Tribhuvan University

Necropolitics, Affirmative Ethics and Atwood's Speculation of an Integrated Human History in the Gilead Series

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Declaration

I, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “Necropolitics, Affirmative Ethics and Atwood’s Speculation of an Integrated Human History in the Gilead Series” is my original work. No part of it has been submitted to any other institution by me or anybody else.

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April 2025

Approval Sheet

This thesis entitled "Necropolitics, Affirmative Ethics and Atwood's Speculation of an Integrated Human History in the Gilead Series" presented by Ms. Alisa Dahal, MPhil, 2020 from Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University has been approved.

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Abstract

Margaret Atwood speculates a totalitarian regime Gilead in her novels *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019. It was formed under a coup after the civil war preceded by the assassination of the US president and collapse of the Congress. The state represses its people, especially women, to enforce forceful sex, marriage, pregnancy and births to cope with the population crisis induced by continuous wars, climate disasters and low human fertility rate. To execute these repressive policies, the state invents extreme forms of control mechanisms built on Puritan doctrines, militarism, pervasive surveillance and utter violence like public execution, selective killings, brutal punishments, violence and intimidation. Sinners and criminals like adulteresses, rapists and pedophiles are not tolerated, and women are cared for and controlled to manage the population. Quite contradictory to totalitarianism and repression, the state employs a female leader, Lydia to watch the "female sphere" and carry out safe births. This thesis analyzes the extreme means of control and punishment on women and attempts to answer how and why the state resorts to such mechanisms ranging from militarism, theocracy, rampant surveillance to female leadership. This thesis examines how the state evokes positive response and support from the disempowered women. Furthermore, it probes into the implications of inclusion of a woman leader into state politics and unravels the rationale of such contradictions prevalent in state. Besides, it pays critical attention upon the plurality of forces and people performing their roles constructively and flexibly in the reduced circumstances.

This thesis is framed under interpretive research design and is substantiated by interpretation and criticality as theoretical underpinnings under constructivist approach as explained by Creswell and Creswell. This approach helps to reflect and

understand reality constructed by four female narrators from their experiences and observations as main victims and witnesses of the repression, and supports the interpretation of women's responses to state politics. Moreover, it employs Butler's theory of performance to deepen the understanding of shifting roles and responsibilities, openness and fluidity of identities. It uses the conceptual framework built on Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, Braidotti's approach of affirmative ethics, Butler's concept of frames of war and Agamben's idea of "state of exception" to discuss why and how the regime violates law, eliminates selective population of women, and executes repressive rules by employing a female leader. Mbembe's concept of sovereign right for selective killing and Braidotti's ideas about sacrificial deaths, legalized euthanasia, use of technothanatological weaponry and "ethos of engagement" are relevant tools to analyze the totalitarian regime, its people framed in different categories and their performances to live through the unprecedented crisis in Gilead as a "state of exception".

This thesis concludes that the state violence, repression, selective killings and extreme forms of control on its people are neither for sovereignty, elimination of the enemies as by racism nor a tool for eugenics but they are critical choices the state has to make when all other alternatives of saving the human future are exhausted by itself in the pretext of wars, nationality and individual freedom. Consigning the political power to the woman leader is the recognition of women's agency unacknowledged in the history but crucial in lifting up the fallen societies and rebuilding peace. Atwood's implication is of a collective battle as the ultimate resolve to fight against the shared precariousness and common vulnerability of the imminent human future. Unity can overcome the unprecedented crisis. Empathy, compassion, forgiveness, affirmative ethics and charity founded on self-criticism, critical retrospection and sense of

oneness can rebuild an integrated history. Proposed as a design to live the future under the constant threat of ever-going wars, the rehearsal of thoughts in this discourse can trigger affirmative response and transformative approaches to crises in the uncharted chapters humanity is likely to face. To conclude on what Atwood says: “imagination influences hope” and on what Braidotti claims: “words are sonic acts”, this thesis draws upon the chilling experiences of the repressive rule of Gilead and keeps readers aware and critical about contemporary wars and violence, and the past. Implicitly, it asks us to be prepared to take the dystopian future if navigated otherwise. Rigorous in tone, Atwood, nevertheless gives hope providing patterns of lives to live through similar situations awhile and learn to resist them, meanwhile.

Keywords**:** affirmative ethics, critical retrospection, ethos of engagement, necropolitics, repression, shared vulnerability

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Chapter I: Repression, Violence and the Persistence of Wars

Introduction

Margaret Atwood's novels *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* share the dystopian regime Gilead as the setting despite a long gap in their publication —1985 A.D. and 2019 A.D. respectively. Founded under a sudden coup after the collapse of the democratic USA, Gilead suspends the constitution and laws, and imposes repressive rules and violent state mechanisms of control on women's lives and deaths. Like Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception" which necessitates the intersection of the legal and the political, Gilead functions "outside law" (*State* 1, qtd. in Swiffen 346). To rebuild the population put at stake by civil wars, environmental collapse, and decline in fertility rate, the state suppresses women's freedom, curtails their rights, deprives them of jobs and opportunities, and closes bank accounts to disable their mobility and escape. Their things are "looted, dumped out, carried away. Confiscated" (Atwood *Tales* 70). They are forced into marriage, sex, pregnancy and birth. Women's rights to life and death become national issues and so are managed by the state. This management includes extreme measures of punishments and control of crimes and sins related to sex, marriage, love, births and personal choices. More rigorous are the events of public killings of unwanted populations, especially of women to be "purged" so that the lives of the prospective fertile women and "good" people will be facilitated. An individual dies for a common purpose in a sense, deprived of natural death. Forces of different kinds like Puritan narratives, military functionaries and pervasive surveillance are exploited by the state to discipline, intimidate and control women. The Bible hovers everywhere in the form of images, words and virtues to support the absolute rule. Women and young girls are made to witness and participate, too, in official mass executions of the disposable population–

"Unwomen" in Salvagings and men of Sins like rapists and pedophiles in Particicution. The state has no tolerance to adultery, incest, rape, whimsical teasing to girls, sexual abuses, resistance and free choices to control crimes, sins and their byproducts like birth of Unbabies, useless population. More importantly, the imperative is to protect the potential "worthy" young girls and control their "selfish choices". In case any of them fail to abide by the rules, they are labeled as Sinners and criminals so are persecuted with violent deaths or punishment depending on the level of offences they cause. Genetically defunct, infertile and old women are either killed or put to slow death by making them work in the Colonies which are poisonous radio-active areas resulting from the chemical disasters because of continuous war.

Ironically, quite contrary to the repressive policy, the military ruler Commander Judd in *The Testaments* employs a woman leader Aunt Lydia to watch the women's side and control their "selfish choices" whereas no such official power at this level is conferred to women in the prequel *The Handmaid's Tale*. This accreditation of authority generates other questions: why does a despotic government include a woman into the state politics? How does Lydia balance her power as a ruler and the leader of women under totalitarian rule? What does the contradiction between delegation of power to a woman and the disempowerment of women in the meantime imply? Out of these experimental political practices, most fundamentally, this thesis interprets what Atwood implies by speculating Gilead– a dystopian regime which exploits tools of brutal punishments like killing, violence and intimidation founded upon theocracy, militarism, surveillance and female leadership.

The general tendency of existing literature draws upon the feminist interpretations centered on the issues of women in the novels. Atwood herself claims that Gilead is a reflection of "the atmosphere today", referring to the recent uprising

of the repressive policies as in the democratic US during Donald Trump's rule for its anti-abortion laws and regulations that inspired her to write *The Testaments* (qtd. in Josefsson 3). Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* is imagined as a dystopia which in *The Testaments* is becoming the reality to some extent. *The Tale* uses the millitant feminist ideological movements of the '70s and the consequent backlash of the '90s against feminism and gender equality as the distinct background. Offred, the protagonist of the novel bears the attributes of both time–the craze for motherhood of the Baby Boomer's Age and the defiance to the radical feminist ideals. However, she lacks the spirit of militant rebellion of her mother. Lydia, on the other hand, carries out the anti-feminist stance of the backlash by repressing her own kind, the women although that has to do with a bigger purpose of humanity. It is also assessed as "a reaction to second level feminism" that championed identity politics or as "Reganism" that curtailed women's number and power in political posts or as a "relationship of complicity and resistance" to gain power by women as by Lydia. Some critics take it as "a literary manifesto of a new (fourth) wave as part of the storm surge of feminism" against the second wave feminism slogan "the personal is political" (Ghiorghiu and Praisler, "Abstract" 87). But, this thesis is a departure from the existing interpretations which have focused on some fragmentary issues. It analyzes the novels from a holistic perspective which presents a peripheral vision of realities and claims that Atwood is speculative of a collective issue of an endangered humanity beyond the identity politics of women and national sovereignty. Consigning Lydia this authority fulfills two imperatives: first, Commander Judd's motive of restraining the possible "opposition [which] is led by the educated", so they were the target– "first to be eliminated" (*Testaments* 116). Lydia was one of them offered to manage the women's side effectively as a leader. Second, Lydia gets a comfortable

position for power play to rule women and launch an underground rebellion against Gilead of which she was also an architect before. She proceeds with a do or die spirit. She flips her role between a cruel ruler and the Savior of women by managing their easy lives and deaths for which she has to win their trust and impose violent punishments, too. Her mission is to help rebuild the population by inoculating in women the spirit of affirmative response to and rebellion against the despotic rule.

Such a political contradiction between complicity and resistance, repression and recognition of women's agency and disempowerment and privilege to them at the same time is strategic to rebuild the war-ridden population of Gilead. As such, this interplay of binary forces– men and women, ruler and the ruled, repressed and the recognized, conformity and dissidence requires redefining the traditional power structures of hierarchical categories. Hence, this thesis claims that their identities are flexible and fluid in a large socio-political context and are determined by their performances. There is nothing essential, inherent and static to define the powerful or powerless, masculine or feminine, center or the margin as the identity attributes. Strength of the crisis is the unit of dynamic forces upholding each other for sustaining. Relevant to this claim, Judith Butler's theory of performance is used to support the main argument that the integrated history can be rebuilt on the intersection of different realities, power blocs and performances beyond any social, political and biological specificity.

Atwood herself conforms to the view that The Republic of Gilead is a dystopian form of the democratic USA in Regan's rule and few other countries like Great Britain during Thatcher's time (Josefsson 10). Joseffson opines what she imagined in *The Tale* is the reality today that inspired her to write the sequel *The Testaments* (3). She claims: "dark circumstances . . . must have historical precedent"

(qtd. in Josefsson 3). She refers to her experiences of her visit to Afaganistan, four European attacks after the Second World War, Ronald Regan's stance against women in jobs, women's oppression in Ireland, Poland; and lately Trump's anti-women policies that backed up the content and context of her novels (3). She relates the horrible consequences of the 9/11 attack inducing violent means and measures of control, mass surveillance and survival–military and theocratic– both at individual and socio-political level. In an interview about the future, she predicts "Gilead never ends" which may be implicative of persistence of wars and violence (Atwood "Telling Tales"). It can be inferred that her speculation of the totalitarian theocracy is backed up by "the atmosphere today" which she thinks has turned repressive on women (Joseffson 3). Hence, this thesis analyzes the use of using ultimate tools of control ranging from biblical narratives, militarism and the unacknowledged agency of women in the novels. Furthermore, it unravels the causes of the panic the state is undergoing to hunt high and low the human history of integrated power and peace through repression and violence. It argues that the simultaneity of all these forces functioning at different levels have overcome the identity politics that defines crisis-ridden Gilead coping with the shared vulnerability and precariousness of endangered human condition.

To discuss economy of war, politics of killing and repression by the state, and the creative and positive response to it by women, this thesis takes references of Butler's concept of frames of war and the theory of performativity, Mbembe's concept of necropolitics and Braidotti's notion of affirmative ethics. All these critics advocate community building, collective crusade and reciprocity among all populations to fight the crisis for the common future.

Butler refers to the political economy of categorizing people into "grievable"

and disposable to ease and authenticate its selective killing and manage the population during wars (*Frames* 22). She defines the grievable as the ones whose deaths are missed and mourned whereas the disposable die without bringing "any consequences" and killed in the name of "creative destruction" as interpreted by Kassimi (*Frames* 25, Kassimi 3). Kassimi terms the state killing as "creative chaos" which can be related to Nietzsche's idea of "necessary evil" and the powerless population responding to it with constructive resistance subverts the roles of the powerful and the powerless. But when deaths of the unwanted people create spaces for the people who are grievable, do they not contribute to supporting the war economy? There appears the blurring of the value of life and death, grievable and disposable, and human and the non-human that the state categorizes during the wars. To argue on this fluidity of identity, Butler's theory of performance described in her seminal book *Gender Trouble* is applied. She conceptualizes gender that it does not have any inherent, essential and biological specificity but it is the product of large socio-political conditions where one needs to perform or fulfill dynamics of roles. Hence, gender for her is an open coalition with any socio-political conditions to meet "the purpose at hand".

Mbembe terms the selective killing as neccropolitics which he thinks is another name of racism (66). He elaborates and extends Foucault's idea of bio-power or bio-politics to define necropolitics which is built upon the "selective elimination". Bio-power as such controls one's life and body whereas necropolitics rules over one's death. But to borrow Braidotti's idea that death is embedded in life, both ideas of bio-politics and necropolitics intersect. While relating to the postcolonial context, Mbembe reflects how the states created "death worlds" guised under various names to silence the threatening population or enemies (92). He identifies such politics with

racism that paralyzes certain populations “subject to slow deaths and habituated loss” (Sahana 221). It is deletion or negation of diverse blocs of masses labeled as “the resistant or redundant population to state workings and policies" (Sahana 221). In her review of Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics, Sahana argues it as a politics of eradicating “the rebellious discontentment of poverty and killing the powerless to form a tiny section of powerful elites” (221). It is founded on the war economy of saving the nation by specific “framing” of the population—a concept Butler has developed in her book *Frames of War*.

Braidotti calls for being “worthy of time” which refers to one’s readiness to die to create space for some others. She critiques the “unthinkable” death of the universal “I” that has led humanity to a critical mode of desiring “inevitable deaths”. So, in a dystopian world, as represented by Gilead; wars, violence, emergent “states of exceptions", and the “ massive mutations" become the norm (Agamben, *State* 1, Braidotti “Ways of Dying"). Agamben used a term “homo sacer” which refers to “the right to kill with impunity” the people living bare life (Pele para 2). The subsequent crises compel the creation of death worlds like concentration camps, Colonies, plantations, prisons, refugees and the like which have “become a prevailing way of governing unwanted populations" (Pele para 4). In Braidotti’s words, “ubiquity of corpses”, deaths and violence have entered “in our daily lives . . . news and popular culture” which previously were the subjects of Sci-fis and thrillers (Braidotti “ Ways of Dying”). She is largely agreeable because becoming corpses is “an element of daily reality”, a norm in the real world today– in news, popular culture and worryingly in human societies “(“Ways of Dying”,).

Living through such persistence of wars requires redefining deaths. Mbembe conceptualizes state-killing as necropolitics—another name of racism. Sahana

interprets the concept in the same vein that necropolitics eradicates the rebellious discontentment by the killing. But if located in Gilead politics, they need reinterpretation. It is not a question of eradication of women as rebellious or threatening to the few elites–the Commanders or rulers who deserve to live. Rather, the powerless women accept deaths to contribute to fighting the collective battle to save a race—the human race from being extinct. Their imprisonment is for liberation of the human race and their sacrificial deaths are for making space for the worthy ones. Furthermore, who is rebellious—the state which violates the law and rules outside it, or the women who abide by the arbitrary rule too strong to resist under the "reduced circumstances"—is open to interpretation. Butler's concept of framing the population during wars helps to analyze the state politics of killing in Gilead.

Gilead is founded on similar frames of war which divide the women into various groups according to their genetic status, social responsibilities and other duties. But Lydia is assigned to watch "women's sphere" and frame its population, check the births, sex, marriage and unwanted activities of women and deaths. Both cruel and kind, she empowers herself through "divide and rule" among women, complies with and intrigues against the government, and builds up trust with both sides — the state and the women. She decides on who to allow to live and who to recommend to die despite the final approval being subject to Commander Judd, the chief military ruler. She also recommends brutal public executions to pedophiles and rapists from male population. Lydia's selection of the unwanted population from both men and women is strategic to make-believe women about her righteousness and sense of justice so that she can safely execute her authority over women, prepare them to follow her guidelines and values to choose certain ways of lives and deaths.

