# THE EVOLUTION OF FEMINIST DYSTOPIAN FICTION

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# ABSTRACT

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Abstract: In the latter half of the 2010s, perhaps as a result of the current American political climate and citizens' collective anxiety over the future, classic dystopian novels made their way back to the top of national bestseller lists. In addition to this sort of "comeback" that older dystopian novels seem to be making, the contemporary dystopian genre has seen a substantial surge in popularity since 2016, producing a new crop of novels that address a wide range of fears members of present-day society may have: fear of technology and our increasing dependence on it, fear of corporations and capitalism, fear of climate change and environmental catastrophes, etc. Probably the most popular subgenre of this new wave of dystopia is contemporary feminist dystopia, and the huge critical success of recent novels such as *The Power* by Naomi Alderman (2016), *The Water Cure* by Sophie Mackintosh (2018), *Vox* by Christina Dalcher (2018), and many other similar novels is evidence of this increasing popularity. In my thesis, I analyze two popular and critically-acclaimed novels from this new wave of feminist dystopian fiction — *Future Home of the Living God* by Louise Erdrich (2017) and *Red Clocks* by Leni Zumas (2018) — and, by methods of rhetorical analysis, explore how the feminist dystopian genre has evolved throughout the last decade. Specifically, I compare and contrast the most significant and interesting aspects of these two novels to similar aspects in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), probably the most popular feminist dystopian novel ever and one that undoubtedly influenced the entire new wave of feminist dystopia. By identifying the major differences and similarities between these two generations of novels and placing these differences and similarities in their respective historical contexts, I identify how the feminist dystopian genre has evolved recently and speculate, based on historical and political context, as to why this evolution has occurred. This thesis project is a study on how the contemporary political climate can often affect contemporary literature.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Chapter One: Introduction

As a whole, dystopian fiction has been around since the early twentieth century, and to begin understanding the history of dystopian fiction, one must begin with its natural opposite: utopian fiction. The word “utopia” derives from Greek words meaning “no place” or “good place,” and one of its first known appearances is as the title of a novel by Sir Thomas More.[1] In the novel, the protagonist learns about a fictional island society in the Pacific known as Utopia. Utopian society is drastically different from contemporary European society; it is a society with no significant class differences, no private property, little to no greed, little to no crime, little to no war, religious tolerance, etc. More’s novel inspired the writing of several other utopian stories in the nineteenth century, which some have called “the utopian age.” Some examples include *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy (1888) and *Gloriana* by Lady Florence Dixie (1890).[2]

If a utopia can be thought of as a place of peace, equality, and tolerance, then a dystopia can be thought of as the exact opposite: a place of conflict, inequality, and intolerance. One of the first known uses of the word “dystopia,” which derives from Greek words meaning “a bad place,”[3] was in an 1868 in a political speech given by famous philosopher John Stuart Mill to the House of Commons.[4] Most critics agree that dystopian fiction is a twentieth-century development emerging in response to the so-called “utopian age” of the late 1800s, with the first major dystopian novels emerging around the turn of the century. These dystopian novels, which many believe gained popularity because of the early twentieth-century’s increasing global

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[1] Ellen Datlow, *After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia,* ed. Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (New York City: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2012), Afterword.
[2] Ellen Datlow, *After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia,* ed. Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (New York City: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2012), Afterword.
[3] Ellen Datlow, *After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia,* ed. Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (New York City: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2012), Afterword.
[4] Jessica R. Valdez, “’Our Impending Doom’: Seriality’s End in Late-Victorian Proto-Dystopian Novels,” *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 9, no. 1 (2018): 1.

political tension, impending world wars, and rise of totalitarianism, greatly contrasted their utopian counterparts; instead of being promising, optimistic tales of peaceful, high-functioning societies, dystopias were bleak, satiric tales of failed utopias and highly-flawed societies. Probably the most famous dystopian author of the early twentieth century is H.G. Wells; novels like *The Time Machine* and *When the Sleeper Wakes* helped establish the genre and influenced several future authors.

In 1924, Yevgeny Zamiatin published *We,* another prominent example of early dystopian fiction in which the author creates a dark authoritarian setting, inspired by his own lived experiences from the 1905 Russian Revolution.[5] *We* popularized the genre even more and used many tropes we see throughout contemporary dystopian fiction, including an unresolved conclusion to the story and an unrestrained tyrannical government. In addition, Zamiatin inspired a new wave of young authors to take up his mantle and continue writing the dystopian genre. Perhaps the most important of these inspired authors was George Orwell, who in 1949 published *1984. 1984,* along with *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, were written in the aftermath of World War II and predicted extremely dark visions of future society. It's also important to note that both *1984* and *Brave New World* include very detailed accounts of the dystopian or speculative elements of the stories (i.e. what caused the dystopian society to begin existing, how the dystopian government functions, etc.), and they were instrumental in setting the dystopian tradition as containing these sorts of detailed accounts, probably because the stories are dependent upon the reader understanding the various aspects of how these fictional oppressive societies function. In *1984,* a low-level employee from the ruling political party in London (known as Oceania) works for what is as known as the Ministry of Truth. The Ministry of Truth

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[5] Ellen Datlow, *After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia,* ed. Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (New York City: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2012), Afterword.

rewrites historical records in order to cast any actions performed by Oceanic government in a favorable light and to eliminate all forms of rebellious thought among the citizens of Oceania. In addition, the ruling party discourages any form of free speech, free thought, sexual exploration, and individuality, and it accomplishes this through constant surveillance. [6]

Orwell's dystopian setting contrasts with the setting created by Huxley in *Brave New World* in that the ruling government in *Brave New World* isn't overtly oppressive, simply because it doesn't have to be. In *Brave New World,* the government controls the lives of all its citizens by running a hatchery in which they supervise the birth of all human embryos. From there, all newborns are split into one of several distinct classes which will determine the work and social life of that person for their whole life. Through hypnosis and intense psychological conditioning, citizens in *Brave New World* are taught from birth to love the class they are in and love the work they are supposed to do for society. Because of this lifelong conditioning, no one questions their role in society, and everyone lives in a passive state of distraction and service to the government.[7] Although they may differ, both novels were written as a result of fears of overly oppressive governments caused by World War II, and both were extremely important in solidifying the genre; as stated before, they both set the dystopian tradition as containing detailed accounts of the speculative elements of the story. Additionally, they both influenced several dystopian novels which would come after them and are both taught in schools to this day, seen as sort of the "gold-standard" of dystopian fiction.

After Orwell wrote *1984* (and probably because he wrote this novel), dystopian literature gained immense popularity in the 1950s onwards and started to reflect new sets of fears society possessed. In response to the fear of regulation of the arts by the government, Ray Bradury wrote

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[6] George Orwell, *1984* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949)
[7] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932)

*Fahrenheit 451* in 1953. In response to technological advancements such as the invention of the first personal computer, Phillip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and several other similar novels were written. *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966) was written by Henry Harrison as a response to fears about overpopulation. Additionally, concerns regarding the increasing influence of large corporations influenced the writing of Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992). Several other influential dystopian novels from the second half of the twentieth century include *The Chrysalids* by John Wyndham (1955), *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess (1962), and *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* by Phillip K. Dick (1974).[8]

Another dystopian author that both Orwell and Huxley greatly influenced was Margaret Atwood, who published *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) in response to concerns about environmental catastrophe and gender inequality. *The Handmaid's Tale,* a novel about a Christian, patriarchal society in which the main character is essentially enslaved and forced to have the children of a high-ranking male, is one of the earliest examples of a feminist dystopian novel and probably the most popular feminist dystopia ever. Feminist dystopian novels can be thought of as any novel in which an oppressive government heavily suppresses the rights of women in particular (and oftentimes specifically the reproductive rights and bodily autonomy of these women) to maintain order in society. Interestingly, there has been a new wave of contemporary dystopian novels published in the last decade, and the feminist dystopian subgenre seems to be especially popular as of late. In this thesis, I explore the historical evolution of the feminist subgenre of dystopian literature. By comparing and contrasting two popular contemporary feminist dystopias with *The Handmaid's Tale*, I analyze how the feminist dystopian subgenre has evolved over time and why it has evolved the way it has.

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[8] Ellen Datlow, *After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia,* ed. Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (New York City: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2012), Afterword.

To understand how the feminist subgenre of dystopian fiction has evolved, one must first understand the evolution of the feminist social movement. By tracking changes within the feminist social movement over time, one can begin to understand why the feminist subgenre has evolved the way it did.

Feminist history is often thought of as happening in "waves," with each new wave representing a new time period, new issues to overcome, and new social movements to fight against gender inequality. The era known as the first wave of the feminist movement took place from the mid-nineteenth century till the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, in 1920. The Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention in US history, published the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments which identified the primary goals of the first wave feminist movement: women's suffrage, the abolition of coverture laws, and equal access to education and employment.[9] Unfortunately, the first wave feminist movement often excluded the interests or concerns of working-class women or women of color. For example, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), the largest suffrage group in the country at the time, excluded Black women from joining. As Angela Davis notes, working-class women "were seldom moved by the suffragists' promise that the vote would permit them to become equal to their men—their exploited, suffering men."[10] Although the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment was a step in the right direction, racial and gender inequality persisted in the United States; women did not have total access to everything men did,

[9] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).
[10] "Working Women, Black Women and the History of the Suffrage Movement," in *A Transdisciplinary Introduction to Women's Studies*, ed. by Arlene Avakian and Alexandrina Deschamps (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2002) 73-78.

and things like the KKK and Jim Crow Laws kept Black women from education, employment, and voting.[11]

After receiving the right to vote, feminist activists diverted their energy towards reforming labor laws and fighting gender-based discrimination in the workplace. In 1920, a new federal agency called the Women's Bureau was created to brainstorm policy solutions which would improve the conditions of women in the workplace. In addition, the YWCA, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW) were formed in an attempt to influence government officials to pass legislation which would prohibit gender-based discrimination in the workplace.[12] Similar to the first wave, the second wave feminist movement is often criticized as ignoring the needs of working-class women and women of color. Black women activists and writers such as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins developed Black feminist thought as a way to critique this exclusion, and the Combahee River Collective, one of the first Black feminist associations, was formed in 1974.[13] As Kang notes, Black feminism states that sexism cannot be separated from racism, classism, and homophobia, and that fighting sexism includes fighting racism, classism, and homophobia: "an intersectional perspective that makes visible and critiques multiple sources of oppression and inequality also inspires coalitional activism that brings people together across race, class, gender, and sexual identity lines."[14]

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[11] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).
[12] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).
[13] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).
[14] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).

