism (1974, p. 72). This bears a striking resemblance to the Gileadean example of Marthas and Econowives scorning one another. Offred even remarks that the bodies hanging from the Wall are warnings and that they should be despised: “What we are supposed to feel towards these bodies is hatred and scorn” (Atwood, 2017 p. 48).

Arendt shows that in masses, individuals are insignificant, they are only valuable in serving the state ideology. Her study offers two examples from the Nazi and Bolshevik regimes to illustrate the point. Similar to Gilead in an aim to obliterate the old regime and establish a new one, Stalin had created a new mass that identifies with his ideology to overthrow Lenin's directorship and establish a totalitarian regime in its stead (1973, pp. 319-323). Arendt refers to the process as the "liquidation of classes" (p. 320); similar to Arendt's chronicle of this occurrence in two totalitarian regimes, Gilead liquidated the classes of old America (the working class, white-collars, etc.) and instead reorganized the society into classes such as the Econo-class, the elite Commanders, Handmaids, Marthas, etc. as a swift and effective way to transform America into Gilead. Arendt recounts that in Lenin's time peasants were the most prominent, and their liquidation, as a consequence, "was more thorough and more cruel [sic] than that of any other group and was carried through by artificial famine and deportation under the pretext of expropriation of the kulaks and collectivization" (p. 320). The equivalent of gulags in Gilead, the Colonies further attest to Arendt's account: the feminism activists are the most radical opposers of the movement, and as a result, they have gotten the worst liquidation. Offred also remembers a film of women in the Colonies cleaning up deadly waste as a cautionary tale to the Handmaids planning on transgressing, and that is how she finds out about her mother's demise. Finally, Arendt establishes a poignant connection between the gulags, and their lasting effects on the citizens who remain, and how they serve to affirm and fortify the state power while obstructing alliances between citizens.

Those who were not among the many millions of dead or the millions of deported slave laborers had learned "who is master here," had realized that

their lives and the lives of their families depended not upon their fellow-citizens but exclusively on the whims of the government which they faced in complete loneliness without any help whatsoever from the group to which they happened to belong (1973, p. 320).

Fontana and Bertani's foreword to Foucault's *Society Must be Defended* establishes a kind of "uninterrupted dialogue" between Marx and Foucault (2003, p. 277). With that connection in mind, it is worth noting that Marx and Engels placed immense emphasis on class divisions; their formulations intersect with Arendt's theory exemplified with Nazis and Bolsheviks. Marx and Engels claim that society is arranged into various orders, but a relationship between the "oppressor and the oppressed" always remains (1992, p. 32). Furthermore, according to their theory, families who live under different economic conditions are separated in their lifestyle and culture from others, and they are made hostile to one another (1950, p. 303). Identically, in *Gilead* subjects cannot act on their interests and there is an irreparable rift and hostility between the classes. Moreover, a similarly close dialogue between Foucault and Baudrillard examines "a purifying obsession of power" (Gomes, 2016, p. 71). Similar to how Arendt demonstrates her point in reference to the history of totalitarianism, Gomes also points out that Nazism and Stalinism are the pinnacles of Foucaultian bio-politics which are concerned with purity (2016, p. 71).

For Foucault, one of the consequences of bio-power is the emphasis placed on the norm. This development brings about the castigating power of the norm: "[the norm's] arm, par excellence, is death; to those who transgress it, it replies, at least as a last resort, with that absolute menace" (1990, p. 144). Furthermore, in conjunction with the power of the norm, it is worth noting that those deemed abnormal and segregated accordingly are doomed to the same demise: "the 'shameful' class existed

only to disappear” (Foucault, 1995, p. 182). This is also what Baudrillard would regard as the “strategic organization of life that starts from death” (1995, p. 76). Hence the abundant spectacles of death penalty that come to be the quintessential zeitgeist of Gilead find both its justification and its sustenance in the norm. The de-subjectification of the abnormal means “putting them in some way outside the law in such a way that anyone could kill them, even if no one was actually designated as the executioner” (Foucault, 2015, p. 10). Hence the dissidents are driven out of society, stripped of their rights, and ‘illegalized’; simultaneously legalizing the maltreatment they receive on the grounds that they are the enemies of the state.

It is crucial to discuss the term “enemy” before relating it to the politics of Gilead. According to Foucault, the enemies to be disposed of “are not adversaries in the political sense of the term; they are threats, either external or internal, to the population and for the population. “Killing, then, is acceptable when it is to eliminate the threats to a species or race” (2003, p. 256). The abnormal, that is the enemy, becomes the threat within the borders, and the solution is “a racism that society will direct against itself, against its own elements and its own products. This is the internal racism of permanent purification” (Foucault, 2003, p. 62).

Derrida offers a similar definition of the enemy in relation to the death penalties.

What, then, is an enemy of the nation? (...) question of the death penalty is not a question of life or death, of the difference between living and dying, or even between killing and not killing; rather it is a question of the different ways the state has of affirming its sovereignty by disposing of the life of certain subjects, foreign subjects (the enemy soldier, sometimes the enemy civilian) but also its

own soldiers sent to the front or even condemned to death in wartime for treason or desertion (2017, p. 38).

It is often mentioned by various characters that Gilead has prevailed in the Civil War, yet the State is engaged in ongoing international battles. In what is ‘officially’ designated as war efforts, the Elites of Gilead dispose of criminal dissidents by forcing them into cleaning up the radioactive leftovers of war on Gileadean soil for treason. On a smaller scale, in order to ration during the allegedly ceaseless wars, less food tokens are distributed, and certain foods are reserved exclusively for the families of the Commanders. While Offred’s accounts reveal that the Waterford household enjoys rare and expensive delicacies such as exotic fruits and rare meat consistently, the Econoclass are driven to near starvation. One could only speculate the diet of the abnormal-turned-clean-up workers in the Colonies, though it is quite non-objectionable to assume that some of the prisoner/workers may succumb to hunger and thirst before the radiation sickness.

Foucault further claims that the elimination of “the sub-race, the counter-race that we are, despite ourselves, bringing into existence” (p. 61); elimination “of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer” (2003, p. 255). Hence, “massacres have become vital” (Foucault, 1990, p. 137). The power to commit massacres assumes authority and addresses the fears of the society to justify its deindividualization. Thus, the persecution of the undesired abnormals finds its rationale in State sanctioned lies which ultimately become the widely-accepted facts of its society:

It claimed to ensure the physical vigor and the moral cleanliness of the social body; it promised to eliminate defective individuals, degenerate and bastardized populations. In the name of a biological and historical urgency, it justified the racisms of the state, which at the time were on the horizon. It grounded them in “truth” (Foucault, 1990, p. 54).

The previously mentioned association of Foucault’s biopower and the elimination policies with the Aryan politics of the Third Reich is also present in Agamben’s work as the chronicle of the Third Reich’s transformation of prisons into death camps (1998, pp. 166-181). Not unlike the public executions in and the Colonies of the Gilead, according to Agamben, “the juridico-political system transforms itself into a killing machine (2005, p. 86)”; and “the [concentration/death] camp is merely the place in which the most absolute “*conditio inhumana*” that has ever existed on earth was realized” (1998, p. 166).

Linda Kauffman’s analysis of *The Handmaid’s Tale* asserts that “Gilead strips women of their individuality, categorising them hierarchically according to class status and reproductive capacity” (1989, p. 237). This resonates with Arendt’s observation of the totalitarian regimes where “(...) character is a threat and even the most unjust legal rules are an obstacle; but individuality, anything indeed that distinguishes one man from another, is intolerable” (1973, p. 457). In Gilead, one man distinguished from the other is impossible when they all wear uniforms, act, speak, and think the same within the same social circles they are confined in. Pamela Cooper further details the strictly uniform society of Gilead with the naming system of the Handmaids: “Handmaids’ generic name, “O” (for Offred, Ofglen — compounds of the preposition “of and the name of a Handmaid’s Commander)”, suggests the impossible contradiction of their selfhood” (1997, p. 102). Though

accurate, it is inadequate to investigate the atrocities committed only with the female victims in mind. As Alyssa Malcorps responds to Kauffman's analysis:

However, the categorisation of society goes much further than that. For example, men are also categorised and standardised. The categories applicable to men are fewer and they are given the opportunity to move up from one caste to another. For women, however, it is impossible to move up in society (2018, p. 25).