Thus, Lydia undertakes her part in the reconstruction of Gilead history like the

women did in the Partition violence of India as reclaimed by Urvashi Butalia in an article: "Violence is almost always instigated by men, but its greatest impact is felt by women. And for every fire that is lit, it is women . . . [who] painfully built the future" (34). Her reference is to the main victims of violence in wars dominantly women who perform the roles of pacifier in crises. Women had to bear multiple perpetrators during and after the Partition Movement of the subcontinent of India. The setback was founded on women's power of resilience and creative resistance. Such affirmative responses of women to critical modes of history have brought many endangered societies back to life as illustrated by Butalia in her essay "Community, state and gender…" and portrayed by Giovanni Boccaccio in "Decameron." Boccaccio presents how a group of remaining women invent ways to reconstruct the Black-death ridden city by telling and sharing stories to soothe people and revive the strength of living. In the same vein, even under repression, Lydia partakes in state politics, imposes violence and helps to manage the population. It is to be noted that both categories of women–the powerful and the powerless– are decisive in rebuilding the population, breaking the boundary of the powerful and the powerless. State-killing and women's readiness to die or be killed decides the future of Gilead. Hence, the future can be saved if all realities integrate.

Relating these theoretical concepts to the novels gives a critical apprehension of the political context of Gilead. Pele critiques Mbembe's concept: "Necropolitics entails the subjugation of life to the power of death" (para 3). For him, Mbembe offers deaths as "a political making of spaces" for the protection of good people by "the extermination of the inferior" —like the black, Jews and Arabs subjugated to mutations in "colonies in general and the slavery plantation in particular" (para 2). The different euphemistic death-worlds like concentration camps and colonies were

the postcolonial strategies of imperialists to eradicate the enemies of its own populace in Mbembe's view. Mbembe himself illustrates the necropolitical ethnic cleansing in the German holocaust in Nazi rule and Stalin's fascist pitiless mass killing for race purity and the protection of good people as in a "state of exception" conceptualized by Agamben (Agamben *States* 1). But Mbembe's initial claim that necropolitics is a political tool to perpetuate the states' supremacy over the erstwhile colonies and their people changes in the context of ongoing civil wars. The death-worlds were imperialist political tools to put people of threat to perpetual mutations in the post-colonial contexts. Atwood creates some parallel death centers like Salvagings, Particicution, Colonies, Stadium and Rape Centers in the novels. But they execute affirmative deaths and serve a noble purpose of perpetuating humanity by managing population. Hence, Lydia's role in undertaking the crusade for rebuilding population in Gilead turns the table of history.

Lydia's performance is a shock, a departure from the woman's virtues like modesty, kindness and femininity because she plays the subverted role. Herself a woman– victim, witness and authority of the repressive rule, she adopts cruelty, strategic actions and sensible steps on women. She defers her femininity to use the newly consigned power and impose it against other women –an action against the given feminine modesty. She gathers courage by recalling a dream of killing her female friends, acquaintances and previous colleagues to pass an ordeal in the Stadium. She is approved of her ability of using brutal approaches by Commander Judd and is conferred the authority over women. Thus, she complies with the state politics of killing women: the killing is not for the annihilation of the unwanted demography but is the "inevitability" to manage the vulnerable population (Braidotti, "Ways of Dying"). She states that deaths and violence have become the banal

subjects. Becoming corpses is ubiquitous, a norm in the contemporary world. Death is no more “the unthinkable” but the “inevitability” (“Ways of Dying”).

Hence, the regimented theocracy of Gilead is a tell-tale dystopia, not of a far future but of something happening around the world. Atwood makes a statement about the “ubiquity of corpses" by speculating the parallel “death-worlds” and calls for cultivation of violence and rigorous ability to be “worthy of time” by offering sacrificial deaths to create spaces for worthy lives to sustain human future (Braidotti “Ways of Dying”). Hence, revising the question: who is powerful–the sovereign state or the disempowered women? Other questions emerge–Is the state-killing a backlash or backfire of the age-long suicidal militarism to itself expressed through violence on women? Or is it the “empire writing back” a history of integration? Hence, this study analyzes the dynamics of politics and the ways women pave to recreate the history of endangered humanity in a world marked by unstoppable wars and the persistence of violence Atwood has foregrounded in the novels.

Hence, this thesis states that humanity sustains if history is rebuilt by integrating all existing realities and forces in a holistic frame. Atwood's dystopian vision in the novels hopefully transcends the absolute patriarchy, the feminist ideals of motherhood, individual freedom, identity politics; the radical ideologies of autonomy, and the sexual abuses and harassment in the workplaces as merely the feminine problems. Sovereignty, population and individual freedom are the simultaneous realities functioning as a unit, situational— fluid and flexible to adapt to the crisis and repression. It concludes that no war for sovereignty, territory or any scientific experimentation but a war to save the human species from itself captures the temperament of Gilead. The implicit mission is to spearhead a collective crusade against the self-induced precariousness and shared vulnerability of the common future

of human species. To achieve this, Atwood is proposing a design of the future and taming the present generation to live through violence in the “reduced circumstances" and make the world a livable place (*Tales* 116). The repressive state mechanism on women, the leader Judd’s condescending women by labeling them as unimportant but including Lydia into state politics, ironically approves the weakening masculine order, a sense of incompleteness, an acceptance of the “Other” — the women’s agency, and a call for an integrated human history.

Statement of the Problem

The identity of women, national sovereignty and individual freedom exist in relation to each other in the speculative regime of Gilead. The state controls over women's freedom fearing their “selfish choice” that caused the “free fall” of birth rate, and manages their life and death to recover the loss (*Testaments* 174). Ironically, the reconstruction depends on the lives and deaths of women. What is central is women’s reproductive power and affirmative obligations of donating deaths for sustaining the future. Lydia complies with the male order and implements torturous means of punishment to enforce forceful reproductive activities. The woman’s side, in her leadership rules and intrigues resistance at once fearing the killing, public executions and being sent to jail in case the system is confronted in public. She trains women to survive violent rules as if normal, internalize them and perform sacrificial deaths, and intrigue resistance simultaneously.

Hence, as a futuristic novel, it appropriates necropolitics that is neither for race purity, ethnic cleansing, annihilation of the “Others — the suppressed, powerless, women or enemies— nor for sovereignty but for fighting against “shared vulnerability” of the humans to save the common future. And, the women bearing children for the infertile couple and offering deaths to give space for the “useful”

women are affirmative actions to compensate for the past loss– but not for the underprivileged or women. The women—the "Other" are rebuilding the endangered humanity destroyed by the privileged–the Man. This subversion is a revised response to the shared "precariousness" and "reciprocal recognition" of the "common vulnerability" compelling the "reconfigurations of the relations". . . "Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other" (Butler, *Frames* 14, Mbembe 3). It is ironic that the repressed "Other" —the women are reconstructing the regime and founding a "clean space" for future generations by living through violence and repression (*Testaments* 4). Their performance is resetting the clock of human history to shape it into a holistic frame of sustainability.

Research Questions

This research has answered the following questions:

a. What does controlling women's rights to life and death, and freedom imply in the novels?
b. How does the "female sphere" respond to the repressive government?
c. How do the politics of killing and sacrificial deaths relate to the future of humanity in the face of ongoing wars?

Research Objectives

The primary objective of the research is to analyze the state politics, power structure, and relation between the sovereign male order and the repressed women's sphere in the crisis-ridden Gilead. It examines how women respond to, and survive repression and violence in the totalitarian regime.

The secondary objectives are:

– to probe into the dystopian context of Gilead and analyze the extreme measures of control and punishments

– to interpret the simultaneous forces and realities functioning at their extreme.

– to redefine sovereignty, individuality, identity politics, affirmative actions and the politics of killing in the context of the dystopian state of Gilead. It finds out how women create spaces to live through utter violence, comply with the state and intrigue rebellion. Hence, it explores the ways Atwood paves to help the future generation survive the dystopian future and the irresistible hegemony of continuous wars as in the speculative world of Gilead.

Delimitations of the Study

Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* (2019) and its prequel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) are taken as the primary texts to take data from and make citations in the research. This thesis basically discusses the power relations, integrated power structures and unacknowledged force of collective response to the shared crisis of the humans. It does not focus on its other dimensions like resurgence of totalitarianism, relationship between complicity and resistance as a means to empower women or the novel as a text of Puritan theocracy or the "intergenerational transmission of womanhood " as claimed by Ewelina Feldman Kolodziejuk. It does not include the element of the posthuman while referencing Braidotti's concept of affirmative ethics.

Significance of the Study

A "warning" to humanity against the contemporary wars and the dark future humans are heading to, Atwood makes a prophetic note: "Don't go there", "Don't do it" ("Telling Tales"). This is how Atwood herself labels the novel *The Testaments* as

a prelude to future crises full of violence, intrigues, cruelty at their extreme. But this research aims to unravel hope out of the grim tale of brutal repression and violence on women that can dramatically resurge even out of the best democracies as in the USA represented by the dystopian totalitarian regime of Gilead. After we read the testimonies of the narrators– Offred in *The Tales*, two girls Agnes and Daisy, and Aunt Lydia in *The Testaments*, one of the founder Aunts who orchestrated the horrors and violence on women, we experience the prophetic world of Atwood's speculation. Hence, this thesis claims that this level of thought exercise of the future crisis influences our actions in the present as Atwood herself hopes: "Imagination influences action" (Atwood "Telling Tales"*).* It might help to change our behaviors by revising the current courses of actions for the future.

In the face of hegemonic wars and technological experimentations, alarming devastations of the environment, loss of genetic capacity and violence on women in contemporary societies, this study presents a telling tale of reciprocal obligations and affirmative actions for survivability. Against the mutual threat of sovereign repression on women and the endangered status of the nation, both men and women immerse into deep thought of "mutual fear" of being eliminated. This thought exercise helps readers to retrospect and reshape our relations, watch the "selfish choices" and the politics of national identity, and reframe a common ground for the endangered human species. How will it be if this research accomplishes its purpose of making the readers familiar with the dark future, preparing the coming generations to live through violence to prevent extreme forms of violence as in Gilead? What if both men and women overcome the ego of individual freedom and rights to avoid the prophesized "shared precariousness" of a crisis-ridden world? Both proactive and reactive in its tone, this study examines how Atwood simultaneously warns and prepares the young

generation against a dystopian future. How it tames and trains us to ease our lives and deaths in a vulnerable future entrapped in wars, violence and the mystery of emerging and re-emerging global diseases like the pandemics induced thereafter!

Methodology

This thesis uses a constructivist approach to examine different realities of the novels. Creswell and Creswell explain the constructivist worldview building on the ideas from Mannheim, Berger, and Lincoln and Guba: "Constructivism or social constructivism (often combined with interpretivism is such a perspective . . an approach to qualitative research" (54). They further refer to the ideas of how individuals understand the world and "develop subjective meanings of their experiences which are varied and multiple". A researcher, thus "looks for the complexity of views" in a broad context as they "are negotiated socially and historically" (54) . This approach uses individual responses or experiences of people to certain things, objects or situations, contextualizes them and examines their interaction with larger socio- historical situations. This dissertation studies the experiences and narratives of four key women characters as victims and witnesses, interprets their interaction and negotiation with the given social and historical context and synthesizes with the researcher's own experiences to induce meanings. Unlike quantitative research which quantifies the findings in numerical projection, this approach studies individual behaviors and experiences of the major characters in the novels and theorizes on a situation that is responded differently by different participants. The single narrator Offred in *The Tales* and three narrators Agnes, Nicole and Lydia in *The Testaments* influence, guide and shape the readers' understanding of the socio-political context of Gilead which is composed of a complex power structure centered on managing population by violence and killing.

Atwood implies the performativity of dynamics of politics in a dystopian context in managing crises and reconstructing human history. Roles are reversed in many cases. Nietzsche's concept of the "necessary evil" needed to protest the "good", Derrida's allegation to the sovereign as a "beast" which rules "outside law" during emergency and the punishment to others as a form of one's indebtedness to the past injustices, oppression and exploitation have a reversal in the context of Gilead. To interpret the reversals and flexibility of characters and their roles, and the way realities are constructed, Butler's performance theory is used to support the constructivist approach. Hence under this frame of research, the researcher can better understand and project the implication of the politics of killing, people's experiences, actions and behavior, and synthesize with the personal experiences and insights to make conclusions.

Butler's performance theory corresponds to the constructivist approach to analyze changing roles and responsibilities, experimental means and measures of control, shifting bonds and relations, and the fluidity of self and identity in the novels in discussion. In her groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble*, she defines gender as social, political or time-bound constructs, but not based on one's sex (6). Gender performance is open to change, has no "essence'; so is not "innate', "natural" and based on biological differences. Even sex is constructed according to her as described by Page Allen in her article on gender performance. The "gender affirming surgeries" of a child born intersex are the examples to its approval (para 13). Relevant to the argument of this study, her concepts of affirmative obligations, frames of war and gender performance are used to discuss the issue of this research. In *The Testaments,* femininity is deferred, both socio-political and biological agency of women is recognized by patriarchy, individuality is overcome, nationality resets into the globe

and personhood is blurred. When one exists in relation to others, one's death can create space for another — the "disposable" population offering deaths to create a "liveable space for the "grievable" ones". Butler terms this interdependence as affirmative obligations which the unwanted population performs. She argues:

> There is no life without the conditions of life that variably sustain life, and those conditions are pervasively social, establishing not the discrete ontology of the person, but rather the interdependency of persons, involving reproducible and sustaining social relations, and relations to the environment and to non-human forms of life, broadly considered. (19)

She redefines "persons" and categorizes them into "persons", "non-persons" or "pre-persons" on the basis of biological individuation and defines them ontogenetically. "Persons" are "entitled to protection against harm" whereas the "non-persons" are disposable (*Frames* 19-20). She is referring to how the irresistible wars and the consequent violence necessitate categorizing people under different frames and how the state claims autonomy over the citizens as per the investment on them like social and medical security. Butler argues: "we would have to rethink the "right to life" where there is no final protection against destruction and where affirmative and necessary social bonds compel us to secure the conditions for livable lives" (21). The war-induced scarcity overpowers the individual rights to live. Hence, helping the "grievable " find a "liveable" space, the individuality and ego must be overcome (Butler 15, 21). This thesis relates such an intersection of the framed population with the open boundaries of relations between disposable and the grievable, and powerful and the powerless. This readiness to be disposed of or dispose of oneself is what Butler terms as affirmative obligations. Butler proposes this action provoking concept of affirmative ethics and redraws the

boundary of individuality, sovereignty, and identity politics. The larger issues of precariousness and "common vulnerability" resulting from the ever going wars are ahead to be fought against collectively. Gilead is facing a similar crisis to be battled against.

This thesis also uses Rosi Braidotti's approach to necropolitics and affirmative ethics of "being worthy of time" (*Posthuman* 129). She observes mass executions, exterminations and death camps which are instrumental to necropolitics in the pretense of sovereignty and race purity. She critically recommends such rigorous practices of death as the design of the future to prevent humanity from being extinct in a world buffeted by wars and violence. Braidotti indicates the moral implications of deploying "technothanatological" weaponry and legalized euthanasia to facilitate sacrificial deaths. She offers "a new analytical tool for an ethics that respects both the horror and the complexity of our times and attempts to deal with them affirmatively" (131). The idea of "being worthy of time" refers to affirmative deaths that have agency to create space for the living ones. Not just easing lives, but easing deaths can also encourage women/people to help manage the population during crises. Braidotti reasons that death is embedded in life. Realizing this rigorously for the "Others" is freeing oneself from the Man's ego and individuality. Hence, this thesis uses this critical approach to life to analyze Lydia's leadership that reframes affirmative action not to empower a special community or a group but to redeem humanity from its own abyss. As such, I substantiate my argument using this concept of affirmative ethics as an analytical tool proposed by Braidotti.

Mbembe's revised concept of necropolitics agrees with Braidotti's idea of affirmative deaths so is relevant to argue about the dystopian context of Gilead. The

deployment of the despotic military forces supported by theocratic doctrines to manage and rebuild the population by killing the unwanted population of women requires reinterpretation of necropolitics. Despite Mbembe's initial identification of it with racism in a postcolonial context, he redefines it from a different perspective and claims that the "contemporary forms of subjugating life to the power of death (necropolitics) are deeply reconfiguring the relations between resistance, sacrifice, and terror" (Mbembe 92). Death prefaces its dynamic roles in crises. The dark side of democracy in the name of sovereignty, individual freedom and radical feminist ideologies is what Gilead is experiencing. Mbembe questions the appropriateness of Foucault's bio-power, the politics over people's lives and bodies. Under the violence of state politics, managing life is intricate with managing deaths. He has also"outlined some of the repressed topographies of cruelty (the plantation and the colony in particular) and suggested that today's form of necropower retakes death as a suicide to outlive "the status of the living dead" (Mbembe 71). Death has agency to counter repression and resist violence. These blurred values, fluid identities, subverted roles, resistance and responsibilities define the "feminine" power in Gilead. What one performs repeatedly is making a statement under the given circumstance. Gilead runs by complex patterns of relations and power structures, fluidity of identities and suspended individualities that render conventional politics full of twists and turns.