Third-wave feminism began in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries and is a hybrid movement influenced by second-wave feminism, Black feminism, transnational feminisms, Global South feminisms, and queer feminisms.[15] Third-wave feminists focus on coalitional politics and hope to organize with other oppressed groups based on their shared lived experiences of oppression. For example, transnational feminism explores the connection between sexism, racism, classism, and imperialism, and queer politics seeks to "to develop more radical political perspectives and more inclusive sexual cultures and communities, which aimed to welcome and support transgender and gender non-conforming people and people of color."[16] In the mid 1980s, ACT UP (the Aids Coalition to Unleash Power) was formed in order to persuade the US government and medical establishment to produce affordable HIV/AIDS drugs.[17] Third-wave feminism also produced several new interesting tactics in the fight for gender equality. For example, ACT UP, the prominent third-wave feminist organization, staged die-ins, inflated giant condoms, and occupied politicians' offices.[18] The rise in popularity of social media also resulted in the creation of several other unique tactics, including the formation of feminist news websites and magazines. Kang sums up third-wave feminism well when she says, "Third wave feminism's insistence on grappling with multiple points-of-view, as well as its persistent refusal to be pinned down as representing just one group of people or one perspective, may be its greatest strong point."[19] Overall, the feminist social movement has become more

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[15] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).
[16] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).
[17] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).
[18] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).
[19] Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken, *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2017).

diverse and inclusive of non-white women as time has progressed, especially since the late twentieth century, and these changes can be used to make sense of why the feminist dystopian genre evolved as it did. As I will argue, newer feminist dystopian novels include more diverse casts and are therefore more inclusive and a more accurate representation of real-world society and oppression. Additionally, newer authors including more diverse casts can focus and elaborate on the experiences of these minority characters that reflect the experiences of real-world minorities and may be exclusive to these minorities, thus increasing the realism of the novels.

Interestingly enough, in the latter half of the 2010s, perhaps as a result of the current American political climate and citizens' collective anxiety over the future, classic dystopian novels made their way back to the top of national bestseller lists. For example, *1984* was at the top of the Amazon bestseller list in the United States at the beginning of 2017, and Penguin USA saw a 9,500% increase in sales of *1984* the week of January 25, 2017. Additionally, that same month, *Brave New World* was also ranked among Amazon's best sellers.[20]

In addition to this sort of "comeback" that older dystopian novels seem to be making, the contemporary dystopian genre has seen a substantial surge in popularity since 2016, producing a new crop of novels that address a wide range of fears members of present-day society may have: fear of technology and our increasing dependence on it, fear of corporations and capitalism, fear of climate change and environmental catastrophes, etc. Probably the most popular subgenre of this new wave of dystopia is contemporary feminist dystopia, and the huge critical success of recent novels such as *The Power* by Naomi Alderman (2016), *The Water Cure* by Sophie Mackintosh (2018), *Vox* by Christina Dalcher (2018), and many other similar novels is evidence

[20] Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, "George Orwell's '*1984*' Is Suddenly a Best-Seller," The New-York Times, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/books/1984-george-orwell-donald-trump.html

of this increasing popularity. As stated before, feminist dystopias focus primarily on the oppression of women, and the feminist dystopian novel was first made popular by *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood published in 1985; all of the new feminist dystopian novels being published today are influenced in some way by Atwood's novel.

In my thesis, I analyze two popular and critically-acclaimed novels from this new wave of feminist dystopian fiction — *Future Home of the Living God* by Louise Erdrich (2017) and *Red Clocks* by Leni Zumas (2018) — and, by methods of rhetorical analysis, explore how the feminist dystopian genre has evolved throughout the last decade. Specifically, I compare and contrast the most significant and interesting aspects of these two novels to similar aspects in *The Handmaid's Tale*. By identifying the major differences and similarities between these two generations of novels and placing these differences and similarities in their respective historical contexts, I identify how the feminist dystopian genre has evolved recently and speculate, based on historical and political context, as to why this evolution has occurred. As stated before, it is my belief that there are major differences between the feminist dystopias of the 1980s and the feminist dystopias of the 2010s and that these differences can (at least partly) be attributed to the natural progression towards increased inclusion in the feminist social movement discussed earlier. This thesis project will be a study on how the contemporary political climate can often affect contemporary literature.

Regarding methodology, I perform a close reading and analysis of the three novels I am focusing on, using historical evidence to interpret and contextualize any observations or analyses I make. Next, I compare and contrast these texts and interpret them with a fresh emphasis on similarities and differences between the novels and their contexts, focusing on why these similarities or differences between the texts may or may not exist based on historical

context. After conducting analysis and research, I've found that, unlike *The Handmaid's Tale*, newer novels like *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* contain a diverse cast of characters, which allows the authors to engage in racially-focused social commentary and allows the novels to be more representative and inclusive of contemporary society as a whole. Additionally, these newer novels lack focus on the dystopian or sci-fi elements of the story, instead choosing to focus on the rough experiences (that many real people face today) of the characters and various methods of resistance that can be used against these oppressive governments. These developments greatly contrast older dystopian novels like *The Handmaid's Tale;* Atwood's novel doesn't contain a very diverse cast of characters, and she develops the dystopian and speculative elements of the story in great detail, emphasizing the fact that her oppressive government is all-powerful and resistance is near impossible. The newer novels' focus on the characters' familiar experiences makes for novels that are more realistic and therefore more frightening. This increased realism plus the aforementioned increased diversity and inclusion means that feminist dystopian novels may be improving at representing reality. Similarly, these new realistic novels may signify that society is in fact regressing and the sorts of curtailments of women's rights described in the novels may no longer seem very far-fetched. However, the newer novels' added emphasis on modes of resistance against government oppression (the sort of emphasis Atwood's novel lacks) leaves the reader with a hopeful message: although institutional oppression may *seem* all-powerful, there will always be methods of resistance, and we should never give up hope in the face of the sorts of oppression (which could make their way into the real-world in the near future) that are described in the novels.

# Chapter Two: Exploring the Experiences of People of Color in the Novels

## INTRODUCTION

The subject of race and the way the author portrays the experiences of people of color varies widely between *The Handmaid's Tale* and the two never novels, *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God.* In *The Handmaid's Tale,* Atwood creates a sort of post-racial society; the majority of the characters are white, and the experiences of the main characters aren't affected by their race. In fact, aside from a few sporadic mentions, race really doesn't play a huge role in the novel. That isn't the case in *Red Clocks* or *Future Home of the Living God.* In these two contemporary novels, race plays a role in driving the plots forward, and in *Future Home* specifically, the race of the main character heavily affects her experiences and decision-making. In *Red Clocks,* there is an influential character whose actions and circumstances are heavily affected by her race, and in *Future Home of the Living God,* the protagonist Cedar's indigenous heritage is one of her most prominent character traits. In addition, the experiences of indigenous people in *Future Home* echo the experiences of many real-world indigenous populations. This increased racial diversity among characters creates a more inclusive vision of society and allows the new authors to engage in racially-focused social commentary.

## PART ONE: EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR IN *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

As Paul Moffett says, *The Handmaid's Tale* takes place in a "monochromatically white world."[21] However, although Gilead is a sort of post-racial mostly white society, Atwood makes

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[21] Paul Moffett, "Erasing Race in *The Handmaid's Tale,*" in The Handmaid's Tale*: Teaching Dystopia, Feminism, and Resistance Across Disciplines and Borders,* ed. Karen A. Ritzenhoff (London: Lexington 2019), 157-170.

it known that it is still a racist society. On page 197, an anchorman on the Gilead news station says, "'Resettlement of the Children of Ham is continuing on schedule . . . Three thousand have arrived this week in National Homeland One, with another two thousand in transit.'"[22] It is later revealed that National Homeland One is modern-day North Dakota, and this resettlement of the "Children of Ham" refers to the way the government of Gilead segregated the society by deporting people of color. Christians in the Southern United States during the mid-nineteenth century associated the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa with Noah's sons Japheth, Shem, and Ham respectively.[23] This is because in Genesis 9 God curses Canaan, Ham's son, into servitude:

"Cursed be Canaan!

The lowest of slaves

Will he be to his brother"[24]

This Bible story was often used as a way to justify African slavery in America through religion. As Haynes writes, "antebellum American proponents of Noah's curse adhered to the orthodox interpretive paradigm which exalted Noah as a righteous patriarch and vilified Ham as a worthless son" and "proslavery authors were more respectful of Noah . . . since in their eyes Noah was not only a biblical patriarch but the patron saint of plantation life as well."[25] Calling the people of color the "Children of Ham" is an allusion to the horrific history of American slavery, a tragedy whose effects are still felt both in the real world and in Gilead.

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[22] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Anchor Books, 1986), 197.

[23] Paul Moffett, "Erasing Race in *The Handmaid's Tale,*" in The Handmaid's Tale*: Teaching Dystopia, Feminism, and Resistance Across Disciplines and Borders,* ed. Karen A. Ritzenhoff (London: Lexington 2019), 157-170.