Whilst correct on the women, this analysis is only partially true regarding men. In Gilead, only men within the regime are allowed to move up *within* the ranks of Commander; although Guardians can be given Handmaids, they are never granted the rank of Commander. The direst of all, Econoclass, both men and women, are completely barred from social mobility and forced into immense poverty and extreme labour. When Agnes and Nicole are on their way out of Gilead, they travel from the pristine dwellings of the upper echelons into the 'depths' of the state where the Econoclass are confined to. The two sisters are surprised to find out that the houses are in disrepair, most of them are in the dark, with only a few having dim light coming out of them.

The bus wasn't full; everyone on it was Econoclass. We were on the scenic route, winding along the coast, but it wasn't all that scenic. There were a lot of closed-down motels and roadside restaurants, and more than one big red smiling lobster that was falling apart. As we went north, the friendliness decreased: there were angry looks, and I had the feeling that our Pearl Girls mission and even the whole Gilead thing was leaking popularity. No one spat at us, but they scowled as if they would like to (Atwood, 2019, p. 358).

A similar disdain for the Handmaids is also shown to the privileged members of the society. Rightfully so, as their grotesquely extravagant lifestyle is a figurative insult to the struggles of those in reduced circumstances. For example, Agnes has a wardrobe change to match the season, she remarks that while the “rule” is to wear pristine, colourful dresses with trims and collars “for special girls like us. Ordinary girls from Econofamilies wore the same thing all the time—those ugly multicoloured stripes and grey cloaks, like the clothes of their mothers” (p. 11). She also remarks that a young girl wear spring green dresses to signal she is ready for marriage, however, “Econofamilies were not allowed such extravagances (...)” (p. 160). As the half-sisters travel out of the ‘heart’ of Gilead and into the Econoclass sphere, the realities that the Commanders, Aunts, and Wives try to gloss over and conceal are bared. Gilead is a grueling, hostile and deadly space for anyone that was not a part of the Sons of Jacob prior to the coup. Econoclass suffers regardless of gender: their roads are fallen out of repair, the scenery is depressing, the whole area is decrepit.⁵ As Nicole notes, the unfair division of funds means that the roads in the northern side of Gilead are left unrepaired in favour of the more seen and used roads of the cities of Commanders, Aunts, and Wives. Cooper dubs Handmaids Gilead’s “invisible” class (1997, p. 101), but the same must be valid for the Econoclass as well. They are relegated to the slums where they are overworked for the benefit of the upper class of the state; they are rarely seen in the upper class districts, if at all. Offred only notes seeing them twice: once in a funeral procession, and second in a prayvaganza where

⁵ The third episode of the second season of the TV adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, created by Bruce Miller for MGM Television/Hulu shows Offred attempting to escape Gilead, taken in by an Econofamily. The episode features the poor condition of the class who live in the extremely polluted side of the state and in dilapidated apartment buildings. There is almost no landscaping or foliage; everyone wears dull and ratty outfits that are more rags than proper clothes; and the depressing scenery is topped off with people hurrying about from their assigned factories to their houses while being under constant surveillance by the Guardians. The family that harbors Offred is detected by the Guardians and executed along with their child in the end. Last but not least, in the show, Offred only sees the Econoclass people when she steps foot in their district, otherwise they are completely invisible in the upper echelon premises.

they are distanced from the rest of the attendees. Nicole notices the boarded-up buildings and smashed windows where Econoclass dwell, and the store they are supposed to stop by is in a state of disrepair and “smell[s] like burnt toast and feet” (p. 359). The man working the counter is open in his disdain towards the Pearl Girls as well, and the ‘washroom’ he points the girls to change in turns out not to be one at all, but an old, barely standing outside shed. Nicole notes the awful taste of the day's old coffee served, and how even the sugar made the taste worse (p. 360), whereas in the Ardua Hall's Schlafly Café, Aunts and visitors are served warm milk, herbal tea, and relatively fresh delicacies in exchange for tokens. The diet of the Econoclass is demonstrably horrifying compared to the cuisine of the Commanders: fake, chemical substitutes of cheese and chewy, mock pastries are luxuries for the Econoclass whilst the dwellings of the Commanders are filled with authentic bakery goods, meat, and desserts. Agnes grew up in one such home, and Offred also notes the rare and expensive fruits she gets to buy, and meat upper-crust food prepared by the Marthas of the Waterford house.

The man working the counter treats the siblings better after Agnes tells him the ‘code’ signifying that they are the ‘packages’ to be taken out the state. The new resistance web stretching from Canada to Gilead that smuggles people out is revealed to have almost more male agents than females within their ranks. Peter Baehr's exposition of a quieter, clandestine resistance fits the men risking death to smuggle people into Canada: “(...) to engage in what Riesman called “resistance quiescences”: those “quieter modes of resistance” in which people bow their heads in mock mental obeisance but refuse “to internalize the system's ethical norms” (Baehr, 2010, p. 49). Not every man within Gilead is complicit in the oppressive politics, some even fight against it, for example, men like Waterford's chauffeur—who is

revealed to be an Eye working for Mayday (Atwood, 2019, p. 259)—, Nick, Mayday operatives like Nicole’s adoptive “parents” and the men she meets at the headquarters following their death, the bus driver, bar owner, and the boat captain who help the siblings escape Gilead fight against the state’s totalitarian politics. It could even be speculated that some Commanders are not wholehearted supporters of the regime: Commander Waterford showed himself to be willing to break the strict rules set upon Handmaids by letting them into his study and taking them out to Jezebel’s. It is mentioned then and again that Commanders and sometimes their entire households are salvaged, and paired with the fact that Aunt Lydia has repeatedly collaborated with Commander Judd to prevent the disclosure of the real ‘crimes’ of some of the Gileadens so as not to ruin the perfect image of the state or plant the seeds of dissidence into other minds (Atwood, 2017, p. 267 & 2019, pp. 275-278 & pp. 292-294), the possibility of even some Commanders being involved in the Mayday operations must be considered. Offred also mentions that the influential Commanders and their Wives are only ever salvaged for the three most severe crimes: murdering a Handmaid, adultery, and escaping Gilead. More concretely, when the half-siblings share their concern with the man serving the coffee about someone recognizing them and reporting them to the authorities, the man discloses that “People around here don’t talk to the Eyes, (...) We don’t like snoops” (Atwood, 2019, p. 368). Not everyone in Gilead is completely collaborative and happy with the regime. Especially people victimized by its practices who are pushed outside the city into abhorrent living conditions, left to survive on their own are disillusioned with the lies of the State and engage in seditious actions against Gilead. Significantly, men risk death to actively take part in the Mayday operations within the city. Though, unfortunately, as Arendt would argue: “The strength of even

the strongest individual can always be overpowered by the many (...)” (2014, p. 42). In one of the Particutions Offred and Ofglen partake in, they kill a Guard who is announced by Aunt Lydia to have raped and killed a pregnant Handmaid along with her baby. Ofglen reveals to Offred that the alleged rapist was a part of Mayday (Atwood, 2017, p. 267). Identically, Lydia reveals in her tell-all Holograph biography that a Particuted man who had been condemned for selling contraband lemons had not actually committed the crime.

(...) He'd been accused of taking bribes from Mayday and aiding several Handmaids in their successful flights across our various borders. But the Commanders did not want this fact publicized: it would give people ideas. The official line was that there were no corrupt Angels, and certainly no fleeing Handmaids; for why would one renounce God's kingdom to plunge into the flaming pit? (Atwood, 2019, p. 275).