As such, the conceptual frameworks used in the thesis include necropolitics and affirmative ethics as recontextualized by Mbembe and Braidotti regarding the ongoing wars and violence. The argument on simultaneity of realities, role-shifting and creative responses to crises is substantiated by Butler's theory of performance and concept of frames of wars that categorize people to manage population.

Braidotti's notion of "ways of dying" resembles Butler's concept of sacrificial deaths as the affirmative actions. However, the study focuses on textual analysis to interpret power structure, to examine Lydia's strategic response to state control, and critically explore the fluid identities that integrate with each other to sustain the future. The ideas made from a wide range of materials like books, journals, scholarly articles and critical scholarships related to the novels, theoretical tools and concepts contribute to the discussion substantially in this thesis.

Organization of the Study

The first chapter describes the context of the novels, the dystopian regime of Gilead, its totalitarian rules and the repression of women to rebuild the population. It raises some questions to the situations and problematizes the use of violence, taking over the personal liberties of women and the killing as part of state politics. It sets the theoretical framework of interpretivism and criticality under constructivism and applies Judith Butler's theory of performance to analyze the dynamics of realities in the novels. To argue why the state chooses certain lives over others and does "selective killing" of women, why it coerces forceful rules and control mechanisms, and how and why the women's side lives through the violence and horror of the state, it uses the concepts of necropolitics and affirmative ethics as conceptualized by Mbembe and Bridotti. Moreover, it relates them to dystopia to recontextualize them with their revised values. Primarily, textual analysis forms the major part of the argument.

The second chapter consists of critical reviews of the theoretical tools, the key concepts, relevant books, scholarly articles and other useful materials like videos and interviews related to the topic to scaffold the discussions and arguments of the third chapter. It explores the unresearched area on the topic, basically the

integrated power structure unlike other research which have focused on one-dimensional elements in isolation, and it proposes a holistic perspective to show the interaction of different entities for reconstructing the endangered human condition. The third chapter goes a wide and critical analysis of the textual data supported by the concepts, theories and scholarly ideas from some critical scholarships of the primary texts. The fourth chapter observes different power blocs, their performances, fluidity and openness working to cope with the population crisis and the war economy, yet under state-control. Lastly, the research concludes with the restatement that Atwood proposes a design to live through a dystopian future full of wars, violence and horror, and prepares a future generation to respect, live through and also resist them with a note of hope for every dystopia presupposes a positive change with some appealing provocation of actions to be performed proactively.

Chapter II: Reviewing Perspectives on Power Structures and Women's Status

First of all, this chapter presents a conceptual and theoretical review of literature related to necropolitics, affirmative ethics, dystopia, theocracy and Performance Theory. Then, it offers the review of existing literature related and relevant to the primary texts *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments.* This includes books, scholarly articles, videos, critiques, interviews and commentaries, which are categorized thematically to accomplish an effective analysis and interpretation.

Necropolitics and Affirmative Ethics

Mbembe discusses the state politics of killing people in his book *Necropolitics*. He alludes to Foucault's bio-power to make his point on necropolitics. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault delineates "sovereign power [as] the right to decide life and death" of the people, which diminished after the individual "right of life and death was framed" by theoreticians (135). Mbembe relates sovereign power with necropower: "The ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes. To be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power (Mbembe 66). He identifies the ability to kill its people in the name of sovereignty with state power. However, previous absolute power, after the individual rights were declared, was conditioned by the special situation like only when "the sovereign's very existence was in jeopardy" (135). In this "historical type of society", power was exercised through appropriation to defend the sovereignty and the sovereign's "own survival" (135). Yet, the state's absolute power to manage its people's death and life was exerted only in the exceptional cases as with Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception" like Nazim or totalitarianism. Mbembe

argues:

> Bio-power, in Foucault's work, appears to function by dividing people into those who must live and those who must die . . . such a power defines itself in relation to the biological field—of which it takes control and in which it invests itself. This control presupposes a distribution of human species into groups, a subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of a biological caesura between these subgroups. Foucault refers to this using the seemingly familiar term "racism". (71)

Foucault reclaims that the normative politics of war and sovereignty is to justify the right to kill the enemy. The German holocaust was meant for ethnic cleansing and race purity. Mbembe relocates Foucault's concept of state's control over people's bodies or lives in "our contemporary world [where] weapons are deployed in the interest of maximally destroying persons and creating death-worlds, that is, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead" (92). The conditions are created to enforce the self-desired embracing of deaths that keeps the sovereign power in a comfortable position to exterminate the unwanted population.

However, Mbembe signifies the inadequacy of Foucault's concept of bio-power to address state-killing of the unwanted people in the war time and the crisis that follows.

For him, the issue is the extermination of the enemies, not only the control over their lives. Taking on the issues of both Focault and Mbembe, this thesis raises a question on who, the enemy is in the dystopian condition of Gilead where state power and the people's lives intricately weave for sustainment. The target population takes a death of both liberation and rebellion by overcoming the "living conditions . . . of the

living dead" and also creates space for others (92).

Later, Mbembe reverses the control on the unwanted people–the "Other" and relates them to "the non-Western" — referred to The South and The North during de-colonial Europe who had a similar kind of overwhelming fear of being annihilated by the de-colonizers and imperialists (13). He interrogates the rationale of "bio-power" in a different context when both sides–colonizers and the colonized share the common fear: "their burden always to be overwhelmed by" meaning both fear each other ("Introduction"). Mbembe examines: "Various interpretations of the death camps in particular have taken them as the central metaphor for sovereign and destructive violence and as the ultimate sign of the absolute power of the negative" (67). This is the case in "the state of exception" like "Nazism, totalitarianism and concentration/extermination camps" (67).

Having no sign of resisting the hegemony of western technology and contemporary wars, he re-contextualizes planned deaths: "If, ultimately, humanity exists only through being in and of the world, can we found upon a relation with others based on the reciprocal recognition of our common vulnerability and finitude?" (Mbembe, "Praise for Necropolitics" 2-3) He argues: "Can the notion of bio-power account for the contemporary ways in which the political takes as its primary and absolute objective the enemy's murder, doing so under the guise of war, resistance, or the war on terror?" (Mbembe 66). This thesis re-approaches state killing, the decolonial necropolitics purported to eliminate the "Other" but values it as an inevitable state mechanism to manage the whole population for the time being. The question of the "other" dissolves there. It is relatable to the ideas Kodjo-Grandvaux and Pauron, and Jeune Afrique perceive: ". . . war has become not an exception but a permanent state, 'the sacrament' of our era", so is the reciprocal fear

of survivability (qtd. in Mbembe 3). Mbembe claims: “contemporary forms of subjugating life to the power of death (necropolitics) are deeply reconfiguring the relations between resistance, sacrifice, and terror” (92). So, it can be stated that with the lack of distinctness among these various forms of deaths, power relations are also reconfigured. The state, women or the enemy to be deleted– all in Gilead survive on reciprocity, and the affirmative actions of the women — the “non-human”. As the subversion to the affirmative privilege given to women traditionally, the disempowered women compensate for the loss caused to the humans, not the privileged men to the underprivileged “Others”.

Made Fitri Maya Padmi correlates war and peace, and characterizes women's peace-making capacity: “Pacific or peace characteristics of women are often used to analyze the peace prospect after war” (“Abstract” 1). Her ideas are relevant to argue in this thesis that the Handmaids materialize this by living through violence and transferring the genetic capacity to the future generations. So does Aunt Lydia by both resignation and resistance–violent and strategic–a way to keep up with the repression.

Revising the politics of killing and the ways of dying, Braidotti claims that life and death are blurred or embedded instruments for surviving the “precariousness” in a posthuman context marked by wars and violence. She argues: “the relentless generative powers of death require the suppression of that which is the nearest and dearest to me, namely myself, my own vital being-there” *(Posthuman* 121). Her point is that such deaths can reproduce the future. She proclaims: “The ethics of productive affirmation is a different way of handling the issue of how to deal with pain and traumas and to operate in situations which are extreme, while working to bring out the generative force of zoe – life beyond the ego-bound human” (133). Braidotti’s critical

attention draws upon pan-humanity against the sense of Otherness and the Universal Man, manifested in wars, technological experimentations, ecological crises and political-divides. She also relocates feminist identity: “Posthuman feminists look for subversion not in counter-identity formations, but rather in pure dislocations of identities via the perversion of standardized patterns of sexualized, racialized and naturalized interaction” (99). In the same vein, this thesis draws upon the indeterminate gender roles and feminine ideals that intersect with the extemporaneos situations and needs in a state of crisis in Gilead.

Braidotti speculates the posthuman death as impersonal which demands rigorous thought “about ways of dying” and “new forensic social sensibility” (*Posthuman* 130). She reverses the anthropocentric view on human supremacy: “Death is not a human prerogative, especially in the era of ‘disappearing’ nature resulting from “the rationalist idea of human stewardship of nature” that further has led to “the environmental question . . . how to prevent species extinction” (130). She raises “a bio-political issue: which species are allowed to survive and which to die? And what are the criteria that would allow us to decide?” (130). She recommends us to discard the idea of “unthinkable death” and create renewed criteria and “an alternative vision of subjectivity to support this effort and make it operational” (130).

Her approach to deaths as “the inevitable” is convincing if located in the background of “the persistence of political violence and notions of ‘just wars’ where deaths and “ways of dying are socially distributed and organized” (131). Her post-human death theory relocates “bio-politics . . . in the contemporary context marked by the ‘new’ wars and by remote-controlled techno-thanatological weaponry" (131). She discusses Deleuze’s concept of “personal” and “impersonal” deaths. Impersonal death makes sense to a greater demand beyond the ego and parallels to

"impersonality of life" that lives on "suppression of the individualized ego" (131). Compensating what the Universal anthropocentric self inflicted upon the nature and the "Others", and what it perpetuates to guard its own desires and ambitions, the posthuman has to accept "the reality of horrors, [and] re-work it so as to assert the vital powers of healing and compassion" (132). She conceptualizes affirmative ethics and recommends "ethos of engagement" and "becoming worthy of time" implicative of sacrificial deaths (129). It is reminiscent of Philippe Aries' "The Tame Death" reemerged as a response to modern deaths and the demand for will-death termed euthanasia as a positive restraint to Eros and Thanatos which Freud discussed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. A critic Kli interprets the terms that, Eros refers to instincts for preserving life whereas Thanatos is a negative drive for desiring deaths (Kli "Abstract"). Built on the concept, Foucault discusses "thanatopolitical utopia" imagining the freedom to choose deaths which is a subversive notion against his idea of bio-politics and Thanatos as telos of state to choose deaths of people: 'This death that was based on the right of the sovereign is now manifested as simply the reverse of the right of the social body" (Foucault 136). It is also a reverse of the notion of Eros, the instinct to live or "the unthinkability of death" of "Me" in Braidotti's words (*Posthuman* 130). With the Freudian interpretation of Thanatos as "a tendency for the dissolution of life" inherent in humans, Foucault's subverted Thanatos and Braidotti's call for euthanasia–a conscious choice for death contradicts (Kli "Abstract'). With it, the demarcation line between instinct and consciousness blurs. In the same vein, Braidotti calls for a positive response to death as an affirmative obligation and training ourselves against the instinct of life for a collective purpose of fighting the crises. So does Butler when she reflects on the "precariousness" of human life: "we would have to rethink the

"right to life" where there is no final protection against destruction, and where affirmative and necessary social bonds compel us to secure the conditions for livable lives, and to do so on egalitarian grounds" (*Frames* 21). Adding on to the concepts of affirmative deaths by these critics, this thesis proposes a constructive response to crisis and prefaces a design of the future.

Talking about the impersonalization of death similar to Braidotti's worthy deaths, Butler reflects on contemporary wars and "the selective and differential framing of violence": "specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living. If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense" (*Frames* 1). Bringing the concepts of both of the critics together, this thesis argues how for confronting the "precarity" volunteered by "Man" himself, the sovereign governments decide on the lives and death of their people framed under different state rhetoric.

Butler defines precariousness:

> To say that life is precarious is to say that the possibility of being sustained relies fundamentally on social and political conditions, and not only on a postulated internal drive to live. Indeed, every drive has to be propped, supported by what is outside itself, which is why there can be no persistence in life without at least some conditions that make a life livable. (*Frames* 21)

With this, the definition of life, individuality and reproductive freedom is regenerated and reframed by the socio- political conditions. Butler's idea is how one exists in relation to "Others" when they share a common "precariousness". She reinforces the idea of interrelations and affirmative obligations that "variably sustain life, and those conditions are pervasively social, establishing not the discrete ontology of the person,

but rather the interdependency of persons" (19). To meet these social ends, the given conditions decide on the deaths/killing of the non-grievable to make the situation liveable for the grievable whose losses are missed and mourned (22). This thesis builds on this concept of framed populations over which the state decides the lives and deaths, especially and largely of women. Hence, this thesis presents a justification of Butler's concept in Gilead politics where the women--the Others– undergo rigorous experimentation of the repressed self and sexuality, forceful births and deaths that is instrumental to enable the "grievable" to survive the violence and crisis and let the human history go on the flux (*Frames* 23). It further calls for subversion of the definition of the disposable and the grievable to decide who the "worthy" ones are.

Derrida also questions the concept of sovereign power in *The Beast and the Sovereign* by comparing the sovereign with a beast. He uses the analogy of the sovereign and the beast representing the powerful masculine and the emotional feminine respectively (*Derrida* 60). However, he claims that both "bear a strange resemblance. . . in particular being 'outside the law' " (qtd. in Swiffen 346). He relates the situation to the "state of exception", which violates laws and imposes emergency rules for the public good as discussed by Agamben. However, Derrida disagrees with Agamben's biopolitical theory on sovereignty of the state of exception which "necessitates the intersection of the legal and the political" and proposes a revised definition of sovereignty: "No one sovereignty" (Agamben, *State* 346). Swiffen adds on to Derrida's concept of sovereignty as "a perpetual openness" . . . related to "undecidability" of "human and animal" (346). To substantiate the claim of openness of identity and power, Derrida reinterprets one of the Ten Commandments– "Thou shall not kill": "And so morality, ethics, the "Thou shalt not kill" with respect to anyone at all, the first comer, the first living creature to come, be it a God, a snake,

a beast, or a man, and that's a question we ought to discuss" (Derrida 326). That is you might identify with any of them. His question is: "Whose sovereignty?" which cannot be determinate but is fluid that underpins the slippery feature of defining and specificity (Swiffen 346).

Regarding the relevance of the concepts by different critics and theorists discussed above to this research, all of them propose a common ground for openness to identity formation, interconnectedness among forces and undecidability of roles and responsibilities. Derrida's intervention on sovereignty, Butler's concept of affirmative obligations, Braidotti's proposition of "ethos of engagement' and "becoming worthy of time", and Mbembe's idea of reconfigured relations to live through the political crises reclaim the power of performance to achieve the "purpose at hand" disregarding the stereotypical strata of political positions. Like Mbembe's "dreams of writing a common history of humanity that would deflate all the flashy national heroism and redraw new relations between the self and the other", this thesis rewrites the history of convergence of male and female power (Mbembe 2). Subverted femininity in Lydia's character, young girls Agnes and Becka transformed from self-centered individuals having a scared and repulsive response to forced sex and marriage into adults who internalize reproduction as a great responsibility manifest the redrawn roles and identities.