[24] Genesis 9:25 (NIV)

[25] Stephen R. Haynes, "Original Dishonor: Noah's Curse and the Southern Defense of Slavery," *Journal of Southern Religion* 3, (2000).

There are a few other examples of Gilead being an inherently racist society throughout the novel. In the epilogue titled “Historical Notes on *The Handmaid’s Tale,”* Professor Pieixoto, a Gileadean scholar, gives a talk called “Problems of the Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid’s Tale*” (Atwood 300). In his talk, Professor Pieixoto refers to the “Underground Femaleroad,” presumably an underground route women would take to escape Gilead during the time of the novel (Atwood 303). This “Underground Femaleroad” is an obvious reference to the real Underground Railroad African slaves would use to escape to free Northern states and Canada during the mid-nineteenth century and an allusion to the brutal history of American slavery. In addition, Professor Pieixoto describes the novel as taking place during “an age of plummeting Caucasian birthrates, a phenomenon observable not only in Gilead but in most northern Caucasian societies of the time,” and he also refers to the “differing statistics among Caucasians and non-Caucasians” (Atwood 304). Professor Pieixoto’s declaration that Gilead was formed in response to only a Caucasian decline in birth rates reflects a sort of xenophobia that the founders of Gilead must have felt; they, as many white supremacists before them, feared that their declining population would one day be outnumbered. Atwood even explicitly states this when Professor Pieixoto says that Gilead’s “racist policies . . . were firmly rooted in the pre-Gilead period, and racist fears provided some of the emotional fuel that allowed the Gilead takeover to succeed as well as it did” (Atwood 305). Clearly, Gilead is an all-white society, but that’s only because of racism that pervaded the fictional pre-Gilead United States, as it pervades contemporary American society. Moffett puts it perfectly when he says, “the dystopia of the book’s Gilead is not only an incidentally white one; it is white by design, by practice, and by motivation. It was the desire to create and maintain a white state that was part of the impetus behind the creation of the book’s Gilead, and the whiteness of the book’s world is part of what

makes it dystopian."[26] *The Handmaid's Tale* takes place in a mostly white society, and this lack of people of color in the novel is caused by the racism of pre-Gilead Americans. This Gileadean racism is probably a critique against the horrifically racist history of the United States and the racism of 1980s America.

Although this lack of diverse characters acts as a critique of the racism of American history and society, this critique also comes with its limitations. By only having Caucasian people as the main characters in her novel and not having race act as a serious thematic element, Atwood limits diverse perspectives and her ability to engage in more meaningful social critique against American racism, which some of her critics have pointed out. In an article for *Vulture*, Angelica Jade Bastien says that Atwood's decision to only mention Black people a few times "feels like the mark of a writer unable to reckon with how race would compound the horrors of a hyper-Evangelical-ruled culture. Furthermore, it misrepresents how black and brown people resist in times of crisis."[27] Atwood's critics raise a valid point; when she finds out that the people of color have all been resettled in North Dakota, Offred gives hardly any thought to this phenomenon, and the issue of race doesn't significantly come up again until the epilogue. This lack of diversity constrains Atwood's ability to describe the unique experiences people (and especially women) of color faced in being deported to National Homeland One and experienced as citizens of Gilead. Instead, Atwood chooses to focus on the subjugation of white women exclusively, keeping race out of her critique. As Lauret writes, "*The Handmaid's Tale* once again

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[26] Paul Moffett, "Erasing Race in *The Handmaid's Tale,*" in The Handmaid's Tale*: Teaching Dystopia, Feminism, and Resistance Across Disciplines and Borders,* ed. Karen A. Ritzenhoff (London: Lexington 2019), 157-170.
[27] Angelica Jade Bastien, "In Its First Season, *The Handmaid's Tale's* Greatest Failing Is How It Handles Race," *Vulture,* June 24, 2017, https://www.vulture.com/2017/06/the-handmaids-tale-greatest-failing-is-how-it-handles-race.html.

prioritizes gender over racial oppression in its displacement of the political discourse of African-American emancipation on to that of white women's resistance to patriarchy."[28]

It's not only the fact that Atwood removes characters of color from being influential in her novel that has drawn criticism, but also the fact that Atwood essentially appropriates the experiences of African slaves in America during the mid-nineteenth century to describe the experiences of the white characters in *The Handmaid's Tale.* This appropriation can be clearly seen when studying Atwood's treatment of the Marthas, the housekeepers in Gilead and some of the few characters of color in her novel. When introducing Rita, the first Martha to appear in the story, Atwood writes, "Her sleeves are rolled to the elbow, showing her brown arms," suggesting that the Marthas are Black and that not all women of color have been deported (Atwood 9). Additionally, the speech of the Marthas reads like what Atwood may have intended to be Black American English dialect: When talking to Rita, Cora says, "Nobody asking you" (Atwood 10). Later, Cora tells Rita, "Anyways, they're doing it for us all, or so they say. If I hadn't of got my tubes tied, it could of been me" (Atwood 10). All of this can be seen as evidence indicating that the Marthas consist of Black women who complete all sorts of household chores for the Commanders. By creating Gilead in this way, Atwood desexualizes the Marthas ("She put on a veil to go outside, but nobody much cares who sees the face of a Martha") in a way that frees them from experiencing the sort of sexual oppression that the white Handmaids face in the novel (Atwood 9). It's as if racial oppression and sexual oppression are two separate phenomena in Gilead, and only white women face sexual oppression. This stark contrast between the oppression the Black Marthas (racial oppression) and the white Handmaids (sexual oppression) face is problematic because racism and sexism are historically linked and because African slave

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[28] Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 182.

women definitely *did* face sexual oppression in nineteenth century America; for example, Black slave women were often raped and forced to have the children of their owners, like the white Handmaids in Atwood's novel. By centering white characters as the only victims of sexual oppression in her novel and marginalizing the experiences of the Black Marthas as not living through this sort of sexual oppression, Atwood appropriates the real-world experiences of African slaves in America and fails to acknowledge the fact that racism and sexism have been intrinsically linked throughout all of American history.

As previously stated, the Handmaids (and not the Marthas) experience what many African slave women experienced in mid-nineteenth century America. Lauret sums this phenomenon well when she says, "The novel's racist assumptions about a contemporary crisis in fertility are thus reproduced in its formal strategy which borrows the generic features of the nineteenth-century slave narrative, but it suppresses its African-American origins."[29] Many of the horrible experiences of women in Gilead definitely seem to echo the actual horrors that African slaves experienced during the nineteenth century, even though no one ever mentions American slavery in the novel and none of the characters consider the American history of oppression of Black people when trying to make sense of the political situation in Gilead. This appropriation makes Atwood ignoring race as a major thematic element an even worse offense, according to some of her critics. In an article for *The Verge,* Noah Berlatsky interestingly points out that "In Western fiction, dystopic stories often ask, 'What if this atrocity had happened to white people instead?'" and then adds this formula is "the basis for Margaret Atwood's 1985

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[29] Maria Lauret, *Liberating Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 182.

novel *The Handmaid's Tale,* which imagines a world in which white women are enslaved and sexually coerced as black women were under American slavery."[30]

Indeed, the references to slavery are abundant in *The Handmaid's Tale.* As mentioned before, the "Underground Femaleroad" was a way for women in Gilead to escape from their oppression just as American slaves used the Underground Railroad to escape theirs (Atwood 303). In addition, women in Gilead were forced to renounce their old names and given new ones, just as slaves sometimes were. As Offred thinks early on in the novel, "My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden" (Atwood 84). These Handmaid's names weren't random, either; they were named after their Commanders, just as slaves were sometimes named after their owners (Offred = Of+Fred) (Atwood 182). Finally, when thinking about Nick, a male servant that lives in her home, Offred says, "he hasn't been issued a woman," implying that women are viewed as some sort of property in Gilead just as slaves were viewed as property in the antebellum South (Atwood 18). This status of women basically being owned by their commanders is confirmed again later in the novel when Offred is lying in bed with her Commander: she refers to her ankle tattoo as "a Braille he can read, a cattle brand. It means ownership" (Atwood 254).

A major and more horrific and sad allusion to the experiences of slaves and other African Americans in *The Handmaid's Tale* is the depiction of the lynching of criminals at The Wall. On page 32, Offred and her shopping partner walk past The Wall, a place where criminals are publicly hanged so as to deter crime from other members of society, and Atwood offers a vivid description of the lynching scene: "Beside the main gateway there are six more bodies hanging,

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[30] Noah Berlatsky, "Both Versions of *The Handmaid's Tale* have a problem with racial erasure," *The Verge,* June 15, 2017, https://www.theverge.com/2017/6/15/15808530/handmaids-tale-hulu-margaret-atwood-black-history-racial-erasure

by the necks, their hands tied in front of them, their heads in white bags tipped sideways onto their shoulders" and "on one bag there's blood which has seeped through the white cloth, where the mouth must have been. It makes another mouth, a small red one, like the mouths painted with thick brushes by kindergarten children. A child's idea of a smile. This smile of blood is what fixes the attention, finally" (Atwood 32). This horrific scene probably was similar to the scenes of many African American lynchings, which unfortunately were extremely common in the South for years both during and after the Civil War. Oftentimes, local law enforcement was complicit in these lynchings, and between 1889 and 1940, 3,833 people were lynched. Ninety percent of these people were murdered in the South, and 80% of them were black. As an African American, one could be lynched for a number of reasons, not only serious crimes like murder, rape, and theft, but also insignificant crimes like insulting a white person or being too proud.[31] Similarly, one could be hanged for seemingly petty crimes in Gilead, like being a doctor (Atwood 32) or being homosexual (Atwood 43).