In a similar spectacle by the Wall after a Salvaging, Offred notices bodies of men wearing white coats, like those worn by doctors. The placards hanging from their necks have drawings of a human foetus. Offred, then, remarks on the swift and decisive changes in the norm, as well as the extent of measures the state takes in enforcing them: “They were doctors, then, in the time before, when such things were legal. (...) These men, we've been told, are like war criminals. It's no excuse that what they did was legal at the time: their crimes are retroactive” (Atwood, 2017, pp. 47-48). Normative judgment and public executions threaten Gileadeans of all ages and genders. Gilead is swift to execute anyone who does not meet their new standards for “normality”. In the early days of the state, Jews were given the choice to either emigrate to Israel or convert, those who stayed and did not convert thoroughly and convincingly for Gilead's standards are also executed when caught.

Overall, it is common for men to be executed in Gilead; their lives are neither safer nor more comfortable than Gileadean women. They are subjected to the same strict normative judgment, and they face the same death penalty in case of failure. Offred is familiarized with the sight of multiple male corpses hanging from the Wall quite early on. She walks by the old Harvard, now a trial and execution ground, and notices the new bodies hanging regularly.

Beside the main gateway there are six more bodies hanging, by the necks, their hands tied in front of them, their heads in white bags tipped sideways onto their shoulders. There must have been a Men's Salvaging early this morning. (...) It doesn't matter if we look. We're supposed to look: this is what they are there for, hanging on the Wall. Sometimes they'll be there for days, until there's a new batch, so as many people as possible will have the chance to see them (Atwood, 2017, pp. 46-47).

Perhaps one of the most important testaments to horrors common, underprivileged men face in Gilead is the leader of the Survivors of Gilead National Homelands Genocide. Nicole attends a march against Gilead in Canada, and the leader speaks out against Gilead and the inhumane conditions, and about how people walk in the winter and risk death to cross border and escape. He talks about being a survivor himself, and, strikingly, he holds up his hand to show the missing fingers due to frostbite (Atwood, 2019, p. 51). Identically, Captain Mishimengo has two fingers missing (p.377) and is revealed to be a Gileadean who escaped through the Canadian border (p.381), and now he risks death to smuggle more people out of the state, including the half-sisters. In light of these men's experiences, a question arises: if all men are the privileged, the comfortable, and the safe group of the Gilead population, why would they risk the extremely dangerous and even deadly route of

walking to the Canadian border? Another clue to the high numbers of Gileadeans escaping, both men and women can be deduced from Lydia's biography: "Gilead has a long-standing problem, my reader: for God's kingdom on earth, it's had an embarrassingly high emigration rate. The seepage of our Handmaids, for instance: too many have been slipping away" (p. 112). Aunt Lydia's account implies that although the numbers of Handmaids escaping are quite high, they are not the only ones fleeing the state.

As there are men who subvert the assumptions by refusing to be complicit in the state's politics (and getting severely punished for it as a consequence), there are also women who are not only victims but also victimizers. Michael Foley connects the strict class division policy of the state, which he calls "Regime's policy of divide and conquer" and claims that all the oppressed women respond to the oppression in their way, which, more often than not, involves victimizing others (1990, p. 51). After all, as J. Romains quoted in Sartre would claim: "There are no innocent victims" (1987, p. 56). According to Foley, Aunt Lydia is a "privileged collaborator with the Regime" who denies that she is a victim and simultaneously forces Handmaids to do the same. She is also the mastermind behind the laws regarding the Red Centres and is in charge of everything related to Handmaids as appointed by Commander Judd. Furthermore, the fact that she repeatedly lies about the crimes of men Particulated, as well as concealing the true reason why girls commit suicide so often to avoid arranged marriages coincides with Foley's interpretation of her role in the regime, as part of the regime.

So closely does Lydia identify with the Regime that she becomes, in fact, its coercive voice in the mind of the Narrator, who always refers to her as "Aunt Lydia," thereby reminding the reader of the oppressive role traditionally played

so often by older female relatives in the social conditioning of young women (Foley, 1990, p. 52).

Foley's reading of Lydia echoes Versluis' study on the fanatic masses of totalitarian regimes. Versluis' inspection into religious fanaticism shows that those who radically identify with the religious movement perpetuate the class division and willingly take part in persecuting the others deemed abnormal.

"I" become infallible by way of identifying with a particular fixed set of dogmas and with the division of humanity into friends and enemies, us and them: "Our" side is always right; "their" side is of the devil, so fundamentally wrong that one can only detest them. Once one acquiesces in such a view, one is well on the way to becoming a persecutor, be it religious or political (2006, p. 142).

Staels similarly argues that Aunts "save their skins" by collaborating with the regime in training Handmaids and enforcing the rules (1995, p. 455). Becker's reading of Munro echoes the same sentiment, as it emphasizes the significant contribution of the Aunts to the regime by imposing the totalitarian regime of the state over women.

Women's collaboration with patriarchal power structures. Her irony in the aunts' appreciation of (female) negation anticipates women's collaboration with a totalitarian system in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), where the 'Aunts' enact and enforce male control over women's lives, mind and bodies (Munro quoted in Becker, 1999, p. 179).

Some critics even label Aunts Lydia and Elizabeth as "sadist[s]" (Mouda, 2012, p. 3 & Rajalakshmi, 2019, p. 257); and Mihaela Roibu detects a "sadistic

touch” (2018, p. 78) in the narrative of Gilead that is undisputedly a creation of collaboration. Recent commentaries on *The Handmaid’s Tale* affirm the notion that some women are contributors of the regime, with Aunts and Wives widely regarded as the centrepieces alongside the Commanders.

It's easy to rest the blame of the horrors of Gilead solely at the feet of men like Commander Fred Waterford. But no system this deeply entrenched and high functioning could survive without help. Fred and other Commanders need women (...) *The Handmaid’s Tale* is at its most potent when it interrogates the ways women participate in [exploitative] systems (...) (Bastién, 2017, quoted in Greenebaum & Merenstein, p. 176).

Supplementarily, Aunt Lydia confesses to participation in Gilead’s atrocities in her autobiography. Reflecting upon the Aunts’ role in the appalling crimes of the state, she admits that “(...) among these bloody fingerprints are those made by ourselves, and these can’t be wiped away so easily” (Atwood, 2019, p. 4).

Foley also argues that Serena Joy bears her humiliation and oppression, and in turn, channelises her anger and frustration to Offred rather than the responsible ones (p. 55). Indeed, when she finds out about Fred and Offred’s visit to the Jezebel’s, she is furious and swears revenge on Offred instead of her husband. Foley asserts that although Serena realizes the tough condition she is in now that the Old America is gone, she has helped to create the totalitarian life of Gilead in the first place (1990, p. 53). In seemingly rare but nevertheless extremely disturbing instances, women stray from the frame of passive victimizers and take on the mantle of murderers. Marthas in the Waterford household gossip about a wife who had “stabbed [her pregnant Handmaid] with a knitting needle, right in the belly. Jealousy, it must have been, eating her up” (Atwood, 2017, p. 26). Agnes’ adoptive mother is also revealed to

have cheated on her husband, murdered him to marry Agnes's father for his higher station; and lied to her Handmaid to frame her for the crime, consequently getting her executed (2019, pp. 201-203). It is also significant to note the delay in the surfacing of Agnes' stepmother's crimes. Only years after the framing of the Handmaid and the murder of the Commander that Aunt Lydia allows Agnes to read the file documenting Paula's felonies. Aunt Lydia's intentions in revealing the crime to Agnes are insidious: she plans to gain Agnes' trust and to persuade her into doing her bidding. Agnes reads through the detailed account of Paula's elimination of her then-husband, and laments about the detailed transcript of the interrogation and brutal torture of the captured, innocent Handmaid:

The Aunts had known the truth. Or at least one of them had known. There was the evidence, right in the folder in front of me. Yet nothing had happened to Paula. And a Handmaid had been hanged for the crime instead (Atwood, 2019, p. 203).