Dystopia

Atwood develops a strong ethos by replicating the modern USA in the dystopia of Gilead. The prescience of *The Handmaid's Tales* has manifested in the real world around which Atwood herself confirms. Her visits to Muslim countries, experiences of Trump's anti-women policies and the growing tendency to totalitarianism and fundamentalist ideologies are concretized in the novels discussed

herewith. Mentioning what Vassenden Eirik claims about dystopia helps authenticate Atwood's vision of the future founded in the present:

> Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, depression, debt, and the steady weakening of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination. (para 7)

He locates its root in the existing world buffeted by wars, violence, disease and the consequent endangered human condition. This condition has made a fertile ground for writers to write futuristic novels termed as dystopia that speculate the dark side of utopian imagination. Although Thomas More had conceived a better world in his *Utopia* (1516) centuries ago, that foregrounds its counterpart –a dystopia that is another extreme of technological experimentation — like Orwell's "utopia [*Ninety Eighty Four*] gone wrong in a grim futuristic society", as analyzed by Vivien Green in his article "Utopia/Dystopia" (2). Green reflects on the downside of technology captured by dystopias:

> Thomas More, in his *Utopia* (1516), conjures an isolated island to describe a better world but one that in hindsight sounds fascist, prescient now that the twentieth century is over, while in *1984* (1949) George Orwell positions his utopia gone wrong in a grim futuristic society. Both are characterized by oppressive canons and the suffocation of independent thought. (2)

Designed as a control mechanism over crimes and conspiracies against the constant wars by limiting the people's ability to think freely, Orwell's Ingsoc (English Socialism) in his utopian totalitarian regime of Oceania is grounded in three

principles: “War is Peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength” (Orwell, 36). It controls people’s privacy and freedom but the anticipated better world turns more fascist and violent on people. The party bears no truth of those ideals in practice (80). Orwell’s speculation in his fiction is now almost our real experience. Different forms of inflictions by man on his own kind and nature are the “fertile ground” to produce such dystopian narratives like Atwood’s novels in concern.

Today's surveillance capitalism is another side that controls our visions, detects our desires and records them to its benefits. In an interview with a Harvard correspondent, Soshana Zuboff defines it “as the unilateral claiming of private human experience as free raw material” by companies to compute and “translate them into behavioral data” to sell “prediction-product” (Laidler “High Tech”). She reminds how after the 9/11 attack in New York in 2001, Google invented surveillance capitalism to keep “total information awareness” beyond the concern of individual privacy. Zuboff, however, critiques the “one-way mirror”: “Every survey of internet users has shown that once people become aware of surveillance capitalists’ backstage practices, they reject them” (Laidler “High Tech”). Laidler sums up Zuboff “about her belief that surveillance capitalism, a term she coined in 2014, is undermining personal autonomy and eroding democracy — and the ways she says society can fight back” (“High Tech”). But, if perceived from a different angle, by living with the hegemony of surveillance, people also develop ways to handle and respond to it critically and wisely and still can confide it in them. Thus, this thesis observes how the people in Gilead detected by the constant surveillance can build their criticality to survive and resist repression that signposts to the readers the idea of mastering over similar dystopian practices turned into realities today. Eirik justifies the futuristic world come into reality:

> And it would seem logical to connect this upturn in dystopian fiction to a corresponding historical economic and political downturn after decades of booming economies and giant technological leaps, our once optimistic and progress-oriented views of the world have been turned inside out: “Dystopias follow utopias like thunder follows lightning([8]). (Eirik para 6)

Her vision of a dystopian future still shows hope in making the world a better place In an article “Dystopia Is Upon Us”, Courtney Coonrod points at the fictional world turned into reality: “From constant surveillance to algorithms that decide what we see, society is entering territory reserved for fictional dystopias” (1st para). Both Eirik and Coonrod refer to how our visions and experiences are shaped and controlled by our own inventions that were made to enhance our lives. Atwood’s comparison of Gilead with “America today” and these critics’ locating of dystopia in the real world fall in the similar array of thoughts tinged with hope for positive changes as the aftermath of dystopian rule. Hence, this thesis presents a consolation of influencing hope into action that requires our more critical, affirmative and holistic responses to history and humanity.

Rob Boston foresees Atwood’s theocracy in America: “It used to be , if you wanted a glimpse of what life would be like in an America that had become a nightmarish theocracy, you had to read a book like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.*

That's no longer necessary, instead, you can just visit Texas” (Boston 1st para). Coonrod’s rhetorical question “Dystopia is Upon Us. Are you Ready?” finds the answer in Boston’s instances from states like “Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania where restrictive laws on abortion, book bans, and attempts to infuse Christianity into public schools raise concerns about civil liberties" (Boston

"Abstract"). Analyzing these perspectives on dystopia today, this thesis adds to the relevance of Gilead which shows the grim side of democracies, the continuous wars, the enforcement of controlling "abortion trafficking" as in Texas and a few other states. It offers a model for our preparedness to face the more critical conditions in the future. Texas is a microcosmic manifestation of Atwood's Gilead where the Handmaids are forced to fulfill God's will by enacting the sex slaves of the Commanders at the cost of their freedom. However, the major concern of this thesis is proposing a visionary picture of an integrated human history that can be founded on sacrificial deaths, affirmative responses and constructive resistance against violence as the daily reality of emerging theocratic democracies of modern time.

Theocracy

Atwood's portrayal of the power of Puritan values in perpetuating patriarchy is significant regarding the fundamentalist ideologies intruding in modern democracies as projected by the aforementioned critics. H. Khalid defines theocracy in the context of Islamic countries:

> By theocracy we generally mean a form of government that is exercised under divine authority, i.e., a government which recognizes God as the supreme ruler in civic affairs and accepts His revelation — interpreted by His representatives — as the basis on which state and society must be built. . . God is proclaimed as the sovereign of the state, represented on earth by His vicegerent, the ruler" (187). The "invisible sovereign" and its "divine commands" are promulgated and expounded by priests (187). A notable theocracy was the one by Moses among the Israelites. (187)

Detlev's definition shows theocracy as a proxy government ruled by the "invisible sovereign" that we find functioning even in modern democratic countries as in

Atwood's Gilead version of America and some Islamic countries. Another critic Ferrero agrees with Detlev's opinion on theocracy which "is usually understood to mean government by a clergy, or a self-appointed group who claim to speak and act on God's behalf (Ferrero 723-724). He analyzes how religious scriptures are regarded as God's words, and recited, interpreted or preached for "a political arrangement" (724). He claims that despite a few failures and rarity of theocracy, they are "notable . . . for their remarkable permanence" in different forms even in today's world (724). Rees' illustrations of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Indonesia which use theocracy for national and cultural unity support both Detlev's and Ferrero's concern with the resurgence of theocracies (Rees, "Why 'theocracy' Is"). Taking on their views, this dissertation adds Gilead to the list of theocracies because it is the replication of some existing governments which have imposed orthodox religious doctrines over women's lives. However, it claims that in Gilead, Puritanism does not form absolute power but intersects with militarism and patriarchy to execute totalitarianism. This alliance suggests militarism being exhausted by its destructive history and surrendering to the ultimate–the God. Since the state machinery itself is corrupt, sinful and violent in Gilead, the theocratic values imposed on people are ironically tools for self-criticism, blame- game and self-consolation against its sins, crimes and treachery inflicted upon nature and its inhabitants. The major victims of the political crises are women who are performing resilience constructively. Even the male population living on crimes like rape, illicit love affairs, infiltration and violence as by Commander Judd and Nick portrays another side of population living through repression under these different excuses over the past luxuries they lost in Gilead.

Gender Performance

What women perform in the reduced circumstances under the repressive rule of Gilead makes an invaluable difference in rebuilding humanity. This power of the disempowered and powerless needs redefining. Judith Butler interrogates the heterosexual gender identities and introduces the theory of gender performance in her book *Gender Trouble*: ". . . gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (9-10). She disagrees with the given gender as the fixed identity determined culturally on the basis of sex but proposes that it is decided on what you do, not who you are. She further argues:

> Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure. (22)

These views show how Butler extends Simon de Beauvoir's concept of gender as a social cultural construct but not based on sex, biological trait. It is rather what you perform to meet situational demands, "purpose at hand" or do repeatedly. Paige Allen thematizes Butler's concept of gender performance: "Gender is what you do, not who you are . . . [not] something natural or internal . . . "innate" but is rooted in "outside signs and actions" (1st para). Ritualized repetition of certain acts creates one's identity. The repetition reproduces certain norms that look as if they are stable. But "there is neither an 'essence' . . . nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires", but identity is a continuous process of convergence, Butler claims (qtd. in Allen para 4). Even sex, she claims, is constructed. "Gender affirming surgeries of

intersexual children" by birth is one of its examples. Hence, according to her, gender performance is about doing and getting recognized or identified so is open to changing, convergence or divergence necessitated by purpose. Convinced to her view if applied in the critical condition of Gilead, this paper concludes that women there perform various acts beyond femininity defying the cultural stereotypes. The masculine military Commanders seek to save sovereignty with the charitable responses by the female force accumulated in Lydia's leadership. She best fits into the concept of gender performance shifting her character to dynamic roles. What is worth as the essence is one's ability to mold to open coalition and convergence, and meet the "purpose at hand" whatever the gender one is (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 22). Thus, this thesis reclaims the political convergence among male and female over patriarchy. Even at a personal level, the male are experiencing apathy in sex over the "urges" traditionally tailored to the male ignited by the females for their choices are also under state control. Hence, if examined broadly, Atwood is implicative of inevitable changes in personal interests and the power structures

Literature Review of the Primary Texts

The Testaments is taken as a sequel to Atwood's earlier novel *The Handmaid's Tale* that is adapted into a TV Series by Hulu. Published almost 35 years later, *The Testaments* has the elements of inter-textuality as Aunt Lydia belongs to both of the novels, Gilead is the setting shared by both of them and both use biblical references amply. Many references from the Bible, and a number of political and cultural allusions add to the complexities of the novels. But many others read them as independent texts with a wide range of interpretations. This paper presents them in different thematic categories based on the various perspectives like feminism, dystopia, theocracy, culture and surveillance. Besides, it

analyzes and interprets them to find an unearthed area of research and takes a different position to address it.

Feminist scholarships on the novels have covered the major issues like objectification of women's bodies, repression and violence on women, traditional femininity, identity politics and resistance through complicity. Reviewing them caters to map the gap and find the new area of study.

Preceded by the Baby Boomers' Age, *The Handmaid's Tale* has featured Offred as submissive to patriarchy. Despite her mild defiance of repression, she represents motherhood and the stereotypical women carrying the babies as depicted by a critic Feldman. She finds the women like Offred in the novel "less radical than their mothers' generation" ("Abstract" 1). True somehow, Offred's mother fought for autonomy and freedom for women whereas she "would call Offred a prude" (*Tales* 186). Offred retrospects on her mother wearing like a young and talking with her "rowdy friends" whom she resented. They were a rebellious group. The mother "liked being more outrageous than I was, more rebellious", she reflects (186). Adding to this line of argument, this thesis examines how women like Offred avoid resistance and struggle but transmit "womanhood" among generations as Offred leaves behind two daughters–Agnes and Nicole with genetic capacity who are honored as "Pearls" in *The Testaments.* Offred retreats to homemaking as a safe place and enacts defying her mother's generation which struggled for equality. Little more protesting are Offred's daughters, Daisy/ Baby Nicole and Agnes in *The Testaments* who represent a generation responding with both resignation and resistance. However, Offred's whims for love to Nick and freedom from the imprisoned life, secret or illicit meetings with Commander Judd, and playing the forbidden game Scrabble with him introduce her as a woman split apart

between a faith in womanhood and individual freedom.

Quran and Anwar raise a similar gender issue — "the issue of women objectification in the novel *The Testaments* . . . various ways men objectify and subordinate women's characters in every aspect of women's life" (1). Their analysis "focuses on men's actions in restricting women's life choices and using religion as a shield to regulate women's bodies" (1). That is partly true because women are almost imprisoned except for the pair walking for shopping in the case of Handmaids whose bodies are controlled by the state for planned sex and pregnancy. Pavicic-Iveija labels *The Handmaid's Tale* as "a reflection of the socio- political climate . . . plagued by restrictions where women's reproductive rights seem to be completely absent" ("Abstract" 3). Her stance runs parallel to Quran and Anwar's voice against the state control on women's freedom and reproductive rights. In the same vein, Julia Kuznetski criticizes violence on and the abuse of women's bodies: "the body as a site of social construction, vulnerability and control . . . allowing for empowering "modes of heterogeneity" ("Abstract" 3). In both of the novels *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, Julia pays her critical attention to the body "acted upon with repression" to weaken homogeneity and continue heterogeneous realities side by side (3). If these issues by different critics are observed, the common point they make is how the patriarchy builds on women's bodies and violence upon them which cannot be denied. But, this thesis argues on the ground that the violence and control on women's bodies, reproductive rights and homogeneity do not cater to the vulnerability of women when humanity itself is vulnerable. The grandeur of reproduction and the gravity of control for births have to do with the civil act for a collective human future, not merely as an individual telos of women. Objectification is taken by some feminists as one of the necropolitical practices that pertains to

gender violence and facilitates patriarchy. However, to confine such aggressive intervention on women's freedom by state just to feminist issues does not draw a convincing meaning.

Hence, this thesis calls for a peripheral perspective to comprehend the crisis resolutely, presents a critical outlook to the objectification and reinterprets it in a larger context of dystopian Gilead facing common vulnerability of population. It argues that the control on women's bodies is not merely the state violence to perpetuate male domination but a critical choice to manage the population for surviving economic and political crises as the immediate purpose and preventing the prescient extinction of humanity in the far future.

Meredith Minister departs from the traditional feminist issues in Atwood's novels. She finds them as "narratives of survival": "Atwood and [Octavia] Butler create communities of people who survive because they are connected, even when they are isolated and appear alone . . . these novels suggest that survival depends on being connected to other people" ("How to Live" 285). Of course, the novels not only present the stories of survival, but they also trigger actions for change to integration to avoid the imminent dystopian future replicated by Gilead.

Atwood herself reclaims The Republic of Gilead being the reflection of contemporary societies as in Trump's regime –"America today" (qtd. in Josefsson 3). Hall reflects the same: "Atwood's fictional society has growing parallels with modern America . . . where fundamentalists and patriarchal governmental officials control every aspect of women's lives, including their reproductive choices" ("Reduced Circumstances" 2). She is referring to the fundamentalist policies like Trump's anti-abortion legislation and "encroachment of civil liberty"-- "the ideology . . . firmly rooted in American history" petalled on Puritan doctrines (2).

Trump's control on abortion is an example of violation of democratic values for freedom and individual rights of women in America. Trump's imperative is to save the rights of the embryo at the cost of women's free choices and radical feminist ideologies in some cases. Whether the rights of the unborn baby or the freedom of the living women is more precious is open to interpretation. However, Atwood's speculation surpasses Trump's motive of saving child rights; rather she foresees the possible extinction of the human species which can be saved by new births. As such, this thesis argues that the control on abortion is not limited to child rights but with the human future that the recent wars and violence around the world are heading to. Individuality is reduced to state property or civil belonging during a war economy.

Keck and Ossietzky attribute resistance backed up by charity to the lead female characters in their article about complicity and resistance. They contrast Offred's rather passive behavior as a representative of "the ordinary woman" with Aunt Lydia's "active membership in the political elite . . . ambiguous, contradictory" (14). Lydia is a complex character, sensible and is given agency. She employs various tools, techniques and strategies not to empower herself to achieve any personal gain but to create a space to exercise her power to achieve a larger goal of ending the repressive regime. The varied roles of these two female protagonists illustrate Atwood's vision of appropriated life bound to disguise and change. Notably, the art of resilience, survival and the sacrificial deaths that the women in the novels perform amidst violence as a norm have not drawn much critical attention. Jordyn Weiss implies a similar vein of thought about Lydia's demonstration as "the different gender performances . . . by the version of the character Aunt Lydia", while interpreting *The Testaments* ("Abstract" 1). Her focus

is in Lydia's double role: as a woman "to restore Gileadean women's freedom" and as Aunt to impose the rules of patriarchal theocracy (1). What is questionable in her perspective is isolating women's issues instead of taking them as the collective human condition.

The theme of dystopia is the concern of some other critics. For Shanmugi G, the novel reflects "the totalitarian system and dystopian society" (1). She is agreeable that Gilead is a dystopian state where autocracy rules over freedom and individuality, violence is extreme and deaths are imposed. But, her ideas are less an interpretation but a reproduction of the given text itself. She relates the regime of Gilead with totalitarian rules like Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Italy and Kim's "modern totalitarian state" North Korea which is relatable (1). Quite different in the context, Gilead runs a totalitarian system neither for exerting its sovereign power against any antagonistic threat as with the examples mentioned above nor for saving the national identity. Rather, it is fighting with itself against the age-long afflictions and the consequent crises facing by itself. The critic fails to interpret the specificity and exceptionality of Gilead politics, and overlooks the recognition of women's agency by the state. She could have analyzed the root causes that led humanity to this level of violence and the vulnerability.