Interestingly, there are a few more subtle references to slavery in the novel. At the end of chapter 3 when talking about Serena Joy, Offred thinks "She probably longed to slap my face. They can hit us, there's Scriptural precedent" (Atwood 16). As mentioned before, Bible verses and Christian values were used by plantation owners to justify and uphold American slavery in the nineteenth century. In addition, it's implied that women aren't legally allowed to read (Atwood 26), and even the letters and words on street signs were removed in Gilead: "You can see the place, under the lily, where the lettering was painted out, when they decided that even the names of shops were too much temptation for us" (Atwood 25). Similarly, many African slaves were outlawed from learning how to read in the antebellum South because of fear of uprisings.

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[31] David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Cafe Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2000), 35.

Finally, the children the Handmaid's give birth to are separated from their birth mothers and given to the wives of the Commanders just as many newborn babies were taken from African women slaves. This appropriation of some of the many horrible experiences African slaves suffered through in America by characters that are white women can be viewed as disrespectful to the African American community and their collective experiences, as some of Atwood's critics have pointed out.

It's important to acknowledge that Gilead is inherently racist in its fictional origins. Gilead isn't all-white by coincidence; it's all-white by its founders' design and represents the racist thinking that permeates Gilead and its government. By creating the all-white and racist dystopian setting of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood definitely wanted to critique the racist history of the United States. However, her attempts at criticism of a racist America are undermined by the significant lack of diversity in her novel. This lack of diversity is exacerbated by the sidelining of actual Black characters (the Marthas) and the major focus on the types of oppression (sexual and otherwise) that the white Handmaids face, which are much closer to the types of oppression that women of color have historically faced. Black women are not the subjects of sexual oppression in the novel as they have been in the real world, and marginalizing their experiences to that of simple housekeepers fails to acknowledge the historical loss of reproductive freedom women of color have experienced. Basically, Atwood's failure to involve her Black characters or the fact that the white main characters' oppression is appropriated "provides a subtext that . . . sabotages the surface text's expressed intentions."[32] Atwood's intentions were probably to critique the racism and sexism that have plagued America since its founding; however, by removing Black characters from importance and by appropriating the

[32] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 66.

real-world experiences of Black women to her white main characters (and away from her Black characters), Atwood writes a novel that fails to acknowledge the brutal history of both racialized and sexualized oppression of women of color, and thus fails to capture the true essence of racism and sexism (and how they are historically linked) in America. In conclusion, although Atwood's dystopian setting is ruled by a racist government, it is more importantly an all-white setting, and this all-white setting plus the appropriation of the experiences of slaves results in a failure to grapple with real-world historical oppression that women (and specifically women of color) have faced in America.

## PART TWO: EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR IN *FUTURE HOME OF THE LIVING GOD*

While Atwood centers whiteness and doesn't really offer an in-depth analysis of the experiences of women of color in her feminist dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale,* Louise Erdrich takes a very different approach in her contemporary feminist dystopia, *Future Home of the Living God,* by choosing to center the protagonist's indigenous roots as central to the plot of the novel. However, it is important to preface this discussion by noting that *Future Home of the Living God* is indeed a feminist dystopian novel like Atwood's with several similarities to *The Handmaid's Tale* despite containing the unique science-fiction element of backwards evolution.

In *Future Home of the Living God,* evolution seems to be regressing. Animal and plant species begin to change in mysterious, scientifically unexplainable ways, and women begin to give birth to newborns that resemble past species of humans (and thus are inviable). The Church of the New Constitution, which comes into power when the US government falls for unspecified reasons, begins gathering and imprisoning pregnant women, and eventually all women of childbearing age are susceptible to being captured and used for childbirth against their will. Like

Gilead in the *The Handmaid's Tale,* the Church of the New Constitution implements these oppressive policies against women because of a mysterious drop in viable births across the human species, and the oppressive policies the two governments implement are extremely similar, too; like the Church of the New Constitution, Gilead captures women and forces them to live with Commanders for the sole purpose of giving birth to the Commanders' children, essentially imprisoning them. Additionally, Erdrich's oppressive regime uses many other tactics that Atwood's does to control the population: stringent laws, mass surveillance, family separation, imprisonment of all political dissidents, suspension of freedoms, control of all aspects of the media, militant actions, extreme propaganda leading to indoctrination, etc.

Although the societies in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Future Home* are run by similarly oppressive regimes whose policies both rely on the oppression of women, the backwards evolution aspect of *Future Home* is unique and makes the novel distinct from *The Handmaid's Tale*. In fact, the backwards evolution is a thematically important metaphor in the novel. In an interview with Atwood, Erdrich explains why she started writing her novel shortly after the 2000 presidential election: "I was furious and worried. I saw the results of electing George W. Bush as a disaster for reproductive rights. Sure enough, he began by reinstating the global gag rule, which cuts international funding for contraceptives if abortion is mentioned. This, when we face overpopulation. Also crucial for me was that we lost on climate change; there was a real chance to keep the lid on carbon back then."[33] After a years-long hiatus, Erdrich continued to write her novel after the 2016 presidential election: "I picked up *Future Home of the Living God* again, after the 2016 election, because I needed Cedar. Maybe I'm writing the biological equivalent of

[33] Margaret Atwood and Louise Erdrich, "Inside the Dystopian Visions of Margaret Atwood and Louise Erdrich," Elle, 2017, https://www.elle.com/culture/books/a13530871/future-home-of-the-living-god-louise-erdrich-interview/

our present political mess. And of course it feels like things are going backward again."[34] The backwards evolution in Erdrich's novel could possibly be read as an allegory for society moving backwards in terms of the rights it affords to its most vulnerable members of society. Interestingly, Atwood's novel also highlights moving backwards in a different way; the way Atwood's characters dress, shop, and maintain the home echo earlier periods of history, and the characters think of this regressive feel to the style of Gilead as a "return to traditional values" (Atwood 7). While the reader isn't supposed to think society has progressed in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the subtle metaphor of backwards evolution in *Future Home* explicitly represents the way our society is moving backwards in terms of rights it affords women in a way that doesn't require a complete reimagining of society. Instead of moving forward and trying to improve conditions for women and for the environment, the US government continues to take steps that will further limit the rights of women and continue to harm our environment, like how evolution is moving the wrong direction in *Future Home.*

Importantly, women clearly suffer the most under Erdrich's dystopian setting, similar to Atwood's, making this novel, like Atwood's, a distinctly feminist dystopia. In *Future Home,* women are the ones who are imprisoned and forced to act as virtual slaves for the purposes of reproduction and the furtherment of human society. As Kot notes, the main characteristic of *Future Home* is "the gender-based seclusion aimed at control exclusively over female bodies. While the male population is free from any controlled practices oriented towards fertility and childbirth, women of all ages, races, and cultures become hostages to a society of control."[35] In

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[34] Margaret Atwood and Louise Erdrich, "Inside the Dystopian Visions of Margaret Atwood and Louise Erdrich," Elle, 2017, https://www.elle.com/culture/books/a13530871/future-home-of-the-living-god-louise-erdrich-interview/
[35] Svitlana Kot, "An Indigenous Woman in the Apocalyptic City: Exploring the Multifaceted Urban Panorama in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God,*" *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 12, no. 1 (2020): 1-14.

Erdrich's novel, women "emerge as signs of female self-sacrifice, whose bodies are turned into objects while they are deprived of agency. They morph effectively into operating devices, which fulfill the function of reproduction" (Kot 11). Again, this sort of treatment of women only as vehicles of reproduction in *Future Home* can be seen in *The Handmaid's Tale.* For example, women in Gilead are subject to medical examinations while all men are assumed to be fertile and are never controlled as tools for reproduction or blamed for their failure to reproduce: "He's said a forbidden word. *Sterile.* There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood 61). However, this lack of agency stemming from being turned into a reproductive device isn't the fate of all women — just young, fertile (and implicitly white) women. This is different from how women are treated in *Future Home;* the Church of the New Constitution will capture and imprison any women they believe can have children regardless of race, as is evidenced by the indigenous Cedar's capture, imprisonment, and forced birth.

Because white women specifically are vehicles for reproduction in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood marginalizes the historical experiences of women of color as these sort of vehicles, which Erdrich highlights. Regarding the theme of backwards evolution, it's important to remember that the horrible policies the US government implements which take society backwards in terms of progress harm women (and specifically women of color) at disproportionate rates, which makes analyzing the theme of race in *Future Home* all the more interesting and important. For example, from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, the Office of Indian Affairs opened several boarding/residential schools for thousands of indigenous children (who were forcibly separated from their families) in America. These institutions were run by Christian churches and aimed to extend "civilization" to these children, but in reality,

these schools tried to eliminate indigenous beliefs and culture and often resulted in the rape, murder, involuntarily medical experiments, and forced sterilization of indigenous children, who also often died at these schools.[36] Additionally, rising indigenous birth rates in the mid-twentieth century resulted in the US government experimenting on and coercively sterilizing thousands of indigenous women. It is estimated that between 1970 and 1976 at least 25% of indigenous women aged 15-44 in America were forcibly sterilized, in 1979 Lehman Brightman, founder of United Native Americans, concluded that out of the whole indigenous population in America, 10% of men 42% of women had been coercively sterilized (Pegoraro 2014). As stated before, the oppressive policies resulting from backwards evolution harm all women regardless of race in *Future Home,* different from how only white women are subjected to forced births in Gilead. Considering all of the above, one could argue that Erdrich includes backwards evolution and race as important thematic elements of her novel because society is progressing backwards as the US government implements policies that will harm everyone but especially women and women of color, as these sorts of harmful policies have disproportionately harmed women of color throughout history. Cannella describes *Future Home* as a "colonial critique of social structures that continue to position people of color, specifically women of color, and more specifically Indigenous women, as a resource to mine,"[37] and Martinez-Falqina says that the dystopian society in *Future Home* is meant "to visiblize the persisting historical grief of Native

[36] Leonardo Pegoraro, "Second-Rate Victims: The Forced Sterilization of Indigenous Peoples in the USA and Canada," *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 2 (2014): 161-173.
[37] Megan Cannella, "Dreams in a Time of Dystopic Coloniaism: Cherie Dimaline's The Marrow Thieves and Louise Erdrich's Future Home of the Living God," in Displaced: Literature of Indigeneity, Migration, and Trauma, ed. Kate Rose (London: Routledge, 2020), 111-120.