Aunt Lydia embodies a dangerous dichotomy of victim-victimizer. As the earlier paragraphs of this chapter illustrate, in her determination to survive from the early days of Gilead until the very end of her autobiography, she lies, manipulates, and willingly sends innocent people to their gruesome deaths in order to endure and prevail. Although Doctor Grove had abused Becka, Lydia devises a plan to frame him for a more dishonourable offence to have him executed. Since Aunts are supposed to be "sacrosanct", she tricks Aunt Elizabeth into using her theatre experience from the college to display a shocking scene of attempted rape at the doctor's office, complete with her torn clothes, which she shredded herself (Atwood, 2019, p. 275). In the face of torture by the Eyes and death by Particicution, the dentist's assistant is also forced to give false testimony against him, and in a jury

made exclusively of Aunts, his testimony was more effective than Doctor Grover's. Lydia also admits that she had sneakily captured photographs of Aunt Elizabeth that she could use as a safeguard by claiming that she was lying in case Elizabeth would "ever attempt to slip the leash" (p. 276). This is not the only instance, however, as Lydia, throughout her holographs details how she calculates ways to gather blackmail material on Aunts, Commanders, and Wives to secure her place and gain more power over other Aunts, whom she sees as tools for her plans. Nicole also remembers that Lydia was depicted by the deep-cover Mayday agents as "having been both ruthless and cunning" (p. 410). Ultimately, Lydia admits the satisfaction that comes from intimidating everyone around her through manipulation and extortion: "I had tightened my grip over Ardua Hall and had leveraged it to acquire the extensive though silent power in Gilead that I now enjoy" (p. 178).

Lydia's ploys and nonchalance to the harm that may befall those involved in them, and her constant attempts at justifying the atrocities she either committed willingly or let others do so resemble Arendt's report on Adolf Eichmann's trial at Jerusalem. One of the key architects of the Holocaust in WW2, Eichmann fervently defended himself by claiming to have only carried out his duties, and he was only a "small cog" (Arendt, 2006, p. 57) in the system. The systematic theatre of cruelty was "the new law of the land, based on the Fuhrer's order;" and those orders had "possessed "the force of law" in the Third Reich" (p. 24). Eichmann, in turn, regarded himself as a "law-abiding citizen" who was only doing his duty, "he not only obeyed *orders*, he also obeyed the *law* [emphasis not mine]" (p. 135). What Arendt finds worse is that Eichmann was not a fanatical anti-Semitic, that he had plenty of reasons for not subscribing to anti-Semitism, only that he was surrounded with Jew haters. (p. 26) Ultimately, according to Arendt, Eichmann was a "joiner"

(p. 32); and one could argue that so is Lydia, and that is adequate to return a verdict of guilty. In reverberation to this study's reference to Arendt, Atwood comments on Lydia's complexity of character and her survival within the state:

How do you get to be a high-ranking person within a totalitarian dictatorship? Either you're a true believer from the beginning, at which point you're probably going to get purged later on, or you're an opportunist. Or it can be fear, or it can be a combination of all of them. I would put fear as No. 1: If I don't do this, I will be killed. Aunt Lydia's always been a climber, so she climbed up. She's not easily disturbed (...) (Atwood, 2019, para. 30-31).

An effortless line could be drawn between the testimony of Eichmann on how the Third Reich operated, and why he must be absolved, and how Gilead operates, in which, identically, (often merciless and brutal) orders from the Commanders and Aunts carry the utmost authority, and how Lydia attempts to justify her crimes. Discovered inside a hollowed-out copy of Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Latin for A Defence of One's Life, fittingly, and titled by the fictional scholars of Gilead's history as *The Ardua Hall Holograph*, Lydia's autobiography is an almost desperate attempt to exonerate herself. Atwood's comments on the nature of writing and the motives of writers coincide with the ulterior motives of Lydia: "For whom does the writer write?" Atwood then follows up with an answer: "Only very occasionally is the answer specifically no one" (2009, p. 124). Hence, as Offred also admits, "But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else" (Atwood, 2017, p. 52). Then the next question, which crucially concerns both Offred and Lydia, asks: "If you don't sell [what you have written], and what do you hope to get in return? (...) If a writer gets this kind of power, at what point can he be said to be misusing

it?” (Atwood, 2009, p. 104). Surely, the heroines claim their recordings are for posterity, but the truth is more sinister than that. Lydia, just like Eichmann, aims to acquit herself, absolve her image by presenting a re-telling of the story that would self-servingly paint her in a better light while shifting the blame to the fellow Aunts, Commanders, Wives, and even Handmaids. Lydia details the cruel practices she has helped invent and carried out readily; starting from the very first moment of her ‘career’ as an Aunt when she picked up the rifle and shot at the women lined up at the stadium, she justifies her actions by maintaining that she was only obeying the rules and laws of Gilead, simply carrying out her duties. Though she claims she acted out on the order of Commander Judd, and she had to shoot at the women to starting her initiation into Aunthood, the women, some of whom were former friends and colleagues of Lydia, faced the firing squad because they indeed, unlike Lydia, refused to shoot at others (p.171).

Although not as active in the politics of Gilead as Lydia, Offred is also criticized to be a “joiner”; a passive ‘enabler’, and a collaborator of the regime. Likewise, Wagner-lawlor refers to her as the “problematic heroine” (2003, p. 83). Identical to Lydia, Offred is determined that “[she] intend[s] to last” (Atwood, 2017, p. 22). While her predicament may paint her as an indisputable victim at first glance, some critics explore a more sinister side to the Handmaid. Neuman warns the readers of Offred’s elusory, sinister nature and details it in terms of the autonomy she often omits from her narrative, and, similar to Lydia, the pleasure she gets from the power she holds over people:

We must be wary, however, of the impulse to make an unmitigated heroine of the novel’s Offred. Her desire to survive and to know comes with a necessary degree of complicity and a tendency to relapse. (...) Offred specifically accepts

the element of complicitous choice in her situation. Lying on her back, she reasons: ‘Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven’t signed up for. There wasn’t a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose’ (88). She also recognizes and acknowledges her enjoyment of her own small exercises of power, however ignoble: her sexual teasing of the Guardians at the checkpoint, her slight power not only over the Commander, because he wants something from her, but over his wife, (...) She comes to understand that the Commander craves some unspoken forgiveness for the conditions of her life and that to bestow or to withhold forgiveness is ‘a power, perhaps the greatest’ (126) (2012, pp. 75-76).

Identically, Wagner-lawlor also criticizes Offred claiming that she was “politically complacent before the Gileadean takeover-thus to some degree complicitous in it.” Furthermore, the study finds her narrative “too artful and self-consciously constructed” which renders it indifferent, trivialising even (2003, p. 83). As is the case with Lydia’s autobiography, the carefully and the self-consciously constructed narratives of selves can be argued to highlight the predicaments and the victimhood of the heroines, thus being self-serving and deceiving in nature.

According to Atwood, the victim positions are not fixed, and the first position coincides with the victimizer women of Gilead. The distinct feature of victim position number one is that one pretends “that certain visible facts do not exist.” This position is taken usually by the victims who are more privileged, or are “better off than the others in that group.” They are afraid to acknowledge their victimization in fear of losing the privileges, and they are forced into diminishing and trivialising the disadvantages and hardships the rest of the members of the group suffer (2013, p.

36). Atwood further explains the mindset by offering a hypothetical voice from one such victim.

As in: “/ made it, therefore it’s obvious we aren’t victims. The rest are just lazy (or neurotic, or stupid); anyway it’s their own fault if they aren’t happy, look at all the opportunities available for them!” If anger is felt by victims in Position One, it is likely to be directed against one’s fellow--victims, particularly those who try to talk about their victimization (p. 36).

Just like Aunt Lydia, and even before she has earned her place within the regime as an enforcer of the norms and the all-seeing eye, Aunt Vidala has been playing the role of victim in position number one, and the victimizer. Lydia remarks that while the newly-recruited women were welcomed by Commander Judd in their makeshift clothes, Aunt Vidala stood by the Commander in her all-black, proper outfit with a smile: “Whatever he was persuading us about was already an accepted creed to her” (Atwood, 2019, p. 173).