Theocracy as a system of government in Gilead has drawn some critiques. Yadav and Arora think that "Gilead is within you" as a cultural memory. They observe: "The narrative of *The Testaments* revolves around how these two women [Agnes and Nicole], with the help of Aunt Lydia and Mayday, shift the religious autonomy and fight back the cultural imprints of Gilead" (3). The regime sets cultural and group memories of its people by categorizing them, intimidating by false interpretations of the Bible and using surveillance. The cultural memory, at

another level, might be a course of living through the world that Atwood has envisaged in the novel. In her article, Strommen explores how the Bible is instrumental to control women:

> . . . several of Atwood's novels present a different picture, particularly *The Handmaid' s Tale* from 1985 and its sequel, *The Testaments* (2019), and *The Year of the Flood from 2009*. In *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, the Bible is an object kept from the eyes and hands of most women, used to justify their oppression and objectification. (27)

Agnes recalls how she accessed the Reading Room in Ardua Hall only after becoming a Supplicant, otherwise prohibited: "for which higher authorization is required and where the Bibles brood in the darkness of their locked boxes, glowing with arcane energy" (*Testaments* 35). The stories of Jacob and Rachel, of "incest" that produces "Unbabies" and of the Concubine's adultery as a "grave Sin" illustrate how the Bible is pervasive among women and girls (35).

The overview of the various critical scholarships has revealed significant ideas related to the topic of this research. Most of the critics pay attention to the oppression, objectification and abuse of women as the crux of the novels. Some like Strommen consider the regime as a theocracy and have critiqued the use of Puritan values — another form of repression on women that renders patriarchy justified. Shanmugi compares the regimented state of Gilead with the totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany and Korea founded on militarism which makes sense regarding its absolute sovereign power to dictate and punish civilians inhumanly. Formation of cultural memory of violence and repression as the key theme is largely a convincing interpretation because the categorization of women keeps them aware of their roles and duties as cultural practices. Some critics employ feminist perspecctives and

feature Offred as a traditional woman resorting to motherhood whereas Lydia as a woman of strategy ruling and redeeming women through complicity and resistance– fighting against the system from within. Atwood herself claims that Gilead represents modern America and also prophesyzes about the climax of the oppressive rule in the future. It makes us aware of the dark side of modern democracies as concluded by Yadav and Arora about the threat: "Gilead is within us" (3). They call for our readiness to face Gileaden reality. Based upon the wide range of literature review, this paper has found a new area of research regarding the implication of the use of these diverse realities and modes of control—absolute patriarchy, theocracy, militarism, all working to repress women and manage the population.

Hence, this thesis proposes a peripheral outlook for an integrated power structure composed of diverse forces performing in their own ways to rebuild the future. The state of Gilead keeps on inventing ways of control and Lydia keeps on changing her roles to make Gilead a "livable" place for women and enables women to "live through" the given "reduced circumstances". As a departure from the existing research, this thesis offers an overarching approach to human history founded on the integration of masculine state power with the accomplice and co-combatant—the "women's sphere", the "Other"--acknowledged in practice yet unrecognized at policy level. It argues that both sides are coping with the Man-induced crisis of a vulnerable population that can survive on reconfigured relations; compelling negotiations, shifting roles and responsibilities and the politics of check and balance. Retrospection of and reframing the power structure with the "Others" is the agenda this research puts forth. Hence, it claims that beyond national identity and sovereignty, individual freedom or autonomy of body, it is a critical mode of human history when humanity confronts the common predicament and the "shared

vulnerability" of being extinct that heals only in the mutual recognition and affirmative approach to and by the "Others".

Chapter III: The Rhetorics of State Politics and Women's Responses

Gilead exploits complex measures of control on women to rebuild the population. Under a repressive rule, it invents disciplinary mechanisms, brutal punishments and the violent means of killing the unwanted people. Quite contrary to the rules, it formulates protective policies for women and uses women's leadership as well. Emerged as a "state of exception" it takes support from theocracy, militarism, surveillance and strategic tactics of achieving trust upon its violent and oppressive rulers. This is the way it holds possible public rebellion by women despite a few cases of defiance. It is quite ironic that the "totalitarian" regime imposes repressive rules through collaboration and participation of conflicting forces–ruler and the ruled, powerful and the disempowered, science and religion, and protection and deletion. There exists recognition even in repression.

Violence and the Banality of Deaths

Braidotti observes that the "becoming corpses" has entered the daily reality which used to be the subject of dystopia, thrillers, Si-Fis, crime series before. While suggesting people the "ways of dying" to facilitate less painful deaths and lives in a posthuman future that the unstoppable wars are heading to, she calls for sacrificial deaths to be "worthy of time" amidst the crisis (*Sonic Acts, Posthuman*). Braidotti's concept turns into reality in Atwood's novels in which deaths, killings, suicides and mass executions pervail persistently. From silent deletions, self-terminations, violent persecutions to public executions, deaths mark the mainstream politics of Gilead.

Offred remembers one of the events of women's Salvagings, the killing of women convicts: "On stage, to the left, are those who are to be salvaged: two Handmaids , one wife. . . . they have probably been given injections or pills . . . two Salvagers in their black hoods" (*Tales* 281). The audiences are Wives, daughters,

Econowives and Marthas and the Handmaids at the front. The Aunts are behind the Salvagers and Aunt Lydia justifying the punishment and duty of performing it as the leader, in the mike: "I'm sure we are all aware of the unfortunate circumstances that bring us all together in this beautiful morning. . . duty is a hard taskmaster, . . . and it is in the name of duty that we are here today" (282). Lydia is pointing at herself, too, as "taskmistress" performing very crucial tasks in rebuilding humanity like other women present there who are getting salvaged to fullfill their duty. The women population comprising the Aunts, young girls and Handmaids are taken as "torch of future, the cradle of the race, [doing] the task before us" according to Offred's interpretation of what Lydia propounds as duty (282). Offred relates the ritualized witnessing of the hanging of women in the mass by other women to the politics of communicating the punishments: "The crimes of others are a secret language among us" that would help them to "show what they are capable of" doing as their duty (283). She recalls how the Salvagings would be followed by the detailed announcement of the crimes of convicts which most often are reading, Unchastity, adultery, killing Handmaids illegally by wives or even killing the Commanders by Handmaids and any attempted escape. Those public televising of crimes are not cast any longer fearing the possible riots against them. The state imperative is to keep women silently intact of their virtues and duties of healthy breeding. The Wives and Marthas also prompt fear in the girls to prevent possible rebellion. Paula, a widow, had disclosed the death punishment given to a Handmaid who attempted an escape after killing her Commander, Paula's husband (*Testaments* 74). The women are not only the audiciences but are also compliant in the act of hanging other women. During the execution of a Handmaid, Ofcharles there on stage, Offred recalls how she took part: " I've leaned forward to touch the rope, . . . in time with the others . . . then

placed my hands on my hand on my heart to show my unity with the Salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the killing of this woman" (284). Despite retching, fear and hatred around among these women against the barbarism of the state, this is how they, convinced to accept the punishments, are doing their duty to continue Gilead. The executed bodies are hanged on the Wall at the disposal of the Handmaids as a reminder of their duties and punishments in case similar crimes are committed. Offred shares her memories: "The three bodies hang there, even with the white sacks over their heads looking curiously stretched, like chickens strung up by the necks in a meatshop window" (285). Public deaths and disposal of dead bodies have become a norm. Hence, the state rhetoric of hegemonic deaths and punishments draws upon acceptance and readiness to die.

The state's ethos is further built up by a public display of persecution of the male convicts in Particicution. Offred shares the event of killing male criminals on the same day of The Salvagings. Aunt Lydia sums up about a rapist, Guardian to be executed there: "He was once a Guardian.He has disgraced his uniform. He has abused his position of trust. His partner in viciousness has already been shot. The penalty for rape. . . is death. Deuteronomy 22:23-29" (286). Guardians are the security force, especially to protect women in Gilead. Instead, he had raped a pregnant woman that caused the baby's death. The price of losing the baby " after what we go through" for it because of "too much . . . violation" enrages the Handmaids, reflects Offred. She herself is overwhelmed with rage: "It's true, there is a bloodlust, I want to tear, gouge, rend" (287). Offred's aggression speaks of the influence the state has had upon the Handmaids to encourage their sacrifices for the rare births. The state-killing, despite its brutality, overpowers rape. The libel and punishment to the rapist justifies Lydia's tactics of building trust with the women

about her faith in social justice. L Thomas claims that she is "both feared and revered in Gilead". In a book review of the two novels by Atwood, he identifies her as "more nuanced, . . . three-dimensional . . . both ruthless and sympathetic as she struggles to survive and protect her own interests while grappling with the guilt of her past actions and attempting to preserve her position of power" (Book Review: The Testaments by Margaret Atwood). He marks the changes in Lydia from "one-dimensional character" in *The Tales* to a more dynamic one in the sequel. In *The Tales,* she worked as a high ranking Aunt and was compliant to enforce the repression on women. But, in *The Testaments*, she uses her power to "manipulate Gilead's leaders and shape its policies" to redeem women and then humanity itself (Thomas *Book Review*). This politics empowers her at individual level but helps her persuade women to abide the repressive rules affirmatively.

But who knows, maybe a few cases of rape are fabricated just to achieve this end of trust and consolation to women. Perhaps, the rapist was denying the allegation at the last moment of execution: "I didn't…" meaning he had not committed rape (*Tales* 287). It proves right if what Ofglen discloses is true: "He wasn't a rapist at all, he was a political . . . one of ours. I knocked him out. Put him out of his misery" (287). That is why Ofglen had eased his death by giving him a hard quick blow on head before all the Handmaids' barbaric attack on him. Their brutality was evident in Janine who was smeared with blood and had "a clump of blond hair" ripped apart from his head. This was an enraged revenge on the rapists because Janine was once blamed for being responsible for her own gang-rape and humiliated in public . Moreover, her one eye was plucked out as a punishment of another sin of illegal pregnancy (Cite). The blame and public humiliation was instrumental to intimidate other girls from committing similar sins. They were "permitted anything" on the

rapist as punishment — “this is freedom” to Handmaids, recalls Offred (287). Shooting was considered too easy a death for a rapist. What is remarkable is Offred’s normal response to the barbaric acts of killing: “I am hungry. This is monstrous, . . . but true. Death makes me hungry” (289). To remain alive, After the Particicution is over, she accepts “the body’s way of seeing to it” – the deaths (289). This is an expression of complacency to the condition of being. They have learnt to live through violence and deaths. Hence, life and death are embedded into each other as opined by Braidotti while proposing the idea of “becoming worthy of time”. This erasing the line between living and dying also adds up to Butler’s theory of performativity that is based on flexibility of identities.

Stadium is another lab of rehearsing the killing and dying. Lydia retrospects resentfully her arrest by army during the coup just before Gilead replaced the USA after the Congress was dissolved. The educated women population consisting of doctors, lawyers or judges were the main target to suppress or “crush the opposition, .. . so the educated were the first to be eliminated” Women there were sorted by profession and Lydia was a judge. She recalls the moment: “ the black vans continued to arrive and discharge their unwilling female passengers” (116). She remembers twenty blindfolded handcuffed women being shot at the centre of the field: the two sided performers. The men were “trained” in killing and “the women keeled over” and “the message was clear” of the display to be witnessed without any objection (118). Neither able to confront nor escape after the display, Lydia chooses to go through an imposed ordeal which is to kill blind-folded women almost like in her nightmare before where she had to kill “former friends, former clients, former colleagues; . . . women and girls . . . Wives, daughters, Handmaids” (169). She did not fall and choke after she shot them as in the dream. Standing too rigorous against her femininity while

accomplishing the trial, she proves her anti-feminine audacity which Judd confirms: "You are brands snatched from the burning" (173). Entrapped, yet determined to redeem "all" whatever comes on the way, she declares: "We must all hang together or we will all hang separately" and agrees to partake in state politics (172). The coercive execution of killing at public disposal by her prepares Lydia to experiment and implement it herself later against other women after she is conferred leadership.

Lydia sums up the zeitgeist of Gilead to her virtual readers while pinpointing the problems prevalent in it:

> There is a standard repertoire of problems: wives at war with one another, daughters in rebellion, Commanders dissatisfied with the Wife selection proposed, Handmaids on the run, Births gone wrong. The occasional rape, which we punish severely if we choose to make it public. Or a murder: he kills her, she kills him, she kills her and, once in a while, he kills him. Among the Econoclasses, jealous rage can take over and knives can be wielded, but among the elect, male-on-male murders are metaphorical: a stab in the back. (*Testaments* 212)

This short moment of reflection by Lydia is a tell-tale of death-culture and violence. That was when Lydia was in her office at Ardua Hall "tracing the Bloodlines for a proposed marriage" and was interrupted by Aunt Lise reporting a problem about a suicide attempt "among the Premarital Preparatory students at Rubies" (212). Lise informed of a girl objecting to her would-be marriage feared of living that— "the penises. It's like a phobia" and had tried a suicide "despite the benefits", the potential births. (213-14). The girl was Becka, objecting to "marriage in general". The fear of forceful marriage and men's "urges" led to a few such attempts of suicide and the escape from marriage in some other cases as with Agnes and Becka. The two young

girls were converted into Supplicants–the probation to be the Aunts–by Lydia herself so that they could stay unmarried. Fear and hatred to marriage grew inside them as the abuse of young girls were taken for granted keeping the abusers safe aside.

Agnes remembers an appointment with a dentist Dr. Grove – father of her friend Becka – who raped her in the dentist's chair in the inner room: After the general observation of her teeth, he said she was a big girl then and put his hands on her "small but growing breast" (*Testaments* 96). Embarrassed and shocked, she thought: "it was all true then, about men and their rampaging, fiery urges, and merely by sitting in the dentist's chair I was the cause" to ignite his urges (96). It was not his flaw. He pinched her nipple, locked her in his hand, showed "some of the rest of" him, took her hand to touch it and reminded how she would have to deal with it later: "About time you saw one of these. . . You will have one of them inside you soon", then, he did the job, "wiped himself off" with a towel handy and "tucked his appendage back into his trousers" (96). Atwood's graphic description of the speculative scene is enough to elicit fear and hatred from anyone on the violence upon the girls. The appointment was planned by the Aunts to make her experience sex as normal as she had no problem with her teeth. After she was back home, Martha Zila inquired about the treatment to know her response and indirectly warned her not to fuss around about the dentist: "But he's the best dentist. Everyone agrees" (98). Agnes infers from Zila's malicious laughter while asking her about the appointment: "She knew" about the happening and "she had done it on purpose . . . wanted me to be defiled . . . a word from the Bible " (98). For Zila, it would be a joke, not a big deal. Making fuss about such authorities and their abusive acts could be counter productive for the girls. Some girls' reports support such abuse-culture; "One had claimed their Guardian had run his hands over her legs' and another reported that "an Econotrash

collector had unzipped his trousers in front of her ". Both girls were punished for lying and noticing “the minor antics of men” respectively implying that such abuses were normal happenings (97). However, Dr. Grove or the dentist was later executed although the reasons are not disclosed. Hence, the girls are assured with justice in Lydia’s leadership and the readers with poetic justice in Atwood’s portrayal of Lydia’s character.