Americans."[38] Indeed, race is an important part of driving the plot of *Future Home* forward, and this can be seen by analyzing the experiences of the protagonist.

Cedar Songmaker is a member of the Ojibwe people and the adopted daughter of white "Minnesota liberals."[39] Cedar's Native American heritage can definitely be considered one of her most important character traits. It's not that she's defined by her race; she has plenty of other important characteristics that make her a likable main character. For example, her devout Catholic faith gives her a good moral compass that she's guided by when making tough decisions throughout the novel. Also, she is easily capable of forming meaningful connections with people, which helps her out of tough situations many times in the novel. However, her Native American heritage affected the way she was treated as a young child in her formative years, which probably affected the way she viewed life and acted during the events of the novel. At the beginning of her life, Cedar had very fond feelings towards her indigenous heritage. Early in the novel she describes, "my ethnicity was celebrated in the sheltered enclave of my adoptive Songmaker family. Native girl! Indian Princess!" (Erdrich 4). She goes on to describe some of this celebration and how it made her feel growing up: "I always felt special, like royalty, mentioned in the setting of reverence that attended the study of Native history or customs. My observations on birds, bugs, worms, clouds, cats and dogs, were quoted. I supposedly had a hotline to nature" (Erdrich 4-5).

However, her life and view on her Native heritage begin to change when she receives a letter from her biological parents at the beginning of the novel. She finds out that her biological family's life as Native Americans may not be as romanticized as she imagined it was growing

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[38] Silvia Martinez-Falqina, "Feminist Dystopia and Reality in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks." The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* (2021): 1-17.
[39] Louise Erdich, *Future Home of the Living God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 3.

up: “my family had no special powers or connections with healing spirits or sacred animals. We weren’t even poor. We were bourgeois. We owned a Superpumper [gas station]” (Erdrich 5). In addition, when she was in college, she met many other indigenous people and realized she may not be as special as she thought she was growing up. This loss of an emotional connection towards her indigenous roots result in Cedar struggling with her Native American heritage. She describes her “biological confusion” and a “great uncertainty that life itself has suddenly become,” and she describes herself as “pissed off” (Erdrich 5). Seemingly angrily, she asks herself, “who are they to have destroyed the romantic imaginary Native parents that I’ve invented from earliest childhood, the handsome ones with long, both-sided braids, who died in some vague and suitably spiritual Native way—perhaps fasting themselves to death or sundancing to heatstroke or plunging off a cliff for love or being carried off by thunderbirds?” (Erdrich 6). Clearly, she starts the novel as someone uncertain with their relationship to their ethnic heritage.

However, the events of the novel change her, and bonding with her family on the reservation allows her to start feeling a real connection to her Native American roots. Cedar calls herself a “two-decade plus collection of quirks and curiosities, the biochemical machine that examines its own mind, the searcher who believes equally in the laws of physics and the Holy Ghost, in reading my favorite theologian, Hans Küng (the one chastised by Ratzinger but loved by our present pope), and trying to live by the seven Ojibwe teachings, Truth Respect Love Bravery Generosity Wisdom Humility” (Erdrich 64). This description is the first time Cedar acknowledges that she tries to live according to the Ojibwe moral code, and the fact that she places the same amount of importance to this moral code as she does to her devout Catholic faith

indicates that she is warming up to her indigenous heritage as she spends more time with her biological family on the reservation where they live.

Cedar's growing connection towards her indigenous roots continue to guide her as she faces tough situations as the novel progresses. When she is finally captured by the government and forced to carry out the remainder her pregnancy in a hospital-turned-prison for other pregnant women, one of the few items she feels is important enough to bring with her is *The Life of Kateri Tekakwitha* by Evelyn M. Brown (Erdrich 126). Kateri Tekakwitha is called "Lily of the Mohawks, patron saint of Native People," and by including this patron saint of Native people in the novel who also serves as a role model and moral compass for the reservation, Erdrich both highlights the importance of Native American culture to the story and gives Cedar someone she can look up to and try to imitate, which surely brings her closer to her indigenous roots (Erdrich 22). Like Kateri, Cedar is forced to remain virtuous amidst "scenes of carnage [and] debauchery," and the fact that Cedar brought Kateri's biography to the hospital with her is evidence of the fact that she thinks of Kateri as an important figure in her life, one whom she can look to for strength while she navigates life under an extremely oppressive government (Erdrich 23).

In addition, after Cedar escapes, she hides out at the reservation, where she is finally at peace, at least for a little while. She says, "I lounge in a cushy fake-leather desk chair. An attention to my comfort is the only notice I am shown here—no hiding me, no concern about gravid female detention" (Erdrich 213). As a symbol of the peace she feels because of the protection her indigenous heritage gives her, Erdrich notes that Cedar owns and wears a "huge black T-shirt that says Anishinaabe Warrior" (Erdrich 217). The Anishinaabe is a term used to describe 3 different indigenous tribes: the Odawa, the Ojibwe, and the Potawatomi, all of whom

speak Anishinaabemowin (otherwise known as Ojibwe).[40] Cedar can definitely be considered an Anishaabe warrior; she's fought her way out of several dangerous situations using both her own shrewdness and the help of her family and friends. At last, she finds comfort in staying with other Native people in a safe environment, and she is happy to finally rest and escape from the horrors of the dystopian society in which she lives, at least for a little bit.

By the end of the novel, Cedar is extremely in-touch with her Native American heritage, and it is part of the reason why she can survive the rough experiences of being re-captured from the reservation and incarcerated at a former prison turned birthing center. Right before she is captured again, Cedar, when discussing Eddy and a few veterans training the people on the reservation to fight, says, "together they have organized and trained our people. Our people. My people. Your people. I could never say that before" (Erdrich 227). This significant self-revelation indicates that Cedar has finally fully embraced her indigenous roots, and it's satisfying to see her struggle with her heritage come to a sort of conclusion. Unfortunately, shortly after this self-revelation occurs, she is re-captured and imprisoned again. While imprisoned, she uses prayer as a coping mechanism. On page 253, she says, "Saint Kateri. You owe me. So get busy and pray for us." Because she feels so in-touch with her indigenous roots, Cedar believes that Kateri will now protect her from any harm that may come to her, as many other people on her reservation feel. Unfortunately, cultural identity cannot save marginalized communities from being harmed by an oppressive government, as is indicated by the fact that Cedar is captured while praying to the shrine of Kateri on her reservation. Erdrich may be trying to say that an oppressive government will always oppress its most vulnerable populations when it has the power to, when it's in their best interest, and when the vulnerable populations have no real protections against it.

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[40] Rebecca Chartrand, "Anishinaabe Pedagogy," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 35, no. 1 (2012): 144-162.

Sadly, the novel ends with Cedar giving birth to her child, which is taken from her shortly afterwards. Cedar remains imprisoned so she can attempt to get pregnant and have another child, which will also probably be taken from her.

Clearly, Cedar as a character is greatly influenced by her indigenous roots, and, as a result, the plot of the novel is dependent upon Cedar's forward evolution towards embracing her heritage. Therefore, it can be argued that Erdrich emphasizes race in her novel (something Atwood failed to do), and other scholars have agreed. Kot notes that, "The protagonist's attempts to find a safe place to give birth make her escape, hide, and wander in-between various loci, which seem to resemble a search for home fairly characteristic of Native American literature" (Kot 3). Additionally, the plot of the novel can be seen as a symbol for the centuries-long struggle that Native American communities have faced since the beginning of colonization: "What might be seen as imaginaries of apocalyptic future has happened to indigenous people as a result of different forms of colonialism: destruction of ecosystems, extinction of economically and culturally significant species or loss of access to them due to relocation, cultural dissolution" (Kot 4). While Atwood insists that she wasn't inventing an apocalyptic future but rather creating one by recombining events and policies she had witnessed across the world throughout history, she appropriates those experiences to her white characters, marginalizing the historical experiences of women of color. By contrast, Erdrich writes a novel that calls to mind the historical oppression of indigenous women and has that same sort of oppression happen to an indigenous woman, as has happened throughout history. By doing this, she creates a novel that accurately reflects the historical racism and oppression against indigenous women and how indigenous women would be disproportionately harmed by the sort of oppressive policies in the novel, as they have been historically.

The feminist movement’s recent increased focus on diversity and inclusion of non-white women has allowed us to expand our definition of feminist dystopias and pay attention to the way that experiences of people of color are either marginalized, erased, or highlighted in these works. As discussed in the introduction, towards the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, feminist movements across the country began to take into consideration the needs of women of color and other women that face unique circumstances of oppression, which can explain help why feminist dystopian literature is now more representative of non-white communities. Going back to the novel, Cedar would not have made it as far as she did in the novel without being able to turn to her indigenous heritage and members of her Native community when she needed to. This is important when considering the backwards evolution context of the novel because, as stated before, this backwards evolution (and the regression of society it represents) disproportionately harms and will harm women of color. However, it’s also important to remember that one’s ethnic heritage can provide community and aid in the face of trouble and can form the basis of organized resistance to oppression. After society devolves, Cedar finds genuine comfort and protection on her reservation, and it’s this sort of community that can provide comfort in the face of real-world oppression. This novel’s emphasis on race and the positive effects of embracing one’s ethnic heritage may appeal to real-world marginalized communities who are looking for modes of resistance to oppression. Just as Erdrich turned to Cedar and her own indigenous roots in writing the novel to get her through the political turmoil of the last five years, indigenous people everywhere can look to their Native heritage for community and resistance to oppression. Erdrich may be saying that although oppressive governments may seem all-powerful, there are still ways to combat them by forming strong communities. Additionally, by having Cedar experience the same sort of oppression that real-

world indigenous communities, Erdrich accurately reflects the fact that women of color have been disproportionately harmed by oppressive policies and probably will continue to be in the future. By contrast, Atwood's all-white society doesn't allow her to write a novel that is representative of the real-world historical oppression of women of color.