A further illustration of the Gileadean women as the victimizers through close identification with the regime and enforcement of the normative judgment is their tendency to do ‘victim-blaming’. According to Cowan, women’s victim-blaming and rape myths target the victim instead of the perpetrator; and women who participate in victim-blaming also participate in the “the maintenance of a rape culture.”

Furthermore, “women, sometimes surprisingly, support the mythologies that support the violence” (2000, pp. 238-239). To build upon the victim-blaming phenomena, Burt also claims that women who support the rape myths create an aggressive and antagonistic environment for the victims. Her examples of the myths include “only bad girls get raped”; “any healthy woman can resist a rapist if she really wants to (...)” (1980, p. 217). Ultimately, Burt’s affirmation of multiple studies on victim-

blaming (Calhoun et al., 1976; Lerner et al., 1976; Smith et al., 1976) suggest that this mindset “blame[s] the victims for their own victimization” (p. 217).

This resonates with a common practice in Gilead. The Handmaids are forced to circle around Janine in the Rachel and Leah Center, and chant “her fault; she led them on” following her confession of having been raped as a teenager (Atwood, 2017, p. 18 & 32). Identically, Becka warns Agnes not to charm and seduce men, because if she does, what happens afterward is her fault (Atwood, 2019, p. 327). Consequently, after her repeated sexual abuse at the dentist’s office, Becka is terrified to report the doctor in fear of being blamed, and even worse, punished for it. The Gileadean tendency to further victimize the victim coincides with Foucault’s individualized fascism. According to him “the major enemy” is not only the historical fascism but also the “fascism that is ingrained in our behavior (...) fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (2004, p. xiii). Though it must be noted that in Gilead’s situation, the love and desire one feels for power may not come from within, but could be a result of the excessive brainwashing and indoctrinations. Except for the highest-ranking Commanders and Aunts, the privileged ones of the state, no subject is allowed autonomy in Gilead. Offred even remarks that although the transgression of the household women is the Wives’ jurisdiction, it is clear that it is not so by choice, but by the law and order, though one could always choose mercy and compassion over victimization. Offred also notes following the remark that “[Serena Joy] was a malicious and vengeful woman” (Atwood, 2017, p. 161); and that certainly is by choice. Similarly, Aunt Lydia is disturbed by Vidala’s viciousness. Vidala spearheads the invention of brutal punishments in Gilead, and according to Lydia, she is secretly upset that “that

fingernail ripping and evisceration are not on our list of chastisements [for the fugitive Handmaids]” anymore (Atwood, 2019, p. 113). Significantly, Commander Judd resigns the governance of the Red Centres and all aspects of regulating Handmaids to the Aunts with much protest from Vidala, who echoes Judd in saying that women are not to be trusted with such duties; only taking credit for the concepts he has liked (pp. 176-177). Despite the freedom, Vidala chooses violence and terror as the zeitgeist of the Aunthood, and her colleagues follow in her footsteps. Although Becka and Agnes whisper in secret that they would do things differently, the strength of the many overpowers the few regardless of gender or station.

Aunt Vidala’s complete identification with the Commanders’ narratives, even occasionally appearing as more passionate and dedicated to them than the Commanders also indirectly contributes to the victimization of the Gileadean men. Just like the rape myths, Gilead’s strict normative order and panoptic enforcement of the normalizing judgment create the myth of the ideal Gileadean man. Girls are taught at school from a very young age, from colouring books to various lectures, that men are the intellectually superior ones; they are not to be meddling with anything related to women and femininity; they are to be husbands and live according to the norms and the laws of the State. Agnes remembers her father as one such man, and her approval of his emotional stiltedness illustrates the harm such impositions of norm may inflict: “[Commander Kyle]’d always had a wooden face, and anyway men were not supposed to display emotions in such ways as crying or even laughing out loud” (Atwood, 2019, p. 99). The archaic and eugenic normative masculinity of Gilead is not unique, however. Commonly referred to as ‘hegemonic masculinity’, the term is “normative,” and embodies the “most honored way of being a man,”; it forces all other men to shape and conduct themselves accordingly

(Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). The glorification, the “pageantry”, and imposition of it involve but are not limited to name-calling the abnormals for the aim of “criminalization of homosexual conduct” (Roberts, 1993, p. 177). Foucault also chronicles the criminalization of homosexuality, tracing its roots in Christian European societies where blasphemy (homosexuality, prostitution etc) was seen equal as vagrancy and unreason, and treated as deliberately chosen. Consequently, the immoral abnormals were separated from the society and subjected to punishment in order to extort conformity (2006, pp. xii-xxvii). In addition to Foucault’s chronicle, and eerily similar to Gilead’s politics, homosexual individuals were segregated and barbarically persecuted in Nazi Germany. For “purifying” reasons and national eugenism, mostly homosexual men in comparison to female homosexuals, were arrested and sent to the concentration camps where they were forced to wear huge pink triangles to identify themselves as gay, whereas lesbians were not targeted for their sexuality specifically—and along with prostitutes, alcoholics, nomads, and beggars—were considered “asocials” as opposed to “degenerates” and wore black stars instead (Carr, 2017-2018 & Elman, 1996 & Plant, 1988 & Heger, 1994). Last but not least, it is also argued that the divisions and segregations in men especially takes into account the abnormality, “especially the exclusion and subordination of homosexual men (..)”, even in modern times. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 837). The heteronormative victimization observed in Gilead indeed regards homosexuality as a preference, or choice and in response, the normative judgment firstly alienates them from the ‘normal’s of the society, and secondly, employs death penalty for the purge of the sinners. While it is already established that the harsh and inhumane practices are not exclusive to Handmaids or women and that segregation, extreme judgment, and punishments

target subjects of all age and gender, in this case, the normative victimization is more brutal and apparent in men than it is in women in Gilead similar to Nazi Germany. The only explicitly confirmed female gay character in the novel is Offred's friend, Moira (Atwood, 2017, p. 181), who ends up working at the Jezebel's despite her repeated attempts at escaping the State (confirmed repeatedly as a serious offense punishable by death), whereas The Wall displays an alternative demise that is severely haunting and disturbing than her's: "[The men's corpses] have purple placards hung around their necks: Gender Treachery. Their bodies still wear the Guardian uniforms. Caught together, they must have been, but where? A barracks, a shower?" (p. 55). Similarly dreadful, Offred also remarks that some men caught in homosexual conduct are condemned to the Colonies as well: "I'd say it's about a quarter men in the Colonies, too. Not all of those Gender Traitors end up on the Wall" (Atwood, 2017, p. 243). One might consider men who got Particicuted or hanged lucky in the face of an excruciatingly slow and agonizing death due to acute radiation syndrome at the Colonies; Offred certainly does so. After passing the Wall during her regular walks and seeing the signs of torture on the men's bodies, and later on by participating in Particicutions, she hopes that when they were captured, her husband, Luke, was shot fatally and died relatively easily instead of taken in and tortured to death by the Eyes:

I pray that at least one hole is neatly, quickly, and finally through the skull, (...) so that there would have been only the one flash, of darkness or pain, dull I hope, like the word thud, only the one and then silence (Atwood, 2017, p. 110).

The enforced normativity implemented with panoptic surveillance in every part of life coupled with the hegemonic masculinity creates male victims while

simultaneously trivialising their victimization. Multiple studies confirm similar causal links in multiple societies. Karen G. Weiss' extensive studies on the subject propose that first and foremost, "most prevalent studies focused their attention almost exclusively on female victims," and consequently, male victims have been ignored by "researchers and theorists" (2010, p. 276). Arttime et al.'s study refers to this as the "invisibility of men's victimization" (2014, p. 313). Weiss' study also affirms the rape myth while inverting it to explore it from the perspective of the male victims: "(...) cultural ideals and myths about gender and sexuality continue to influence perceptions about who can and can't be [abused]" (p. 287). From this point of view, the hegemonic masculinity insists that "The "real" men are not supposed to be victims" (p. 290). Weiss chronicles as an example that until the 1980s, most states in America excluded male victims by regarding rape as a crime strictly committed against women (2008, p. 276). Furthermore, the small number of men accepted as victims are subsequently subjected to verbal abuse for being "powerless or, more broadly, as having failed to live up to masculine ideals" (2010, p. 290) or perceived through "derogatory labels" for undermining "the dominant ideals of masculinity" (2008, p. 277). Needham relates this social observation to Gileadean practices: "Males are expected to conform to the religious, heteronormative ideals of Gilead as much as women are, the only difference is that males are granted greater 'power' by the Republic if they do so" (2015, pp. 13-14). Indeed, the common men in Gilead are not granted power solely based on their genders, they need to conform to the norms as well, and they are just as harshly punished when they are caught and deemed as dissidents. Offred remembers seeing a body wearing the religious garb on the Wall.