Disciplinary Tools

Puritan ideologies and surveillance are two extremes of self-disciplinary mechanisms imposed on women in Gilead. Atwood relates *The Handmaid’s Tale* with some stories from the Old Testaments: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (95). Another stuff from Genesis, 30: 1-3 says: “And when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister and said unto Jacob, give me children, or else I die” (*Tales* 95). Rachel is “one of the two wives of the patriarch Jacob” in the *Old Testaments.* First married to Leah, he was allowed to marry Rachel and had children later. But Leah had children before Rachel got pregnant so she threatened that she would die if he did not give her children (Genesis 1;30/prologue). The young girls were told the stories during breakfasts in the cafeteria. This reference to The Bible sets some parameters regarding patriarch's freedom to choose alternative wives and women’s recognition in being mothers. The Handmaids in the novels are stereotypes of those sex slaves in the *Old Testaments.* Offred realizes the importance of the Handmaids when she witnesses Ofwarren's/Janine's pregnancy and the honor she gets: “She's a magic presence to us, an object of envy and desire. . . She's a flag on a hilltop, showing us what can still be done. We too can be saved” (*Tales* 32). Despite the delicacy of pregnant women, she is exposed outside in the street, loved, cared and protected: “She's come to public display herself. . . . she's enjoying every minute of

this", Offred envies. It is strategic to influence and tempt other Handmaids to abide by the privileged status sincerely and triumphantly. Offred envies the honour a pregnant woman gets which is an evidence of the temptation of bearing a child. She is blamed for not following the radical ideology of women's individual choices as did her mother, rather resorting to the tradition of motherhood (Keck and Ossietzky 14). These critics, however, need to take notice of her defiance of the restrictions by following her whims of loving to Nick and secret meetings with the Commander. The Concubine story of adultery, Salvaging as a way to get purged of sin as duty, the fear of being 'defiled" – "a word from the Bible" (*Testaments* 98) that Agnes mentions when back from the dentist, the recognition of the Commanders as "Sons of Jacob" – the powerful patriarchs, Vidala's teaching of the Puritan dogmas to the young girls in the school, certain words and phrases from the Bible like "praise be", and the nomenclature of characters, and stories of sins and virtues are pervasive biblical references in Atwood's novels. Tarico agrees to the use of biblical themes in *Tales*:

> Superficially, Atwood's dystopian novel is littered with biblical names and phrases: Gilead, Mary and Martha, Jezebel, Milk and Honey, All Flesh, Loaves and Fishes, Lilies of the Field, the Eye of the Lord, Behemoth and many more. At a deeper level, Atwood grounds her plot in gender scripts that pervade Abrahamic scriptures. (Para 2)

The Puritan scriptures and the narratives are used to promote patriarchy and the freedom of men over women. The fundamentalist theocratic ideals resonate in the tape which the Handmaids are made to listen to during the lunch: "Blessed be the poor in spirit. . . merciful, . . . meek, . . . silent" (*Tales* 96). These words from the Gospels keep women silent and submissive although Offred claims that she knows "they made that up. . . , was wrong" (96). The story of Rachael and Leah is the moral

bottomline of sex slavery of the Handmaids while King Solomon who possessed 700 wives and 300 concubines makes a foundation for patriarchal freedom and abuse of women (Tarico Valerio). Like the Gospels, both novels are composed of the narratives, perspectives and experiences of the witnesses and victims like Offred, Agnes, Baby Nicole, and Lydia in the lead. Puritan theology prevails to safeguard patriarchy. This allows the Commanders privilege to keep the Handmaids for prospective births to their barren wives. They are regarded as Men of Faith or Sons of Jacob, the infallible men of genetic capacity. A Biblical slogan persists for this coupling of Commanders and the Handmaids: "From each, according to her ability, to each according to his needs" (Atwood, *Tales* 123). This refers to the selection made from the Handmaids and the Commanders to pair for the prospective births. But the Handmaids are punished in case any pregnancy fails, never the Commanders. The Concubine story keeps young girls fearing and off from adultery, different sexual orientations, disobedience and rebellion , and keeps them intact with women's virtues.

The next control mechanism is the hegemony of surveillance which is rampant in Gilead. Different modes of surveillance from psychological, social, visual to theological level are set to discipline women and girls. Wrobel defines: "surveillance as the "purposeful, routine, systematic and focused attention paid to personal details, for the sake of control, entitlement, management, influence, or protection" . . . through a plurality of modes, roles or ends (security agents, policemen, videosurveillance, biometrics, geolocation, RFID chips)" (Wrobel 9). The strength of the rhetoric of surveillance serves dual purposes: care and control , self--discipline and state-protection, and management of certain specific problems which can be a threat to the state. Wrobel is critical about the generalized notion of surveillance which is often negative that it intrudes one's privacy and "undermines individual criticality" (18).

She counter-argues that while mining into the individual data, it has to "recognize the agency of the watched" in the meantime (18). So, it has to be interactive between the watcher and the watched. She reasons: "Atwood's characters' struggle to survive "includes resistance to surveillance" (18). Being under surveillance in return makes them aware of its mechanism, experienced to live with it, escape it and resist it. In such a conflicting situation, they do not only resist by living it but they learn to live with surveillance by developing their critical ability to compel the watcher to know "the watched" and act accordingly.

The same impact can be expected from women in Gilead. The criticality enables them to handle the crisis more artfully and the rulers to watch them more sensibly. Since the mechanism is meant for protection by control, it should be designed dialectically to balance both sides– the watcher and the watched. Hence, the women create an epistemic position even under repression. Consequently, with this reciprocal linkage of the watcher and the watched, the hierarchy of the powerful and the powerless is shaken on which Foucault's concept of power and Butler's theory of performance are grounded. Wrobel has written much on surveillance in Atwood's novels. Her interpretation is relatable to justify the rhetoric of the state: it "operates on a spectrum that goes from care to control . . . protection to scrutinizing one's behaviour to enforce discipline" (9). This contradiction prevails and serves dual purposes– repression for protection in Gilead as well. Different forms of surveillance are installed around women. The Eye serves multiple purposes– symbolic to divine watch, the intelligence bureau at military level and the patriarchal influence at psychological level, fearing and detecting women. Offred is conscious of the images on the ceiling over her bed—"blind plaster eye which stares back down at me" and "the fisheye on the hall wall" (*Tales* 104). Offred's room has the eye-shaped -ceiling-

plastered-over a light socket which was removed after the previous Handmaid hanged herself to death onto the chandelier (219). Thus, the blind Eye stands for both death and freedom for her–adding to the complex surveillance. Offred has a tattoo of "four digits and an eye" in her ankle which is a reminder of continuous surveillance on her because she is "a national resource", rare because genetically potential to be protected and cared for (71). This identifies her, but as "a passport in reverse" meaning that she is state property (71). The "slug's eye" is a recurrent image throughout the novels which shows Atwood's concern with the disenchantment of women to the phallus and its fear latent in them. The metaphorical details of the imaginations and experiences that Offred relates with the Commander's chauvinistic authority among the Handmaids speak of that fear:

> To have them putting him on, trying him out, while he himself puts them on, like a sock over a foot, onto the stub of himself, his extra, sensitive thumb, his tentacle, his delicate stalked slug's eye, which extrudes, expands, winces, grows big again, bulging a little at the tip, travelling forward as if along a leaf, into them, avid for vision. To achieve vision in this way, this journey into a darkness that is composed of women, a woman, who can see in darkness while he himself strains blindly forward. (*Testaments* 94-95)

Offred speculates the first sex with the third Commander Fred that she has to perform in the Ceremony periodically after the Commander reads the Bible for the Handmaids. His physical presence among all the women around elicits the fear of masculine power–all these ideas about how Offred takes the women's socio-cultural status and their role to 'achieve the vision . . . in darkness" (94-95). Literally, Atwood signifies the sensitivity of women about sex which for men is a blind act although this generalization can't be true in all cases. At a deeper level, she is speculating about the

misery of the forceful sex like the one she has to have with the Commander in the Ceremony. She compares it wih a “journey into a darkness”--the testing of her fertiliy or ovary that decides her life or death. Its broader impact relates to the national population. This vision of remaking history even in the “reduced circumstances" speaks of women's compassion and capacity for resilience. The immediate purpose is to bear a child for the sake of the flickering human existence marched by the women as the pathfinder. Lydia's warning to Moira, a lesbian girl who had tried to seduce the Angels in the van is pertinent evidence: “ Remember . . . For our purposes, your feet and your hands are not essentials” suggesting that it is the viable ovary (*Testaments* 98). Moira was punished for different sexual orientation and an attempt to escape to Canada from Gilead to evade forced sex and pregnancy. She was brutally beaten at her feet which looked “swollen and boneless…like lungs”. (98) Hence, the severity of punishment evokes the sense of self-restraint in other girls and helps the state in endorsing coercive sex. Atwood implies that if women had not suffered the age-long atrocities of phallocentric oppression under different disguises like militarism, war, forced marriage, sex, and perpretations; human history would have taken a different turn free from such experimental violence and persecution.

Lydia has installed “cameras on Ardua Hall”--the special office for the Aunts in *The Testaments.* While inscribing her experiences in the “private sanctum” of the library in The Ardua Hall and sharing them with the imaginary readers , Lydia herself discloses it: “I’ll stash this screed in its hiding place, avoiding the surveillance cameras–I know where they are, having placed them myself” (4, 5). She was one of the founders to build the control mechanism which she is determined to dismantle after she is arrested and forced to repress women as their leaders. She remembers the moment of impasse: “I had no choice but to lead . . . for what but defending my life?”.

She has to live to liberate women which she can accomplish. She regrets that she had done wrong by supporting the control of women in the beginning which she realized after she was arrested (*Testaments* 36). Because she was entitled the Aunt, she was privileged to read the Bibles and the "secret histories of Gilead" kept in the Forbidden World Literature section (35). She was collecting "incriminating" and "discreditable knowledge" about the corrupt rulers and elites which she would capitalize to use against them later (35). She knew "knowledge is power" (35}. But empowering hersellf was not for personal advantage as some feminist critics interpreted. When entrapped to rule women, she could choose to die that, however, would not redeem the oppressed women. Therefore, she decides to achieve her end from within the system: "I'll have some choice . . . Not whether to die, but when and how . . . and who to take down with me" (32). She keeps "the secret histories of Gilead" that she would later flash to the world. This is how Lydia keeps even the rulers under surveillance. She is everywhere–"an ear in the wall". "Secret police in vans" appear in it, "border checkpoints" in Canada use swap identification as counter-surveillance, (Wrobel 6). Talking about technological determinism, Wrobel contextualizes Atwood's novel: "The Handmaid's Tale, which she started writing in Berlin in the spring of 1984, has Cold War undertones, with its secret police driving around in black vans, a system of passes for identification, and controls at checkpoints and borders (5). Further, we can see how bank accounts are coded as M and F, "portable money" is replaced by debit cards which their male relatives only can use and is meant for tracking women (*Tales* 6). Handmaids are paired while walking out for shopping. Walking in "twos' is "for protection, for companionship" but the motive is more (6). Offred remembers the walking with Ofglen: "We are well protected already. The truth is that she is my spy and I am hers" (25). The pairing is meant for both mutual safeguarding and checking

each other. In case “something . . . happens”, they are “accountable” (25). The Aunts make a unit of ruling young girls but thrive on prying and reporting each other to Aunt Lydia. Wrobel terms these strategies of surveillance as “psychological springs” operating at different levels “such as brainwashing-induced self-surveillance, peer surveillance and “control of the indigenous by members of their own group” in *The Handmaid’s Tale”* , and also social mechanisms “such as social sort [ing of] people into categories, assigning worth or risk” using factors such as gender, class or race to discriminate and discipline, often used in risk management (Lyon 2003, 1)” (Wrobel 11).

No doubt, a woman controls other women as does Lydia with other Aunts. She herself follows the “divide and conquer” policy to disintegrate other Aunts like Vidala, Elizabeth, Este and others. They compete to win trust from Lydia by leaking the secrets of each other, so are careful to remain sincere and dutiful. The social and genetic categories of women Lydia creates also serve the purpose of keeping themselves dutiful and responsible. Wrobel counts: “Categories of women, men, places, clothes, functions, “Unwomen”, “gender traitor”, “crossdresser” , tatooed numbers in Handmaids” (6). And this disintegration underpins Lydia’s authority and power which helps in enacting her dual mission of keeping Gilead and intriguing its downfall from within. She succeeds in handling women’s side in different ways by inventing whatever she has to use. She has become “an ear inside the wall” to listen in on what young recruits tell one another, “increasing the sensitivity of [her] microphones” and “attun[ing] them to whispers” so as to collect the dirty secrets of Gilead (Wrobel 24).

Despite the control by terror and psychological influence of pervasive surveillance, the purpose is also to train the women to counter the surveillance by

learning to live with it, resist it and knowing its nuances. Wrobel relates Shoshanna Zuboff's model of counter surveillance: "countersurveillance strategies may constitute an acceptance or a normalization of surveillance, taking its existence for granted rather than challenging it and to some extent, such remarks apply to the strategies deployed on a thematic level in Atwood's work"(11). A book reviewer sums up her book – the hegemony of surveillance capitalism is "a threat to people's sovereignty" and democracy according to Zuboff who proposes some models to counter it (Donald, "Age of Surveillance" 288). In an interview about her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism,* Zuboff's idea of surveillance capitalism is compared with Orwell's idea of "Big brother is watching you" with a parallel statement– "High tech is watching you" (Atwood, "High tech"). One of the models she proposes is a "complete NO!" to provide the individual data which , in Gilead and even in today's real world, is not possible. Atwood suggests a similar idea of "not giong to the internet" at least for some time to save our privacy (Atwood, "Telling Tales"). But, the question this thesis posits is if it is practically possible. Hence, in the context of this new hegemonic reality, this thesis infers that Atwood is implicitly inviting us to do the rehearsal of being surveilled and know the technology to handle it and and live with it wisely and critically.

Pathos and Creative Resistance

The state evokes in women a sense of positive response to its repressive rule regarding the main female characters. The four women Offred, Agnes, Nicole and Lydia share their experiences and perspectives both as victims and the victimizers as well, like Lydia. We come to know how the women cooperate and comply with the ruler despite their awareness about the oppression and a few cases of defiance as by Moira. Offred contemplates about the value given to her embedded in the tattoo of an

eye in the ankle: “the small tatto . . . a passport in reverse . . . I am too important, too scarce, for that. I am a national resource” (*Tales* 71). She is given special care, vitamins and food for she “must be a worthy vessel”, Lydia reminds Offred of her rarity (71). Gilead takes the advantage of declaring it an emergency– a “state of exception . . . [that] necessitates the intersection of the legal and the political” and allows it to work “outside law”(qtd. in *State* 1, Derrida *Beast* 33). Not the oppressed but the powerful rulers use the “necessary evil” to control women, and suspend people’s rights and liberties to carry out rare births. The political overruns the legal, the ruler violates the rules and violence is used to find peace. The brutality of punishment and the violation of the laws turn the ruler into a beast as claimed by Derrida. And there emerges the question of sovereignty. Derrida’s concept of the sovereign power as a beast because it itself creates lawlessness and rules “outside law” generates new values and relations to sovereignty. Whose sovereignty–the state’s or the people’s? It lies open to discussion. This duality exists in the politics and characters in the novels.

Most of the major characters are engaged in reconstruction in a dual manner: the ruler controls and protects, kills women to save the humans, condescends women’s issues as “petty” but feeds on women's “charity” and unclaimed agency. The low fertility rate, crisis of war economy and the emergency management of Gilead are the critical issues the state claims it needs to cope with which the women are battling on the lead.

Next thing Gilead prioritizes is its responsibility to save the human future by remaking the population. The key players–the women and girls– for propagation, thus, need special protection which on the other side is taken as repression. The state rhetoric of protection implies both “care to control” which is internalized by women

as Offred does with her mixed reaction (Wrobel 5). She vascillates between defiance and dignity: her secret love to Nick, Commander Fred's family driver, and secret meetings with the Commander violate the restriction on Handmaids for falling in love and illicit relations with the Commander. Meanwhile, she enjoys being privileged– one of the rare women with a "viable ovary", well-served and cared, "like a queen ant with eggs . . . the vehicle for . . . hope", on the other side (*Tales* 141,149). Offred is torn apart between the nostalgia of her past with family, personal whims for love and freedom, and the sacred duty of procreation to serve the state under its regulation in the "reduced circumstances" of Gilead (111). Her stance as a woman departs from what the feminist critics attribute to her that she carries on the values of Second Wave feminism–the personal is political. Ghiorghiu and Praisler claim Atwood's *The Testaments* as the manifesto of the fourth wave feminism" "The slogan of second-wave feminists, 'the personal is political,' is now as topical as it was in the 1960s, and The Testaments may well become a literary manifesto of a new (fourth) wave as part of the storm surge of feminism" ("Abstract" 87). They quote Atwood's statement about Trump's era as "a rollback of women's rights" which also instigated her to write the novel. These critics claim that the identity politics of the Second Wave has come "as topical now as it was in the 1960s" that Atwood portrays in *The Testaments* (87). Back to Offred in *The Tales*, she is deemed parallel to sex slaves and victim of abuse of her body requiring a political intervention whereas she is protected as the Saviour of humanity facing population crisis (Cite). Her character stands for both the imprisonment of women and the redemption of the humans from the age-long self-destruction. If different views on Offred by critics are cross-verified with her fluctuating character, she embodies both the personal and the civil role. Hence, whether Atwood's portrayal of feminism is about identity politics of the 60's or

finding “new ways of justification” for autonomy and the consequent “backlash” of the 90’s or the “rollback of women’s rights” or part of “the empire writing back” should be interpreted on the basis of performativity. Values change as per the context and “purpose at hand” and are open to “assemblage” as proposed by Butler so do not inherit any fixity. Offred recalls Aunt Lydia justifying the cause for those impositions on women: “We were a society dying of choices" (Atwood, *Tales* 31). Lydia’s claim echoes a sense of guilt and blame on feminism expressed during the backlash of the 90’s for causing unhappiness and the identity crisis of women in the name of autonomy, freedom and individuality. Susan Faludi refers to some remedial writings of the time like “ Radical Feminism in Retreat” and “the era's self-help classic Smart Women/Foolish Choices [which] proclaim that women's distress was "an unfortunate consequence of feminism, . . . it created a myth among women that the apex of self-realization could be achieved only through autonomy, independence, and career" (3-4). These writers wrote to help women regain that loss. The resurgence of pop-culture in the same decade defied feminist ideals. It was a kind of response to the third wave feminism which resulted in more crimes with a lot more freedom, “more opportunities to be raped” with more number of women in colleges and work, freedom for “rightful” display of “graphic details of abortion” and “stripping off female protections” because they no longer needed them (4). However, Atwood’s implication is not only to aware women of the dark side of a lot of freedom but also to ask the rulers to retrospect on women’s refusal to bear children as a result of having lost faith in the future with the grounded sense of exploitation, torture and atrocities on women. Faludi counter-argues against the backlash:

> . . . the afflictions ascribed to feminism are all myths. From "the man shortage" to "the infertility epidemic" to "female burnout" to "toxic day care,"

> these so-called female crises have had their origins not in the actual conditions of women's lives but rather in a closed system that starts and ends in the media, popular culture, and advertising—an endless feedback loop that perpetuates and exaggerates its own false images of woman. (7)

Instead of backfiring women's freedom and autonomy, and playing a blame game, the "closed system" needs restructuring, rather than flourishing on blaming women. The "indebtedness" to age-long inflictions on women is repaid by punishment by the state, however, forgiveness and sacrifices are vital in crisis management and resilience. Lydia's rhetoric to intervene in "selfish choices" of women is that the young girls' "hardest" sacrifices of them would make the future easier and encourage women "to accept their duties with willing hearts" (*Tales* 123). It is her attempt to regain balance by checking women's free choices and men's ravenous treatment on them. She defines new freedom in Gilead: "There is more than one kind of freedom. Freedom to and freedom from. Now you are being given freedom from" (*Tales* 30). Freedom from rape, pedophiles, demonic men and reproductive mishaps like miscarriage, abortion and individual love interest which are threat to girls' protection are newly defined freedoms in Lydia's terms.