**PART THREE: EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR IN *RED CLOCKS***

Similar to Erdrich, Leni Zumas chose to include race as an important thematic element when writing *Red Clocks,* something Atwood failed to do in *The Handmaid's Tale*. However, it's important to note that despite this key difference, *Red Clocks,* like *The Handmaid's Tale,* is still a feminist dystopian novel, albeit not in the most conventional sense; there's no bio-medical catastrophe or incomprehensible phenomena resulting in declining birth rates that coerces a government to implement overly oppressive policies. In fact, there aren't many overly oppressive policies in *Red Clocks;* there's no mass surveillance, no seizure of media outlets, no forced labor or imprisonment, no extreme propaganda, etc. In *Red Clocks,* Zumas chooses not include the speculative/sci-fi elements of the story that dystopian novels usually contain, instead choosing to ground her novel in frightening realism. As a result, the federal government in *Red Clocks* is very similar to the real-world federal government, and society in the novel functions similarly to the real-world America. Despite this unconventional nature of the dystopian society, *Red Clocks* still shares many similarities to Atwood's novel, and Zumas was clearly influenced by Atwood.

In *Red Clocks,* there is no totalitarian government that has taken over after some sort of unexplained catastrophe and is implementing excessively oppressive policies against its citizens, as there was in Atwood's and Erdrich's novels; instead, the novel takes place in an almost-normal America where the federal government is controlled by conservatives, a reality not impossible to imagine. In Zumas's novel, Congress has recently passed what's known as the

"Personhood Amendment,"[41] which severely restricts the autonomy women have over their own bodies: "Abortion is now illegal in all fifty states. Abortion providers can be charged with second-degree murder, abortion seekers with conspiracy to commit murder. In vitro-fertilization, too, is federally banned, because the amendment outlaws the transfer of embryos from laboratory to uterus. (The embryos can't give their consent to be moved.)" (Zumas 33). Additionally, the "Every Child Needs Two" law prohibits unmarried persons from adopting children (Zumas 34). Conservatives passing new laws aren't conditions that make for a science-fiction or speculative dystopian fiction novel, which is why *Red Clocks* isn't very conventional in the dystopian sense. However, the reality is these fictional laws affect all women in horrible ways that severely restrict their right to choose what they do with their own bodies, making it a distinctly feminist dystopian novel.

Like current American society, in Zumas's America, lawmakers seem to be happy ignoring a woman's choice over what happens to her body once she becomes pregnant. These new and restrictive laws in *Red Clocks* which disregard the autonomy of women can be compared to the way Gilead's government essentially takes control over the reproductive rights and autonomy of young women by forcing the Handmaids to give birth to the Commanders' children and makes them carry these pregnancies to term. Additionally, in *Red Clocks,* legislators enthusiastically endorse and encourage a women's desire to have children (Zumas 93), similar to how Gilead's government strives to produce as many viable pregnancies as possible among the Handmaids. Gilead doesn't just encourage a woman's desire to have children but instead takes that encouragement a step further by forcing young, eligible (and white) women to attempt to have children. Even though the oppression of the government in *Red Clocks* may not be as

[41] Leni Zumas, *Red Clocks* (New York: Hatchet Bay Books), 32.

extreme or overt as the government in Gilead, it's clear that these new laws and their terrible effects on the lives of women create a "totalitarian male chauvinist society"[42] like the one in *The Handmaid's Tale.*

It's evident that women in *Red Clocks* feel as if the government is overly oppressive when it comes to their bodies. When discussing her pregnancy, Mattie says, "I just want it out of my body. I want to stop being *infiltrated"* (Zumas 301). While Maddie's desire for no more infiltration can be read as her expressing that she wishes she weren't pregnant, it can also be read as her expressing that she wishes she could have a legal abortion, which the federal government won't allow; she wishes her body would stop being infiltrated by legislators who have no right to decide what she does with her body. Additionally, when considering whether or not Ro is stupid for believing the police aren't following her on her way home from an underground abortion clinic, Zumas writes, "Unless she's being stupid. Naively ascribing common decency to people in power, as she did before the Personhood Amendment showed all of its teeth" (Zumas 318). The fictional "monsters" in Congress who passed the Personhood Amendment have no shred of decency or respect for women's autonomy, just as Gilead's government doesn't. In Gilead, Offred and the Handmaids have their identities reduced to the function their bodies provide: when all the women in the Commander's house are gathered for the strange sexual intercourse ritual and one of the servants in the house is visibly upset, Offred remarks, "It's my fault, this waste of her time. Not mine, but my body's, if there is a difference" (Atwood 81). Offred feels as if she's lost her identity because the government reduces her to her body by not allowing her to do anything but give birth to wealthy men. It's this suspension of autonomy, similar to the suspension caused by the fictional laws in *Red Clocks,* that real-world anti-abortion laws

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[42] Silvia Martinez-Falqina, "Feminist Dystopia and Reality in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks." The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* (2021): 1-17.

implement in order to oppress women. Therefore, even though it may not be a typical dystopian setting, *Red Clocks* is a distinctly feminist dystopian novel, like Atwood's, because the federal government creates horrible conditions for women by taking away much of their bodily autonomy and forcing them to take extreme measures to take some of that agency back.

However, like Erdrich, Zumas explores race and the way a character's race can affect their life and decision-making process, which can be thought of as a key distinction between Zumas's and Atwood's novels. Admittedly, the race of the main characters doesn't play a significant role in driving the plot of *Red Clocks* forward as it does in *Future Home of the Living God.* All four of the main characters (Ro, Mattie, Gin, and Susan) are presumably white, and aside from a few other characters, most characters in the novel are presumably white. Some critics have viewed this lack of real diversity as a shortcoming of the novel: Birkin writes, "The book also forgoes any intersectional analysis of the dystopian landscape; for example, while Zumas explores the impact of 'Every Child Needs Two' on a single woman's adoption rights, there is no mention of how the new law could impact queer couples, despite their protracted struggle to gain full adoption rights in the U.S. Red Clocks also makes no mention of the effects of the anti-abortion law on women of color, who have historically been most affected by laws surrounding abortion and access to birth control."[43] I will concede that this lack of significant diversity is a definite shortcoming of *Red Clocks* and that Zumas could have more deeply explored the experiences of the women of color in her novel in such a way that would serve as a critique of the way women of color are disproportionately harmed by laws that limit the bodily autonomy of women. However, I will argue that, unlike Atwood, Zumas doesn't entirely marginalize and ignore the real-world historical sexual oppression of women of color in *Red*

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[43] Laura Birkin, "Life Without Roe v. Wade: A Review of Red Clocks," *Femspec* 19, no. 1 (2019): 116-119.

*Clocks.* Through the experiences of Yasmine, Mattie's Black best friend who was incarcerated for an attempted abortion, Zumas calls attention to the unique circumstances of oppression women of color face. Martinez-Falquina puts it well when she notes that *Red Clocks* "point[s] to the dangers of inaction and call[s] on us to take a stand against the unjust treatment of women, especially women of color such as . . . Yasmine."[44] By highlighting the tragic experiences of this significant character, Zumas exemplifies how women of color definitely have it harder in the face of government oppression and emphasizes why it's important to pay special attention to the experiences of minority women.

The experiences of Yasmine, Mattie's best friend, can be read as an example of how women of color would be disproportionately harmed by oppressive laws like the ones in *Red Clocks* and how women of color must live their lives very differently than white women, especially in the face of institutional oppression. Yasmine's experiences have a profound effect on Mattie, and her experiences as a Black woman can be read as a symbol for the sort of oppression real Black women go through. One of the first things Zumas writes about Yasmine is that she once told Mattie, "I feel strange all the time" (Zumas 196). Prior to the events of the novel, Yasmine was unfortunately sent to a juvenile detention center for giving herself a homemade abortion. When asked why she didn't want to birth, Yasmine said that "she didn't intend to be anyone's stereotype. Black teen mother slurping welfare off the backs of hardworking citizens, etc." (Zumas 247). Additionally, Mattie recounts how her father once mistook Yasmine's mother, "the only women of color in the Oregon State Legislature," for the school bus driver (Zumas 249). Clearly, Yasmine (like all Black people in the novel) is someone who lives her life conscious of the internalized prejudices society has and tries to avoid these as

[44] Silvia Martinez-Falqina, "Feminist Dystopia and Reality in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks." The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* (2021): 1-17.

much as possible, the same way real-world people of color must contend with all of society's internalized and institutionalized prejudices.