There are three new [men's corpses] on the Wall. One is a priest, still wearing the black cassock. That's been put on him, for the trial, even though they gave

up wearing those years ago, when the sect wars first began; cassocks made them too conspicuous (Atwood, 2017, p. 55).

Her account implies that the remaining practitioners and believers of religions outlawed by the State are still hunted, and when caught, or reported, disposed of. The panoptic structure of Gilead makes it nearly impossible for the abnormals to co-exist, and those who identify with the regime, regardless of gender, perpetuate the neverending ‘witch hunt’ that terrorizes the minorities and the nonconformists of Gilead. Two examples from the two novels stand out the most regarding women who align themselves with the regime and betray the men to the state. Firstly, Offred remarks that the doctors who performed abortions in America when it was legal but retroactively punished in Gilead were most likely told on by ex-nurses who worked as informants for the state (Atwood, 2017, p. 47). Secondly, Agnes fearfully refuses to wear jeans on grounds that it is ‘Gender Treachery’ and remembers that “last year a man had been hanged on the Wall for dressing in his Wife’s undergarments. She’d discovered him and turned him in, as was her duty” (2019, p. 337).

Ultimately, Cooper traces an “oppressive culture depicted in [The Handmaid’s Tale]” (1995, p. 53); Neuman argues that Gilead practices “state-sanctioned murder of dissidents” (2006, p. 859). Therefore, one could argue that the studies approaching the victimization of the Gileadeans from a female-only perspective are doomed to be inadequate and inaccurate. Life in Gilead is not easy for men either, though certainly they are not shown to suffer as much as women do. However, it must be kept in mind that both novels are narrated by women and the strict class division in Gilead makes it impossible for them to observe men and reach an accurate conclusion, or even witness their predicament in enough detail. As a result of that, the representation of the victimized men is quite limited to the very strict windows of the heroines keeping

memoirs. However, from what little is relayed, it is indisputable that men have their own challenges; their own set of equally dehumanizing and unrealistically strict norms to live up to and harsh punishments to face despite them not being as prevalent and statistically high from what the narrators witness. The monopoly of power to rule, judge, and execute, regardless of when, where, or by whom it is held, is bound to be corrupt. Though the logical solution to Gilead, at first glance, may be to eliminate the Commanders, it is crucial to consider what Aunts and Wives could do with what little power they held, and what more they are capable of. After all, in response to matriarchy as a replacement for patriarchy, the author herself had this to say: “If practical, hardline, anti-male feminists took over and became the government, I would resist them” (Atwood quoted in Meese, 1990, p. 183). In the end, it is not about men or women, but about the mentality, ethics, and the power and privilege one holds within any given regime or movement. In the words of John Dalberg-Acton: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (quoted in De Janosi, 1940, p. 316). Just as there are women who contribute to the totalitarian regime and victimize the less fortunate subjects of the State, there are men who silently resist and persevere; and in Gilead’s case, keeping the soul of old America and solidarity alive.

CONCLUSION

“A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.”

(William James quoted in Greene & Haidt, 2002, p.517)

The present thesis has endeavoured to contribute to the wide array of critical works and offer an alternative approach (philosophical and socio-political) to the characters and the fictional state of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. Because “When [Atwood] wrote ‘*The Handmaid's Tale*’, nothing went into it that had not happened in real life somewhere at some time” (MasterClass, 2018), it was of utmost relevance for the text to cross-reference the heinous politics and the accomplices of Gilead with recorded instances from the relatively recent past. Due to the implications of historical figures such as Stalin and Ceaușescu as the constitutors of the model for the state, and to the frequent invocation of Hitler and Mussolini in numerous sources, it was inevitable to situate the politics of Gilead within what is often termed as “totalitarian”. Commonly used in reference to the governance eras of the aforementioned leaders, totalitarianism briefly corresponds to a system where the state aims the monopoly of power (Arendt, 1973, p. 326; Brzezinski, 1956, p. 751; Bongiovanni & Rugman, 2005, p. 6). Having inspected Gilead's politics and apparatuses via Foucault's all-encompassing term “governmentality” (2009, p. 144), the present dissertation presents two major findings.

Firstly, a thorough examination of seemingly isolated and disjointed instances of regulations, legislations, and punishment/executions of the regime essentially yield identical results. The eugenic agenda of Gilead carried out either through blood-thirsty and vindictive adjudgments or by the means of disciplinary training and corrections—to which Foucault would refer to as “biopower” and “biopolitics” (1990, pp. 138-140)—eventuate in one of the two possibilities. Either the heretics and the dissenters are indoctrinated and disciplined—or intimidated—into model subjects who identify with the ideology of Gilead, or they are deemed as inconvertibles, consequently dehumanized and deindividualized, and ultimately disposed of. Arendt aptly refers to the precedents of the former in history as “fanatics”, who, by the success of deceptive propaganda and state-enforced ignorance, associate themselves entirely with the ideology of the regime (Arendt, 1973, p. 306). Thus, this thesis places a heavy emphasis on the fastidiously crafted language of Gilead, and the prohibitions on reading and writing to the point where the written word is eliminated completely from daily life, from the storefronts to the signs and currencies. The influence of language can be detected in all spheres of Gileadean life; thus, this thesis regards it as one of the Republic’s apparatuses—the chief one in its biopolitics-era, in fact. In support of this argument, a chronicle on the role of language in the formation of notions, predispositions, and what is perceived as the truth is offered, starting from Saussure’s claim that without language there can be nothing but a “vague, uncharted nebula” (Saussure, 1959, p. 112) and extending to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which proposes that language is not a mere medium for expression but the architect of humanity itself (Ahearn, 2001, p. 131 & Humboldt, 1988, p. 24 & Kay & Kempton, 1984, p. 66 & Sapir, 1929, p. 207 & 1949, pp. 68-70 & Whorf, 1940, p. 212). Consequentially, a top-down investigation from the phrases

coined and enforced within Gilead—"Blessed be the fruit" replaces the ordinary greetings, etc.—the school curricula, to the almost grotesquely dissimilar personalities of Offred's daughters (one 'rebaptised' in Gilead, the other brought up in Canada), produces a critical conclusion. The "language rule", which Arendt explains as an apparatus of Nazi Germany in not keeping the supporters of the system ignorant of what they are partaking in, but rather preventing them from associating the Holocaust with what would normally be deemed as genocide (Arendt, 1963, pp. 85-86), is an identical match to the biopolitics of Gilead. Moreover, the malicious "language rule" enforces the primitive and arbitrary structure of society. It is also extremely important to note that while biopolitics focuses on purifying and shaping lives rather than terminating them, and it may seem harmless, even beneficial and desirable, Nazism and Stalinism were the pinnacles of Foucaultian biopolitics (Gomes, 2016, p. 71).

With the exception of the Econo-class of Gilead, who led lives in accord with Gilead's standards prior to the coup, the entire social structure of the country undergoes a radical reorganisation. Similar to Foucault's "normalizing judgment", (Foucault, 1995, p. 170), the practice of differentiation is used by Gilead to separate and assign its subjects to classes and groups, effectively detecting and purging the abnormals in the process. Arendt and Poulantzas point out that the de-subjectified masses who are forced into all-encompassing classes while being isolated from one another and unable to show solidarity with each other characterize totalitarianism (Arendt, 1973, p. 248 & Poulantzas, 1974, p. 72). The chief apparatus Gilead employs in enforcing the normative judgment and the consequent division in society is argued by this thesis to be the Panopticon. The term originates from Jeremy Bentham's model for prisons where the panoptic penitentiary is "a machine for

grinding rogues honest” (Bentham, 2011, p. 82 quoted in Ignatieff, 1978, p. 76).