Agnes, another narrator in *The Testaments,* mourns "the good that will be lost" in Gilead but holds against its "too much wrong . . . too much false . . . contrary to what God intended" and expects its downfall (9). She is conscious of the utter injustice prevalent in Gilead but still has hope for change despite her ambivalent response to its good and bad sides. "Categories" of women on the basis of their social functions and genetic capability is another strand of the "spectrum of protection" (Wrobel 5). They are prescribed dress codes, duties and responsibilities accordingly. Handmaids cannot have any close friends and freedom to talk and look at each other;

no men to whistle, tease or use obscenities at them, always walking in pairs while going shopping. These are instrumental to their protection. And, women's protection is key to save the future though protection is open to interpretation as wondered by Agnes.

Protective dresses for girls are designed to curb the "urges of men" from "the alluring and indeed blinding power of us", recalls Agnes (*Testaments* 9). Aunt Lydia announces that these rules and cares are to achieve the common good, which the pre-Gileadean women did not get. Agnes is convinced of the announcement that such fertile women are "custodians of an invaluable treasure that existed, unseen, inside us . . . who would be . . .trampled by the ravenous men . . . in the widesharp-edged sin-ridden world" so that they are given "focused attention" (*Testaments* 10). In the meantime, she " . . . dreaded the thought of growing older . . . for a wedding . . . feared to end up married to a goat on fire" (11). She instilled this aversion to unrestrained men from Aunt Vidala's teaching in the Red Centre and after she was raped by the dentist, Mr. Grove–a pedophile during the treatment. But helpless otherwise, she had to prepare herself to accept it: "What could I say but yes and yes. Yes, I was happy. Yes I was lucky. Anyway it was true" (13). Agnes resigns to the situation as does Offred in *Tales*. Offred resorts to forgiveness as the greatest power although she intends to "get out of here" because "It's difficult to resist" (*Tales* 140). Her adaptation with control in this crisis resounds with an affirmative tone of both dissent and forgiveness: "Maybe it's about who can do what to whom and be forgiven for it" (141). Her readiness to live through the violence resembles Braidotti's idea of "ethos of engagement" and "becoming worthy of time"--an affirmative act for a grand cause of human future (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 129). The affirmative acts do not compensate for the past injustices, losses and exploitations of the oppressed group but

the opposite happens in Gilead. The Unwomen and the "unworthy vessels'– from the repressed women's sphere offer sacrificial deaths to facilitate management of population crisis. We see subversion of traditional roles –the subordinate class, women paving a holistic path of remaking history. Not the privileged compensate for the loss but the underprivileged contribute to recreating the history of Gilead. It is by living through the oppression, the women are rewriting the history–living through compliance, forgiveness, and a secret mission to end the repression. They are compelled to live to make Gilead livable and dismantle the system from within. Sensible enough, Agnes and Becka later have a safe escape from marriage. Lydia addresses their fear of marriage by promoting the girls to the post of Supplicant which allows them to avoid marriage. They are enabled to live through as compliant but are indirectly defying repression by escaping marriage. Thus, both Offred and Agnes pursue Lydia's mold to live through repression that defines their affirmative role in the reconstruction through creative resistance. We can relate these women's performance with Butler's idea of making the place "livable" and Braidotti's proposition of "ethos of engagement" and "becoming worthy of time" as the art of overcoming violence and crises.

More powerful than Offred is another female protagonist, Aunt Lydia in *The Testaments*, who is featured as a more determined, cruel and strategic woman leader along with critical Agnes, and rebellious Baby Nicole. She performs a visionary, creative, affirmative and transformational response to the crisis under despotism both strategically and brutally. She has an acute realization of repression and the need for resistance that Offred lacks. She embodies resistance and complicity side by side to adjust in the "reduced circumstances" and creates a network of women under different categories (*Tales* 116).

Lydia is the head Aunt and is chosen as a leader to watch the women's sphere. Commander Judd is quite diplomatic to take hold of Lydia, a woman of education, experience and judgement who could, otherwise launch rebellion against the despotic ruler. He empowers her by conferring authority to rule over the women as a part of "movement" of "building a society congruent with the Divine Order [that]. . . we are acting out of charitable care and concern" (174). Judd acts contradictorily with his split self: male arrogance and "charity" from women. He delegates the authority to women for an effective arrangement and order of women's circle but thinks that 'female sphere" has "petty details" for which male leaders cannot waste their important time and they "have better things to do" (176) . He valorizes the political power to persuade Lydia to his vantage of controlling women; "The women of Gilead have occasion to be grateful to you. . . . if you fail, you will fail all women. As Eve did. Now I will leave to your collective deliberations" (176). The group of Aunts are assigned different tasks and are also privileged to read the Bible and the archives of Gilead's history. Lydia exploits the privilege to achieve power by gathering "discreditable knowledge" and the "incriminating information" of the elites and rulers. She takes on the role of compliant but conspiratory founder fabricating all kinds of means to keep herself powerful. To prevent threats from the group of Aunts within, she employs tactics: "Divide and conquer would be my motto" (177). She "would be revered in Gilead" that would help her impose rules among women (176). She proceeds on: "Week by week we invented laws, uniforms, slogans, hymns, names" (177) She was flexible because she "was not blinded by ideology" so could play any roles the leadership would require (177). As she claims, she has no identity politics of feminists, but freeing women is her target that she can better accomplish by complying with the system itself which is too repressive to rebel openly.

Even Offred and Nick have fluidity. The moment Offred was kidnapped and stripped of her child and husband Luke, and the final escape of her from Gilead that was engineered by her lover Nick frames the whole narrative of her experiences as a fertile woman. Offred is in love with Nick and has a olanned pregnancy from him under Serena, her Wife's design. After Ofglen, a Handmaid is surreptitiously deleted for her connection with Mayday, rebel organization, Nick fears the possible punishment of Offred and himself for the illicit relation. Despite being a member of the Eyes, intelligence bureau of the state, he designs an escape of Offred from Gilead with the help of the rebel group Mayday. Even the role of Nick has the duality in this case–-a member of the Eyes to detect the activities of the rebels and a shadowey member of the mayday at the sametime. His shifting roles add to the performativity of people on their own rights to overcome the threats of the moment. As such, the whole state mechanics of despotic rule and the women's mixed responses to it entail some questions to be reflected about. What do the common setting Gilead, Lydia's persistent character, the rebel group Mayday and few other characters' linkage in both novels imply? Why do women perform different acts of complicity, affirmativeness and intricate resistance to the government side by side? What compels the chief military ruler Commander Judd to incorporate a female, Lydia in the state politics? This is all about who can do what to ease lives and deaths and make Gilead a livable place.

The women resist repression by living it on one hand and intriguing underground rebellion with the Mayday on the other hand. The young girls resist the Aunts at one level but internalize the values they inculcate at another level. The state resists the pressure of population crisis by managing it through deaths, control and violence on the female population on the one hand, and protection of women for more

births on the other hand. Planned killing and forceful births, suicide and executions, violence and ideals of peace are dichotomous realities however, and interconnected. They interact with each other and serve the common purpose of the human future. There is power and resistance in death, and freedom in suicide. This is the way simultaneous forces interact with "different paradigms" as opined by Mona Lija in her article "The definition of Resistance"…..: ""power and resistance are now 'widely seen as "entangled"rather than simply opposed" (Lija). Resistance and power intersect dominantly in Lydia.

Lydia is arrested in the sequel *The Testaments*, and is proposed to watch and control the "female sphere" by the state leader Commander Judd: " . . . we want you to help us to organize a separate sphere– the sphere for women. With its goal, the optimal amount of harmony, both civic and domestic, and the optimal number of offspring" (175). The major concern was rebuilding the population by manipulating the key players—the women, the Procreator, yet an unacclaimed power to reconstruct histories. She is feared as a woman of faithfulness to male safety for she has their "discreditable knowledge" as an erstwhile ally. Moreover, after she is tested cruel on other women after she performed an imposed volunteering at a "rape crisis centre" and brutal killing of women in the "stadium", she is qualified to dictate women (171). Although she is authorised to formulate laws for the women's sphere as it has "petty details" for male to handle, the important decisions are "subject to approval" by Commander Judd (176). Lydia represents similar creative and transformational power of women that lies in flexibility, adaptation, taming women and being tamed to create "livable" space for the "grievable" (Butler, *Frames* 15). Butler reminds of the framing of people as grievable and disposable during wars. She also redefines individual freedom and personal identity which are no more the telos of an individual but exist in

relation to other external support they need during war-crises. Based on the residual resources and the status of individuals, the state categorizes the population and controls their lives and deaths to manage crises. Lydia follows the same politics of grouping the woman population to meet her end of facilitating deaths and lives of women. It also helps her to play an effective leader of women employing the "divide and rule" policy and train them to accept deaths as positive acts that create space for the "grievable" people. This is what Butler has termed as affirmative obligations –the strength in positive outlook against the negative forces.

On a critical note, Gilead exists around Atwood's time. Ronald Regan's curtailing of women's rights, Donald Trump's anti-abortion laws in America; Atwood's visit to Afaganistan, the militant women's campaigns for personal freedom, choice and rights and the climatic disasters instigated Atwood to speculate about Gilead. The young girls being taught the premarital taboos and women's virtues to fulfill the God's Will, they being made to witness violence and mass killing of women, and Lydia herself imposing anti-feminine rules on them are proactive preparations of women to serve the mission of propagating the future affirmatively amidst violence, horror and repression resulting from the ongoing wars. Living through the violence and intriguing creative resistance to the persistence of these wars are the thematic imperative of both of her novels. Both as compliant and rebel, Offred and Lydia stand for the dual position to counter and renew the oppressive system. Oppression of women and their selective elimination, too has a double-fold purpose. With a sense of both hope and regret on what the war and masculinity has done to women, Commander Judd reflects, "It wears you down. All that needless suffering of women. We intend to eliminate that. I am sure you approve" (*Testaments* 171). This realization of injustice and cruelty on women tailored with regret and hope for change

sums up the military ruler's defeated temperament as an absolute sovereign power and need for change in perceiving women as the other— the inferior.

This acknowledgement manifests when the state's absolute power starts breaking once the socio-political conditions demand a woman-leader to oversee "women's sphere" with that power conferred upon Aunt Lydia. She categorizes women, empowers herself using the policy of "divide and conquer" among women but exploits her power to release women from the repressed condition by playing a dual role of dissent and conformity with the state. Likewise, the Handmaids are forced to bear children with "Commanders" and disown the children for their Wives. The young girls are labeled "precious flowers . . . the invaluable treasure that . . . we need to guard so carefully" (25, 18). They are genetically potential and protected to prevent them from being abused and spoiled by the "ravenous men". This level of control and violence is itself a violation of individual liberty, a kind of beastiality in Derrida's terms. However, the state rhetoric is to eliminate the age-long suffering of women and "create a clean space for the pure generation" that the "precious girls" and women require to bear "hard" things (*Testaments* 171, 4). Therefore, the girls are indoctrinated with the Puritan values from the Bible and taught to develop aversion to individual freedom. They are trained to live in crisis. One of the Aunts, Zilla, inhibits free desires: "we can't always do what we want" (*Testaments* 22). Vera instills similar ideals: "And sometimes we have to do what we hate" (22). They are tamed to live and die through violence by intimidation, partaking in public executions, and internalizing them as normative life events. Lydia also uses them as the agents of resistance for change by involving them in the underground rebel group called Mayday working for the downfall of Gilead. Although Lydia's motive looks political, her purpose is to prepare them to live the future, by making the present livable which calls for shifting roles and responsibilities.

Chapter IV: Fluidity of Identity and Subversion of Roles

To examine the battle of reconstruction of population in Gilead, the dynamics of key forces is worth discussion. Under the canopy of totalitarianism, multiple blocs of power are fighting the crisis as a collective force. The spectrum is built on the dichotomy of forces: the sovereign power and the repressed civilians, ruler and the ruled, powerful and the disempowered, male and the female, and human and the "Unhuman". However, they fluctuate, blur and enact to meet "the purpose at hand". No single system but integration of every possible one from theocracy, militarism, underground rebellion to the "charity" by the suppressed group–the women are united to combat the dystopian condition of Gilead. The only hope is the collective battle to recapitulate the flux of population by creating the "ethos of engagement" that calls for "becoming worthy of time" breaking the traditional telos of roles, responsibilities and fixity of identities. Relevant to this dynamism, Derrida's interrogation to absolute sovereign power, Butler's theory of performance and Braidotti's concept of affirmative ethics substantiate the argument about how the praxis of integration of diverse forces is automated in Gilead.

The unit consolidates the dynamics of forces in conflict, alliance, rebellion, resistance and affirmative responses. Explicitly, the means of solidifying cater to violence, deaths, repression, persecution and intimidation. However, some rhetorical strategies are used by the state which evoke mixed responses from the repressed group–the women. The state appeals to hatred, kindness, fear, respect and charity from women of different categories. The use of three narrators in *The Testaments* allows multiple perspectives and experiences of the totalitarian rule of Gilead. The choice of women narrators and their perspectives shape the thoughts and responses of the readers, which helps in reframing the old thought patterns. Despite Commander

Judd's hesitation to accept the female sphere as important, in reconstruction of the fallen Gilead, Lydia's character as a woman-leader takes hold of the core politics which is centred on control of women and population management. Atwood's project is to make readers experience the rehearsal of an integrated power structure to rebuild the history. Lydia embodies an agency built on shifting roles and responsibilities ranging from preaching theological doctrines, flipping from kind to cruel, sensible to violent, ruler to rebel, a bi-sexual persona taking in masculinity and femininity at once, and employing diplomacy, resistance, and complicity as well. She shares her experiences as a victim, witness, architect of Gilead but an underground agent launching resistance to abolish it in the meantime. The Aunts' team led by Lydia is privileged to read in the secret library and know the Bible, the Puritan values, the "discreditable knowledge" of the rulers to be stored and disclosed later. They are the authority to train the girls and administer reproductive activities. Thus, a woman of knowledge with political power, Lydia implicitly is cleaning the corrupt and sinful societies by persecuting the rapists and pedophiles—the ravenous people of prey who exert atrocities, crimes and violence on women—to protect the girls. Her position as a ruler of women but herself weaving resistance against that political system within the "reduced circumstances" is ironic about the "totalitarianism" and repression of women. She herself is involved in leaking the secret to Canada that we know at the end when Baby Nicole is sent back to Canada with a chip encrypted in her arm. Lydia's involvement in the rebellion through infiltration is hinted at by herself : "We have uncovered a breach in our defenses. Two Mayday agents must have been getting help from traitors inside Gilead itself" (*Testaments* 114). She informs this to other Aunts to be aware of the rebels' agents who may be in Ardua Hall itself which refers to themselves along with Lydia. The fact is she herself is an ally with the rebel group

Mayday. Thus, whether one is a traitor or ruler or freedom fighter should be defined in the context of the political crisis in Gilead. Who decides who is ruler and the ruled, powerful and the powerless, masculine and the feminine and creator or destroyer? Are the males truly repressing the females and enjoying the supremacy? It draws critical attention for discussion.