When describing the results of Yasmine's dangerous underground abortion and her subsequent arrest, Zumas writes, "she lost so much blood she needed transfusions . . . Yasmine's uterus was so badly damaged it had to be removed. The cops came while she was still in the hospital" (Zumas 161). It's hard to imagine that police officers would show up to arrest someone so young when she was fighting for her life in the hospital, but unfortunately, this is the type of over-policing African-American communities face in the real world. For example, Black and Latina women make up 85% of the total number of women stopped by NYPD, and Black and Latina women make up more than 80% of arrests among women in New York City despite making up only about 50% of the population.[45] While Yasmine's arrest may not seem significant at face value, one must remember that towards the middle of the novel Mattie (who is white) attempts to cross the Canadian border to obtain an abortion. Although she is caught and detained by law enforcement officers, and even though abortion seekers can legally be charged with conspiracy to commit murder, the law enforcement officers let Mattie go with a warning. This altruistic act by the law enforcement officers sharply contrasts the harsh way Yasmine was treated in the hospital, and it's not hard to imagine Yasmine not receiving the same kind treatment by law enforcement officers that Mattie did if she were caught attempting to cross the Canadian border. By having police officers arrive to arrest Yasmine at this troublesome moment, Zumas is highlighting the fact that African-American communities disproportionately have their lives ruined by convictions and harsh prison sentences and that laws criminalizing abortion would only exacerbate this problem and disproportionately harm minority women. Ro

[45] Andrea Ritchie and Delores Jones-Brown, "Policing Race, Gender, and Sex: A Review of Law Enforcement Policies," *Women & Criminal Justice* 27, no. 1 (2017): 21-50.

acknowledges this disproportionate harm when she says, “Let’s spend the taxpayers’ money to criminalize vulnerable women, shall we?” (Zumas 75). Implicit in Ro’s statement is the fact that women of color are the most vulnerable members of society and that these sorts of restrictive laws would only make worse the disproportionate harm women of color already face at the hands of law enforcement. In addition to restrictive laws, Yasmine must carry the weight of racism and escaping stereotypical perceptions, which would make it harder for her (and all women of color) to follow these sorts of oppressive policies. This difficulty combined with over-policing of women of color would definitely result in disproportionate harm. Ro and Zumas both know that the sorts of restrictive laws imagined in *Red Clocks* criminalize innocent women and, therefore, would most significantly harm women of color.

Similar to *Future Home of the Living God,* the fact that the feminist movement is now more inclusive of non-white women allows us to explore the unique experiences of women of color in *Red Clocks* and analyze how Zumas marginalizes or highlights these unique experiences. Again, while some critics have taken issue with the novel’s lack of significant diversity, and although Yasmine isn’t one of the main characters, I argue that Yasmine is a significant enough character whose experiences are described in enough detail to be a symbol that represents of the sort of disproportionate harm that women of color face at the hands of law enforcement and government oppression and would face if abortion were heavily criminalized. In *Red Clocks,* Zumas “compel[s] us never to lose sight of the peculiarities of different cultural and ethnic contexts” and take into consideration these unique conditions when combatting government oppression (Martinez-Falquina 2021). In her novel, Zumas accurately depicts the fact that women of color have largely felt disproportionate harm from government oppression throughout history, that women of color must carefully navigate life because of their race in a way that white

women will never have to do, and that society must pay special attention to the unique experiences of women of color when finding ways to combat oppression.

**CONCLUSION**

As discussed in the introduction, the feminist movement has become much more inclusive of non-white women and their concerns as of recently, and this new intersectional feminism lines up with the newly intersectional feminist dystopian novels that have been published in the last five years. These newer novels, with their diverse casts of characters whose experiences reflect the real-world oppression that women of color have historically faced, contrast Atwood's novel, which focuses on the oppression of white women and appropriates the historical experiences of women of color to her white characters. In doing so, Atwood doesn't accurately reflect the historical disproportionate harm that women of color have felt because of oppressive government policies and the sort of disproportionate harm women of color continue to face and would face if restrictive laws were implemented, something that the newer, more intersectional feminist dystopian novels succeed in doing.

# Chapter Three: Exploring the Dystopian/Speculative Elements of the Novels

## INTRODUCTION

Another major difference between *The Handmaid's Tale* and the two newer novels, *Future Home of the Living God* and *Red Clocks*, is the way the authors develop the dystopian/speculative elements of the setting: Atwood develops these elements of her novel in great detail, while Erdrich and Zumas do not. This contrast, when considered alongside the newly intersectional nature of the two contemporary novels, result in the newer novels depicting an even more realistic and accurate vision of society in their stories. In *The Handmaid's Tale,* as a result of widespread environmental catastrophe, the federal government is seized by totalitarian religious fundamentalists who distort Christian values in order to oppress women and take total control over reproduction. The dystopian society is very well developed, and Atwood puts a fair amount of focus and detail into explaining how Gilead became the dystopia it is and how it functions as a dystopian society. By contrast, in *Future Home of the Living God* and *Red Clocks,* the dystopian/speculative elements of the novel are much less well developed. *Future Home of the Living God* follows Cedar as she navigates the strange phenomenon of backwards evolution and what that means for her and her family and friends; because she and her family and friends are largely in the dark about what's really happening in society, so is the reader, and we never really gain much detail over what exactly is causing this backwards evolution, how exactly the oppressive government came to power, how exactly it maintains its power, or what its goals are. We know that Gilead hoped to create a mostly-white patriarchal society and what sort of policies it implemented in order to achieve these goals, but there is no comparable information offered in *Future Home*. The dystopian elements of *Red Clocks* aren't very well developed for an entirely

different reason, and that's because, as stated earlier, *Red Clocks* isn't a conventional dystopian society. In fact, aside from a few new fictional laws being implemented by the fictional conservative-controlled federal government, the setting of *Red Clocks* is really not that different from American society today. Instead of fleshing out complex, detailed dystopian societies, these two newer authors instead choose to focus on the tragic but relatable experiences of the main characters, which increases the realism of these newer novels. The two newer authors have two different paths to this aim (Erdrich by emphasizing a lack of information, Zumas by emphasizing how seemingly normal society in *Red Clocks* is), and both strategies are effective, thus making the newer novels more realistic and therefore more frightening. In addition, these two newer authors choose to put a fair amount of focus on two seemingly unimportant figures — Kateri in *Future Home* and Eivør in *Red Clocks* — to make the point that sources of inspiration and resistance against institutional oppression can be found in unlikely places. These two aspects of the newer novels (increased realism and focus on methods of resistance) combine to make them what critic Tom Moylan calls "critical dystopias:" dystopian novels that emphasize the fact that resistance to government oppression *is* possible and authority isn't all-powerful. By not focusing on the oppressive regimes and having resistance be a major theme in their novels, Erdrich and Zumas both create worlds where resistance to oppression is very possible, thus making them great examples of critical dystopias.

## PART ONE: DYSTOPIAN ELEMENTS AND *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

When writing *The Handmaid's Tale,* Atwood crafted a very detailed and well-developed dystopian society. In doing so, she creates what Moylan would call an "anti-utopia:" a dystopian novel where the government is all-powerful and resistance to the regime is essentially impossible. Anti-utopias greatly contrast the "critical dystopias" because, instead of emphasizing

modes of resistance to oppression, anti-utopias emphasize the hopelessness of living under a regime with total power and no possibility of resistance. Therefore, *The Handmaid's Tale* contrasts the two newer novels in this way.

In Gilead, widespread environmental catastrophe causing declining birth rates results in a totalitarian theocracy taking over North America. Christian values and the Bible are misinterpreted and used to subjugate women and maintain order in this dystopian society, and this well-developed dystopian society reflects real-world fears of worsening environmental conditions and the fear of the influence of far-right religious fundamentalist groups.

The first scene of the novel describes the Handmaids sleeping in "what had once been a gymnasium" on army cots "that still said U.S." while the Aunts patrol them with "electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts" (Atwood 3-4). This scene provides the reader with early details over the type of oppression the Handmaids face while setting up confusion as to what exactly is occurring in the novel. However, this confusion is soon resolved as Atwood begins to slowly explain the detailed dynamics of the dystopian Gilead.

About halfway through the novel, it is revealed that an environmental catastrophe started the chain of events which lead to the formation of Gilead; "The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells" (Atwood 112). Offred soon remembers, "Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants, along the San Andreas fault, nobody's fault, during the earthquakes, and the mutant strain of syphilis no mold could touch" (Atwood 112). It is revealed that these environmental problems caused the birthrate to rapidly decline: "Pulled down in front of the blackboard . . . is a graph, showing the birthrate per thousand, for years and years: a slippery slope, down past the zero line of replacement, and

down and down" (Atwood 113). At the time of the novel, this struggling society had been experiencing fertility issues for a while; when Offred's mom was pregnant with her, she stated that she read several articles "about how the birth-defect rate went zooming up after thirty-five" (Atwood 120). In the epilogue, Professor Pieixoto explicitly states that this trend "has been linked to the various nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage that characterized the period, as well as to leakages from chemical- and biological-warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites . . . and to the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays" (Atwood 304).

Great detail is then given on how the new oppressive government took control of the power in the USA: "It was after the catastrophe, when they shot the president and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on Islamic fanatics, at the time" (Atwood 174). This sounds like the earliest example of propaganda from the new Gilead. Offred then recounts, "That was when they suspended the Constitution" (Atwood 174). Soon after, "newspapers were censored and some were closed down" (Atwood 174). Finally, all women's bank accounts were suspended, and all women were fired from their jobs (Atwood 178-179). Naturally, citizens were upset about this and started to protest these unreasonably sexist policies with marches. Unfortunately, these protests were met with resistance from the newly oppressive government: "And when it was known that the police, or the army, or whoever they were, would open fire almost as soon as any of the marches ever started, the marches stopped. A few things were blown up, post offices subway stations" (Atwood 180).