However, Foucault expands upon the concept to reinvent the Panopticon as a carceral system which spreads through every aspect of society via paranoia and punishment, effectively procreating a surveillance state, ergo, reinforcing the normalization of the imposition of the norms (1995, pp. 200-296).

The common demise for those detected to be abnormal is to be executed and hung from The Wall “to be a reminder” to the others intending to resist and dissent (Atwood, 2017, p. 272). The feminist activists from the old America and infertile women are labeled as “Unwomen” (Atwood, 2017, p. 25) and shipped off to the Colonies to clean up radioactive waste with no protective gear until they die—however, there are “a quarter men in the Colonies, too” (Atwood, 2017, p. 243) for “Gender Treachery”, a capital crime that extends from crossdressing (Atwood, 2019, p. 337) to homosexuality (Atwood, 2017, p. 55), punishable by death—and in other instances, criminals are either shot, hung, or “Particuted” (Atwood, 2017, p. 267). Particutions are extremely important not only for their role in illustrating the archaic punishments carried out in Gilead but also for the dangerous undercurrent that this thesis relates to Foucault: “get all citizens to participate in the punishment of the social enemy” (Foucault, 1995, p. 129) to assert the power of the state over its subjects and to coerce complicity.

However, by way of exception, women drafted to be Handmaids, despite being heretics and unalterables, are spared from the death penalty. As a side effect of the protracted chemical wars, Gileadeans suffer from infertility and the population dwindles. Due to that, heretic women who are still able to conceive are deemed “national resource[s]” (Atwood, 2017, p. 76) and made into incubators. Based on Offred’s avowal that she is an “abject” (Atwood, 2017, p. 275), this thesis examines

the process of making women into Handmaids from the lens of Kristeva's "abjection". According to Kristeva, abject is "the jettisoned object" and it is "radically excluded" (1980, p. 2); and, the grounds for abjection is "not lack of cleanliness or health (...) but what disturbs identity, system, order" (p. 4). In a religious context, abjection is embedded in the "Christian Word as a threatening otherness—but always nameable, always totalizeable" (p. 17). Significantly, Kristeva also draws upon the crimes of Nazis to illustrate abjection in a historical context (p. 4). Consequently, this study relates the paradoxical dichotomy of fallacious hatred harbored against the Handmaids and the immense value placed upon motherhood as well as the state's dependence on the Handmaids for its longevity to institutionalized abjection. Young girls are indoctrinated from a very young age to alienate the Handmaids (Atwood, 2019, p. 16), and even the Econo-wives loathe them (Atwood, 2017, p. 24). From their blood-red dresses, to what they signify, to their functions within the society, Handmaids stand as silenced and invisible evidence to Gilead's Christian hypocrisy, and the segregationist, anti-humanly totalitarian governmentality.

The second objective of the present thesis has been to investigate women's contribution to the regime, as well as the majorly overlooked victimization of men in Gilead. Thus, the final chapter brings the plight and the victimization of the men of Gilead to the fore. Karen G. Weiss critiques the widespread disregard for the male victimization in social studies: "Most prevalent studies focused their attention almost exclusively on female victims", ergo, male victims have been ignored by "researchers and theorists" (2010, p. 276). Succinctly stated, it is the "invisibility of men's victimization" (Artine et al., 2014, p. 313). Weiss also elaborates that "cultural ideals and myths about gender and sexuality continue to influence

perceptions” (2014, p. 287), and that “‘Real’ men are not supposed to be victims” (p. 290). Similar and more in-depth to the concept of norm discussed within a Foucauldian framework, “hegemonic masculinity” is a “normative” term that signifies the “most honored way of being a man,”; and it compels all men to shape and conduct themselves accordingly (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Correspondingly, this study presents what it terms as the Gileadean man myth, built upon the “hegemonic masculinity” and enforced through the totalitarian methods of discipline and penalty. From men with “wooden face[s]” because they are not supposed to be forthright about emotions (Atwood, 2019, p. 99), to male corpses hanging from the Wall for being a part of the religious minorities (Atwood, 2017, p. 55), or as a result of retroactive punishment for having performed abortions prior to the establishment of Gilead (Atwood, 2017, p. 47), men suffer from the prejudicial and detrimental norms and rules of Gilead. Offred’s reaction to the Men’s Salvaging, a form of mass murder, illustrates the high frequency of the male killings as well (Atwood, 2017, pp. 46-47). Men are shown to meet with worse demises than women. According to “criminalization of homosexual conduct” (Roberts, 1993, p. 177) men are either killed and left to rot as a cautionary tale for the others, or sent to the Colonies whereas the only explicitly identified female gay character in the novel, Offred’s friend, Moira (Atwood, 2017, p. 181), ends up working at the Jezebel’s despite her persistent and unsuccessful attempts at escaping the State. Significantly, Foucault chronicles the penalisation of homosexuality, tracing its roots in Christian European societies where homosexuality was seen equal as vagrancy and unreason, and treated as deliberately chosen; then, the immoral abnormalities were isolated from the society and punished in order to extort conformity (2006, pp. xii-xxvii). Moreover, and quite similar to Gilead’s politics, homosexual individuals were

alienated and ruthlessly persecuted in Nazi Germany. The eugenic agenda required that mainly homosexual men be sent to the concentration camps. There, they had to wear huge pink triangles to identify themselves as gay; lesbians were not isolated for their sexuality alone—but along with prostitutes, nomads, alcoholics, and beggars—were considered “asocials”, and wore black triangles (Carr, 2017-2018 & Elman, 1996 & Plant, 1988 & Heger, 1994).

Gileadean men who evade death are not better off, struggling to survive under abhorrent conditions. The Econoclass men are forced into devastating poverty, backbreaking labour, which only benefits the select elite of Gilead, and are barred from social mobility. Fleeting glimpses into their dwellings—Econoclass are confined to their designated areas—show the lack of basic needs from power to clean water, and buildings in disrepair with closed down shops from before the coup (Atwood, 2019, p. 358). The pauperized Econoclass also struggle to sustain a healthy diet, their tiny portions of food consisting of nauseous concoctions made from outdated, chemical ingredients. The glimpse into the Econoclass, however, also reveals men who risk death to work for the resistance in smuggling people out of Gilead. The men who refuse to be complicit in the oppressive politics, and men who fight against it outnumber the complicit men in both novels: Commander Waterford’s chauffeur Nick, Mayday operatives like Nicole’s adoptive “parents” and the male operatives she meets at the headquarters following their death, the bus driver, bar owner, and the boat captain who help the siblings escape Gilead fight against the state’s totalitarian politics. Significantly, boat captain Mishimengo has two fingers missing (Atwood, 2019, p. 377), and reveals that he was a Gileadean and escaped through the Canadian border (p. 381) and he risks capture and execution to smuggle more people out of the state, including the half-sisters. Identically, the

leader of the Survivors of Gilead National Homelands Genocide in Canada speaks out against Gilead; he condemns the inhumane conditions of the underprivileged and elaborates that people walk in the winter and risk death to cross border and escape. He then also discloses himself as a survivor, and holds up his hand to show the missing fingers due to frostbite (Atwood, 2019, p. 51). One could only speculate on the particulars of the horrors the men had faced before risking death to flee Gilead.