Sex is perfunctory, even for the Commanders— many experience "inability to feel " (*Tales* 217). Offred, the Handmaid coupled with Commander Fred attended by his wife Serena reflects the triangular sex in the Ceremony which she thinks is neither love, copulation nor rape. No passion, no involvement, no romance; no arousal, and no orgasm —sex is unattended emotionally but a "serious business" (100-101). Even the armed forces called the Angels and the Guardians composed of only male population are just like mechanically functioning bodies to watch the women's activities and movements outside the compounds with only their backs to the display of the Handmaids. A few executed bodies of both male and female are hanged on the wall at disposal to intimidate and warn the young girls and men both against any sins, rape, defiance or open resistance to repressive rules. Both psychological and physical terror prevails all around. Public mass executions of women, extreme inhuman punishments to useless women like old ones –"unworthy vessels" —who are made to work in the Colonies, radio-active area to push to slow death or be deleted— and the young girls' forced participation in the mass killing are other forms of women's oppression and control. News of ongoing wars are being reported and shown to the girls occasionally on TV. The media and surveillance make another power bloc of control and discipline.

Functioning at another level is the rebel group Mayday and the infiltration of its members in the state's militia. Nick is an example–being the family chauffeur of

Commander Fred or Guardian or a low ranking official of Gilead, he is helping the escape of Offred as an ally of the rebel group. This capitalizes the power for a kind of check and balance in regaining collective justice. The whole state power is employed and distributed at different levels just to control, manage and save the population for which the women are the Saviours. Notable is Aunt Lydia's leadership of the women's sphere to help the state watch the endangered population. The contradiction of women's protection and repression simultaneously defines an unacknowledged power bloc of women. An evidence is the tension of searching for Baby Nicole — a fertile seed. The issue of her ownership whether to Canada or Gilead, and the whereabouts takes strong hold in the investigation force. These blurred lines of the military forces, rebels, women's blocs and the powerful narratives from the Bible are implicative of Atwood's imagining of a new history of integration.

Integration is materialized both at praxis and policy. Desciplinary rhetorics works through pervasive surveillance like the Eyes, Puritan doctrines and code of conducts for girls and women. Virtuous sex, marriage and births are founded upon the stories of Rachael and Leah, the Concubine story and some phrases from the Bible. The Handmaid's health is central to propogate and their safety from abuses a major concern. Dresses are coded, foods are prescribed to improve reproductive health and virility, incest and adultery are strictly prohibited to control the birth of "Unbabies". Seemingly the Eugenics of the "Master-race theories", the good births and selective lives are not the mere luxury of the elites and the powerful to create an ideal world through selective breeding. Its severity of population management by watching births and deaths of certain women, has to do with a more serious issue of the continuity of the human species and the sustainability of the earth rather than enhancement of humanity. It is something like what Sartre propounded—"Existence

precedes essence". In the context of the "unstoppable progression of global civil war" (Agamben, *State* 2), Gilead stands for a future of reciprocal combat against the "shared vulnerability", within the given social and political conditions where choosing who lives and who dies is safeguarding each other in a quite rigorous manner. Metaphorically, the women as a unit in diverse facets in Lydia's lead function as a "suicide bomber"--- "a mediator of redemption", and their death as "an agency", "a space where freedom and negation operate"--to release from "terror and bondage", and "continued servitude" (Mbembe 61). This is redeeming not merely of the women but of humanity from its self-condemned world. Commander Judd's rhetorical confession echoes it: "We are building a society congruent with the Divine Order–a city upon a hill, a light to all nations–and we are acting out of charity care and concern" (*Testaments* 174). This realization of the peripheral vision beyond the national politics of sovereignty evokes transformations in our thoughts, too.

Moreover, the charity begins at home. The Handmaids, Aunts, Wives, Marthas, Jezebels, Pearl Girls and Unwomen perform the charity through the reconfigured responsibilities and donation of deaths that render necropower retrospective, repentant and responsive to human history. Creative resistance is encouraged among women. The novel reframes necropolitics that blurs "the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom" as opined by Mbembe (Mbembe 92). Sensibly, Lydia fits into the male order by cultivating an anti-feminine character, violating women's freedom and rights, but intertwining it with a grand mission of ending violence on women through violence and secret resistance. She intrigues with other female characters and a rebel organization Mayday, is aware of achieving power through "divide and rule" among

women. The Mayday rebel group is Lydia's grand design for the downfall of the totalitarian regime. "Like the Platonic concept of *pharmakon",* her dual undertaking; a "bi-sexual" approach works both as a 'remedy and as a poison' – an unclaimed affirmation of women's inevitable participation in repairing history (Mbembe, "Introduction" 2). Lydia invents ways to empower herself, indoctrinate young girls of premarital virtues, control and manage their sex; but instills in them the spirit of resistance as well. She keeps the aunts divided so that they will not unite against her. Vidala teaches the Bible, intimidates the girl with the story of a Concubine cut into twelve pieces for her adultery. Rachael and her maid's story of sex slavery underpins the role of Handmaids. Failure to accomplish these "women's virtues" is the Sin against God's Will. This way Bible manifests in the purgatory killings and punishments in Salvagings, Particicution, Stadium and Rape Crisis Centre where the unwanted people are deleted pubicly or surreptitiously in few cases. Lydia recalls the terror during her arrest at the stadium: "Hour by hour we watched vans arrive, discharge their quota of women, depart empty" (*Testaments* 143). No law she knew could protect them but "a law degree and a uterus: a lethal combination" that only would define them as "grievable " in Judith Butler's term (*Testaments* 144, *Frames of War* 15). Like the male rulers, Lydia herself acts like Derrida's "beast" "outside the law" to fullfil her mission. The analogy of the sovereign and the beast representing the masculine and the feminine respectively is described by "Elsthain (1987) . . . this polarisation between the sexes in the following terms: 'Women are excluded from war talk and men excluded from baby talk'" (Qtd in Fitri Maya 2). Who is abiding by the rules and who violates them remains questionable in the case of both Lydia and the Commander, so is the question of sovereignty. They perform multidimensional roles to implement the

repressive rules by force and violence, like executions or deaths. The state rhetoric of such tortorous punishment is to justify the blame on "selfish choices" of women that perpetuated the decline in population (*Testaments* 174). Hence, this research proposes a critical outlook to this blame-game. It looks like buckpassing at a glance, however the game needs reinterpretation. Blame game or temporary escape from the impasse of endangered human condition does not open up any new avenues of relief. The age-long human arrogance, wars and identity politics do not help but a collective crusade and integration of the humans elevated to the realization of a common future above any hierarchies of power and values can do. This tendency can be observed in religious preaching as well. Aunt Estee counters Aunt Vidala's religious manipulation by instilling in the young girls with positive attitudes to sex, marriages and men. The two Aunts are bi-polar to teach them both aversion and faith in sex. The imperative is making the present "livable" and the future just and stable. The surviving strategies and perpetuation of life Atwood implies in Lydia's power mechanics in *The Testaments* supports Atwood's faith in humanity in her another climatic dystopia *Oryx and Crake.* The framing of it between "the human footprints . . . in the sand" and a woman's appearance at the end embodies hope in Jimmy's character. (Atwood, *Oryx* 372). *The Testaments* ends reconciling the daughters Agnes and Nicole with their mother, Offred in Canada, the protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale*–regaining the ownership of children stripped from her in Gilead. Agnes informs the readers about the fact of her mother which she had found while reading a file from the Bloodlines Genealogical Archives after she became a Supplicant. Aunt Lydia is near to fulfilling her mission of Gilead's downfall by leaking the "discreditable knowledge" of the corrupted rulers outside it and around the world. Atwood's mood of hope as in most of her novels prevails in these two

novels as well, for she believes that imagination influences actions and virtually keeping hope can trigger some actions for change (“Telling Tales”).

Chapter V: Engineering an Integrated History for the Common Future

This thesis concludes that Atwood proposes a design of survival when humanity is left with merely critical choices of life and deaths in a world battered by the continuous devastating wars resulting in low harvest, scarcity, environmental collapse, human infertility and the consequent population crisis as in the dystopic regime Gilead Gilead foregrounds a speculative regime of the future of humanity full of violence, deaths, and critical human condition. Being "a state of exception" declared under a coup because of the collapse of the US after the Primr minister was assasinated and the Congress was dismantled in the civil war, it has to invent mechanisms of absolute control on its women to manage the rare births. The emergency state calls for special attention and well-detected plans and provisions for marriage, sex and child births at national level. To materialize these plans, the state deploys brutal means of control and punishment. It imposes restrictions on personal liberties of women like sex. marriages, births and abortions. The prime imperative is to manage the population by safe births from the few remaining potential fertile women like Offred in *The Tales* and, Agnes, and Baby Nicole as the central ones in *The Testaments.* Sins and crimes like rape, adultery, incest and divorce are strictly controlled and severely punished, if any, to save births and protect young girls who are the hope for continuing the future. The totalitarian regime exploits every mechanism of control ranging from militarism, theocracy to pervasive surveillance at the extreme to execute absolute repression. The population is categorized into different groups parallel to Butler's idea of "frames of war" – a way of population management. The key popoluation to potential births are The Handmaids who are kept as sex slaves to serve the military rulers entitled the Commanders and their childless Wives by bearing children for them. The young

girls are deprived of their freedom in the pretext of care and protection of "viable ovaries" and are trained, tamed and intimidated not to commit any Sins like adultery, abortion, incest and individual choices. Further, they are indoctrinated with virtues of women, Sins and God's Will to perform their noble duty of propagating the human future. Another side of women who are genetically defunct, old and useless are termed as "Unwomen" and are either disposed of publicly or sent to work in the Colonies to die slowly. Quite ironic and contrary to totalitarianism, the state designates political power and authority to a woman–Lydia categorized into the group of women entitled "the Aunts" to watch the female sphere. Under Lydia's leadership, they are privileged to read the Bible and books, teach the Puritan doctrines, formulate rules on deciding the lives and selective deaths from women population to help for an effective implementation of the repression and achieve the goal of rebuilding population.

Hence, this thesis sums up that these contradictions in state politics make up the foundation of a collective crusade against the crisis facing Gilead. Repression of women by the state, building its power on women's agency and their bodies, Commander Judd's retrospection and regret on the "needless suffering of women" in the past and determination to end it, Lydia's blame on the women's "selfish choices" for causing the decline in population, their mixed responses of defiance and acceptance, the ritualised or perfunctory sex, Lydia's strategy of complicity and resistance, and consolidation of power through militarism, theology, female sphere and surveillance by the state are simultaneous realities manifested differently and communicating with each other to overcome the crisis. Deaths, public killings, violence on women, and care and protection of the young girls as the core policy at the same time are not the tools of necropolitical practices of the sovereign to end

any enemies or threat as in the postcolonial time nor they are to facilitate Eugenics to purify human race as by the Nazis. Instead, they are the rhetorics of state politics to evoke in people and women the sense of fear of the possible doom of human species, affirmative response, charity and collaboration to fight the common battle. This thesis finds that to rebuild the endangered human future, who can give what to whom to meet the "purpose at hand" in crises is crucial that is termed as "ethos of engagement" by Braidotti. We should develop this compassion of "becoming worthy of time" by rigorous denunciation of individuality, personal liberties, bigotry and sense of otherness, and by practice of abstinence from the so-called human instincts of life and death that Freud has termed as Eros and Thanatos. It draws attention to the legalization of euthanasia and the use of "technothanatological weaponry" proposed by Braidotti to ease lives and deaths in the context of ongoing wars. However, this thesis does not suggest a passive acceptance, resignation and complacency to the human-induced crisis but recommends critical retrospection and constructive resistance founded on compassion, affirmative ethics and sacrificial deaths to manage the endangered population and rebuild the disintegrated history. The rigor of renouncing the "unthinkable" death of the anthropos for "the inevitable" affirmative deaths in the guise of "selective killing" should be the compensatory options of living through the crisis for the time being until human history is rebuilt. No blame game, no buckpassing, no identity politics, not the egotistical Manhood but reciprocity and integration of all realities, power blocs and performances at every level should be the framework of humanity to save its future. Lydia's undertaking of the task of controlling the whole women's side to implement the repressive policies deferring her femininity is, in fact, her statement on the need of openness to accommodate oneself into the unprecedented socio-political

conditions or the “uncharted frontiers” of human history as featured in Gilead.

Moreover, this dissertation offers some critical perspectives regarding sovereignty, orthodox feminist ideologies and the traditional power structures as the conclusive answers to the questions raised in the discussion. The totalitarian regime uses its absolute sovereign power to repress individual freedom and eliminate the selective population not to fight against any territorial issues, power or national identity but to manage the population crisis as a shared vulnerability of the human species. The mass killing of unwanted women in the Salvagings and the male criminals in the Particicution is not the postcolonial rendition of racism under the euphemism of various “deathworlds” like Colonies, plantations, concentration camps and asylums as echoed by Mbembe. Rather, this thesis claims that the politics of killing or necropolitics in Gilead is the critical choice the state has to make and the ultimate means of surviving the war economy and addressing the fertility-crisis. It rebutts the challenges why the women are repressed and punished as the target population while the history shows that militarism, patriarchy, religiosity and technological explodes are the prime factors to lead to humanity on the verge of extinction because of its testing in continuous wars, bigotry, misogyny and climate disasters. However, retrospecting the histories in the world gives us a consolation that women are the major victims of the wars and crises who still perform constructive resistance for pacifying, resilience and reconstruction. As such, this thesis projects Judd’s character as a self-critical and disillusioned human against the universal Man largely responsible for the dystopian life Atwood has imagined in the novels. Another side of the dystopic regime is a call for performing compassion, affirmative ethics and flexibility in roles, relations and responsibilities embodied in Lydia’s character. Her dynamic presence in the crisis justifies Butler’s

theory of performance as the fluid bottomline of identity attributes determined by the socio-political necessity of a vulnerable state ridden to crisis by humanity itself.

In essence, Gilead is a microcosm of critical human future, a compelling story of the limitations of human tyranny and supremacy over the "Others" that inevitably leads to its own vulnerability. In the current scenario of the world facing the Middle-East conflicts, Russia- Ukraine war, Israel- Palestine blitzes, terrorism and ongoing civil wars, Gilead bugles a warning against the future crisis the humans are heading to. On the next side of the recent political uprising, the Arab Spring Movement is a trumpet announcing the inevitable end of despotism, corruption, economic stagnation, and the militant ideological movements against gender violence and repression in a few democratic countries of Europe, America and Arabia. Relentlessly, the deposition of the rulers as in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, and lately in Bangladesh is a representative voice– "the people want to bring down the regime" – to the recent totalitarian uprisings even inside the best democracies of the world. With the development of aggressive use of surveillance after the 9/11 attack, the hegemony of surveillance capitalism with "the big brother watching you" and "the high tech watching you", the possibility of the recurrence of another World War and the unprecedented crises caused by the emerging and reemerging diseases borne out of the environmental disasters, the world is creating mutual threat to humanity among the humans themselves. In this context, this thesis offers an open outlook and a peripheral perspective to understand the mutual fear human beings are living with and the ways to resolve it. Deployment of violence, repression and extreme forms of punishments like mass killing of selective populations are never the solutions but they are merely the temporary means to survive the crisis as in Gilead which ultimately is dismantled by the

unacknowledged collective battle of all hierarchies of the powerful and the powerless, rulers and the ruled, victims and the perpetraters, men and women, and the sovereign and the people. Both proactive and reactive in its tone, this thesis proposes some critical patterns of life and death, the acceptance of "necessary evil", affirmative obligations and constructive resistance to overcome the unprecedented crises that humanity is facing and is likely to face at their extreme if the contemporary wars, violence and the return of totalitarianism persist as speculated by Atwood in the image of Gilead. Hence, this thesis calls for a collective crusade to save the human future by watching over the ongoing wars, alarming decline in populations and by preparing oneself for surviving the possible critical juncture of human history and rebuilding it with an integrated power structure composed of all realities open and flexible to accommodate with the large socio-political conditions. Quite new in its approach and concepts like necropolitics and affirmative ethics applied in Atwood's novels, this thesis can be an insightful rendition of knowledge about speculative fictions for further researchers to write against the dystopia coming into our real societies buffetted by the obstinacy of violence and wars. Besides, one can also explore the repression of males in the novels for not only women, males are the victim of it as well in Gilead

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