Hannah Arendt writes that “The strength of even the strongest individual can always be overpowered by the many (...)” (2014, p. 42). It is indeed the case in Gilead. In one of the Particutions headed by Aunt Lydia, the Handmaids murder an alleged rapist, who, in fact, was a Mayday agent (Atwood, 2017, p. 267). Aunt Lydia also confesses in her Ardua Hall holograph that a similarly executed alleged contrabandist was involved with Mayday and he was aiding Handmaids in fleeing Gilead (Atwood, 2019, p. 275). Aunt Lydia’s lies and contribution to the regime does not end in two framed and murdered Mayday men. Critics regard her as one of the, if not the most, crucial enforcer of the totalitarianism in Gilead while also noting that many, if not all women in the novels are accomplices in the Republic’s politics (Foley, 1990 & Munro quoted in Becker, 1999 & Staels, 1995, p. 455).

The investigation in this thesis reveals Serena Joy, Aunt Vidala, Shunammite, Paula, even Offred as accomplices and victimizers in their unique ways. From women reporting men to the authorities for non-crimes (nurses delating doctors for having performed abortions and wives telling on their husbands for wearing women’s undergarments), cases of murder carried out by women (from stabbed pregnant Handmaids to innocent husbands), to the Aunts’ active participation in the politics of Gilead, women actively engaged in what the present thesis links to Foucault’s definition of individualized fascism. The “major enemy” is not only the

historical fascism but also the “fascism that is ingrained in our behavior (...) fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (2004, p. xiii). Indeed, Lydia admits that she enjoys the power she has over other Aunts, Commanders and Handmaids (Atwood, 2019, p. 178). Neuman similarly argues that Offred enjoys the power she holds over Fred Waterford and Serena Joy (2012, pp. 75-76). Furthermore, Offred’s narrative is also criticized as intentionally misleading and self-serving (Neuman, 2012, pp. 75-76 & Wagner-lawlor 2003, p. 83). In support of that, this study criticizes the memoirs of Offred and the autobiography of Lydia—which was discovered inside a copy of Cardinal Newman’s *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Latin for A Defence of One’s Life—as misleading attempts at concealing their part in the victimization of others and exonerating themselves. Lydia repeatedly endeavours to justify her contribution to the persecution of others by claiming to have obeyed the law and followed the orders. Identically, Eichmann had regarded himself as a “law-abiding citizen” who was only doing his duty; “he not only obeyed orders, he also obeyed the *law* [emphasis not mine]” (Arendt, 2006, p. 135). Arendt ultimately finds Eichmann a “joiner” (p. 32), which is a crime no smaller than any other Nazi’s; this study argues the same for Lydia and Offred. Wagner-lawlor finds Offred to be a “problematic heroine” (2003, p. 83); and both women admit that they are determined to survive no matter the cost, consequently, they “save their skins” (Staels, 1995, p. 455) by being collaborators. Their memoirs embellish themselves and omit the facts that do not serve their desired discourse; while doing that, they also fail to sufficiently observe and relay the victimization of others, chiefly men’s. As Atwood claims, writers are always inclined to misuse their power of writing (Atwood, 2009, p. 104). While their predicaments may paint them as indisputable

victims on the surface level, the deeper investigations into small hints and ‘slips’ in their memoirs, the elusory, sinister nature of their narrations, and the number of various misdeeds reveal Lydia and Offred as both victimizers and victims.

Although it is not the scope of this thesis to discuss Atwood’s identity as an author or to affirm or deny the label “feminist” the author herself has a complicated relationship with, it is indispensable to look to some of her remarks in exploring a less traveled road. Atwood refused the label initially, and “noted [that it] was sometimes used by reviewers to dismiss her early work” (Neuman, 2006, p. 858). She ultimately regards the label as “not inclusive” as “there are a lot of other things as well that are interests of [hers]” (Gerald & Crabbe, 1987, p. 139). She also questions the misconception of the label: “a feminist, and what does that mean, exactly? That you shouldn’t put a good man into your books, even though you may in real life have managed to dig up a specimen or two?” (Atwood, 2009, p. 108). Ultimately, Atwood also discloses that “If practical, hardline, anti-male feminists took over and became the government, I would resist them” (Atwood quoted in Meese, 1985, p. 183). Hence, coupled with Atwood’s stance and her penchant for deception, the prejudice—and dislike—the heroines set the audience to harbour against the underrepresented men, it must come as no surprise that most writers and critics may be tricked by Offred and Lydia’s self-interest. By illustrating the equal, if not more severe, participation of women and the privilege they hold within Gilead, and by highlighting the plight of the innocent men that is often relegated to the sidelines in favour of the heroines, this study underlines that the issues in Gilead neither stem from nor target a particular gender. The privileged few, regardless of age and gender, reap the benefits of the Republic while the disadvantaged struggle to survive. While it is not as obvious or straightforward to detect the injustice and

cruelty the male subjects of Gilead face, it is certainly possible with a bias-free and laborious approach, and more significantly, it is essential to do so. Hence, to that end, the present thesis has analysed the totalitarian politics of Gilead—which are almost exclusively read, demonstrated, and critiqued within the female experience—and it has shown that the fascist and totalitarian *modus operandi* of Gilead in its entirety, and all its dreadful outcomes can be illustrated through the underprivileged men.

However, certain points have not been elaborated in detail. The connection between the importance of Atwood as an author and an activist, and the victim-victimizer dichotomy of both genders in Gilead is a topic that requires a separate study on its own. For instance, Aunt Lydia is an extremely complex and compelling character that deserves her own study; although the readers do not see much of Aunt Vidala, she quickly and decisively proves herself as a multi-dimensional character, and however brief her appearance may be, she must be further explored.

Last but not least, the Republic of Gilead may seem like a formulaic and almost prosaic totalitarian regime; however, with Atwood's painstaking undertaking to reference history for its apparatuses in consideration, it transforms into a complex compendium of history and sociology. Due to the limitation of space, this study has only dated certain select practices of Gilead briefly within the timeframe of WW2 and the Cold War. Nevertheless, Gilead is abounding with references to the antediluvian and long-standing history of mankind's cruelty waiting to be explored. It is just as Atwood had planned: in an interview following the publishing of *The Testaments*, Atwood admits to the deliberate "imperfection" of *The Handmaid's Tale*. By adding the "Gilead Studies" chapter at the end (a tradition she continues in the sequel), the author had intended to show that every scholar brings his or her own bias into the process, and thus the work will be studied and interpreted in as many

ways as there are readers and writers. She concludes by the encouragement that the study of Gilead in both novels are far from over for the foreseeable future: “When you publish a book, it’s not your book anymore (...) It belongs to the readers. If nobody’s reading the book then it’s just lying there. It’s inert, like a musical score that nobody plays” (Atwood, 2019, para. 26-27).



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Appendix A

Destruction of the 'Old America'

When Gilead took over, the buildings and monuments in the country were all either demolished or repurposed beyond recognition. The signs are brought down or painted over, and the new norm is that instead of letters, only paintings of symbols signify what the stores sell.

"We don't go into Lilies, but across the road and along a side-street. Our first stop is at a store with another wooden sign: three eggs, a bee, a cow. Milk and Honey."

(Atwood, 2017, p.40)

"We got the fish at Loaves and Fishes, with its wooden sign, a fish with a smile and eyelashes." (Atwood, 2017, p. 164)

Even money bills are replaced with tokens as a drastic measure to prevent women from reading.

"I take the tokens from Rita's outstretched hand. They have pictures on them, of the things they can be exchanged for: twelve eggs, a piece of cheese, a brown thing that's supposed to be a steak." (Atwood, 2017, p.26)

Lydia notes the swift changes in the structures to match the radically new ideological identity of the new Republic before she was appointed as an Aunt.

"It was no longer a police station, however: the lettering had been covered over, and on the front door there was an image: an eye with wings. The logo of the Eyes, though I did not yet know that." (Atwood, 2019, p. 149)

“Where are the brands of yesteryear? Gone with the wind. Or rather gone with the paintbrush and the demolition team, because as I was being hauled into the lobby there were workmen overhead, obliterating the lettering.” (Atwood, 2019, p. 152)

“We were not supposed to go in there except to attend funerals: the names of the dead were on the stones, and that might lead to reading, and then to depravity.

Reading was not for girls: only men were strong enough to deal with [it].” (Atwood, 2019, p. 156).