Gilead maintains this sort of state-sponsored violence by justifying the atrocities with a distortion of Christian values and beliefs. For example, Gilead is a war-torn society, and its battle

units are named after Christian symbols (i.e. "Angels of the Apocalypse," "Twenty-first Battalion of the Angels of Light," etc.). They fight enemies of other religions (i.e. "Baptist guerillas," "a heretical set of Quakers"), and it can be assumed that Gilead is fighting its enemies solely because these enemies chose not to subscribe to Gilead's new and oppressive way of life (Atwood 82-83). Also, before the strange sex ceremony between Offred and the Commander, the Commander reads popular Bible stories followed by a distorted version of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the merciful. Blessed be the meek. Blessed be the silent," (Atwood 89). Offred knows these aren't the real Beatitudes, but she has no way to prove it because Handmaids are not allowed to read anything, let alone the Bible. As Filipczak notes, "The Bible is a trapped text turned into a lethal instrument because the regime makes it generate oppressive laws."[46] This distortion of Biblical values used to justify the oppressive sexual practices of the Commanders, combined with the juxtaposition of deadly battle squads with nice religious names, emphasize the fact that Gilead is an extremely oppressive government hiding behind a guise of upholding religious morals and values. Gilead even encourages its citizens to literally pay for prayers to be offered for them, which is probably just another way for its oppressive government to subjugate them by tricking them out of money with the justification that they are being faithful to God and the regime (Atwood 167). Predictably, the government of Gilead withholds full access to Biblical knowledge because they know it would inspire serious doubt among its citizens; Offred thinks to herself about the Bible, "who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it?" (Atwood 87). Additionally, the Commander, his wife Serena Joy, the Marthas, the Aunts, and most other characters in the novel are fully-fledged members of society and devoutly devoted to the government of Gilead, and these characters can often be seen regurgitating the

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[46] Dorota Filipczak. "Is There No Balm in Gilead? – Biblical Intertext in the Handmaid's Tale." *Literature and Theology* 7, no. 2 (1993): 171-185.

sorts of distorted beliefs that Gilead is built upon: at a "Prayvaganza," one of the Commanders proclaims, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (Atwood 221). Overall, Atwood provides a great amount of detail about the nature of Gilead's beliefs and how its people interpret the Bible to support their oppressive practices.

It is understandable that Atwood would have had a grim vision of the potential future for the USA and craft a detailed dystopian society reflective of real-world concerns and fears; the bleak political situation both domestic and abroad allowed her to directly model Gilead after troublesome real-world events. The detailed types of oppression occurring in her novel are taken straight from world news headlines, thus allowing her to greatly develop her portrayal of dystopian Gilead as an accurate reflection of the real world in contrast to the way that Erdrich and Zumas fail to develop these sorts of details in their novels. In 1979, the Equal Rights Amendment was defeated in Congress. Ronald Reagan's 1980s Supreme Court appointments threatened to overturn Roe v. Wade, and the political organization known as the Moral Majority, an ultraconservative Christian group, rose to prominence.[47] The Moral Majority supported "outlawing abortion, opposition to state recognition and acceptance of homosexuality, opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, enforcement of a 'traditional' (that is, patriarchal) vision of family life, and censorship of media outlets that promoted what the movement perceived as an 'antifamily' agenda."[48] In addition, Reagan severely cut funding for programs that served

[47] Kristy Tenbus. "Palimpsestuous Voices: Institutionalized Religion and the Subjugation of Women in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Margaret Atwood Studies*. 4, no. 1 (2011): 3-13.
[48] Lisa Jadwin, "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Cultural and Historical Context," in *Critical Insights:* The Handmaid's Tale*,* ed. J. Brooks Bouson, (Salem: Salem Press, 2009): 21-41,

primarily women, Medicare support for abortion was eliminated, and reported incidents of domestic violence increased by 160 percent (Jadwin 28).

Atwood was also concerned with the rise to power of the Iranian theocracy, and she began to feel as if religious fundamentalism both domestic and abroad could one day begin to restrict women's reproductive freedom (Jadwin 24-25). In the early 1980s, Atwood began to compile a file of newspaper clippings documenting the rise of fundamentalist theocracies around the world, which helped her begin to imagine specific techniques governments could use to control their citizens (Jadwin 25). The "salvaging" in *The Handmaid's Tale* is directly inspired by the salvagings of the Philippines, which, like in the novel, is the "government-endorsed euphemism for the officially-sanctioned murder of political dissidents," and the control over the Handmaids' bodies was inspired by Romania outlawing birth control and abortion (Jadwin 25). Finally, Atwood had to contend with environmental concerns; in the mid 1980s, populations of some animals, specifically amphibians, began to decline, and scientists hypothesized that these declines could have been caused by an increased sterility caused by increasing environmental damage: "waste from nuclear power generation, pollution, effects of heavy metals" (Jadwin 32).

Overall, the troublesome political and environmental conditions, both in the USA and abroad, in the late 20th century created a sort of perfect storm which heavily inspired Atwood's creation of Gilead. It's very easy to see the similarities to real-world government oppression when we look at the religious fundamentalism used to justify restrictions in women's rights in Gilead. Atwood puts a great amount of detail into explaining how Gilead came to power and how it maintains its power, probably because she was influenced by the genre of dystopia as it had previously been written (i.e., *1984* or *Brave New* World). Atwood has even written that she was heavily influenced by Orwell and Huxley: "I read it [*1984*] again, and again: it was right up

there among my favourite books . . . At the same time, I absorbed . . . Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World."*[49] She also writes that Orwell's very detailed and seemingly hopeless dystopian society had a profound impact on her: "The constant surveillance, the impossibility of speaking frankly to anyone, the looming, ominous figure of Big Brother, the regime's need for enemies and wars—fictitious though both may be—which are used to terrify the people and unite them in hatred, the mind-numbing slogans, the distortions of language, the destruction of what has really happened by stuffing any record of it down the Memory Hole—these made a deep impression on me. Let me restate that: they frightened the stuffing out of me."[50] Indeed, both Orwell's and Huxley's dystopian societies are very well-developed, so it makes sense that they would've had an impact on and influenced Atwood. For example, in *1984,* it is explained how the ruling Party in London controls everything in society (i.e. language, history, media, etc.). The Ministry of Truth, which the main character Winston works for, alters historical records to paint the Party in a good light, and the Thought Police ensures no resistance to the Party can successfully form. Additionally, the Party surveils all citizens constantly, and everywhere Winston turns the Party seems to be present. This makes the Party omnipresent in the novel. Regarding *Brave New World,* the Central London Hatching and Conditioning Center controls the reproduction of all citizens in an assembly-line fashion, separating embryos into separate social classes (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, etc.) that they will live and work in for the rest of their lives. Clearly, both of those novels, along with Atwood's, are filled with detailed descriptions of their dystopian

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[49] Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2011), 115.
5 Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2011), 115.

societies, and critic Tom Moylan can give us a good idea as to why Atwood and these other older authors choose to greatly develop this aspect of their stories.

In his book *Scraps of the Untainted Sky,* Moylan argues that older dystopian novels (like *1984* or *Brave New World),* which he calls "anti-utopias," emphasize their messages and critique contemporary society by showing that the highly-ordered, extremely oppressive societies are irredeemable, that the governments of these societies have complete and total control over their citizens, and that resistance is impossible. For example, at the end of *1984,* Winston loses the ability to know truth and learns to love Big Brother right before he is executed by the state. Moylan describes these anti-utopias as "texts that adhere to the insistence of the (usually conservative) argument that there is no alternative (and that seeking one is more dangerous than it's worth)."[51] By contrast, newer dystopias, which he refers to as "critical dystopias," instead of choosing to elaborate on the details of the corrupt society (including all of its beliefs, practices, organizational structures, etc.), emphasize modes of resistance even in the face of extreme oppression. He writes that these newer, more hopeful texts "refuse to settle for the status quo . . . a collective resistance is at least acknowledged, and sometimes a full-fledged opposition and even victory is achieved against the apparently impervious, tightly sutured system" (Moylan xiii). A critical dystopia "self-reflexively takes on the present system and offers not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of oppositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration" (Moylan xv).

Thinking about *The Handmaid's Tale* using this framework, it's clear that this older novel can be considered an anti-utopia. Although there are hints of Mayday existing as an

[51] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (Boulder: Routledge, 2000), xiii.

organization resisting the oppressive polices of Gilead and although the Handmaids sometimes use secret signals to communicate with each other, the oppressed characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* seem completely unable to escape their fate. Mayday is shrouded in mystery and uncertainty, and the reader is unsure how exactly Mayday resists the government or if they even exist. The government of Gilead takes any measures possible to prevent resistance to their policies, and these measures are described in great detail by Atwood. Methods of resisting Gilead are not well-developed at all, and the novel ends with Offred being taken away in a black van, unsure of whether or not Mayday even exists. All this results in Gilead being portrayed as a having total power over its citizens and *The Handmaid's Tale* being an anti-utopia, and Moylan agrees: "the resistance is crushed and the Christian state prevails . . . *The Handmaid's Tale* leans towards the anti-utopian pole of resignation" (Moylan 163-164). Atwood might've chosen to create such a well-developed anti-utopia in order to express the hopelessness she was feeling regarding the state of the world and women's rights during the 1970s and 1980s and emphasize that if society doesn't change drastically, the world could end up like Gilead. This messaging of hopelessness and total control greatly contrasts the messaging of *Future Home of the Living God* and *Red Clocks.* As I am about to prove, Atwood's anti-utopia differs from the way that Erdrich and Zumas develop (or underdevelop) their dystopian societies into the newer, critical dystopias Moylan refers to. Instead of fleshing out the sort of details that Atwood did, Erdrich and Zumas innovate the genre by choosing to divert their focus elsewhere because they have different rhetorical goals than Atwood.

## Part TWO: DYSTOPIAN ELEMENTS IN *FUTURE HOME OF THE LIVING GOD*

In *Future Home of the Living God,* Erdrich creates an interesting dystopian society very similar to Atwood's in *The Handmaid's Tale.* For unexplained reasons that may be indicative of

some sort of environmental disaster, evolution seems to be running “backwards;” prehistoric plants and animals begin to appear, and human genetics seem to have taken a step back, too, as most fetuses born are inviable. As a result, survival rates for newborn children are dropping rapidly. In the heat of this evolutionary disaster, new laws are passed which allow the “government to seize entire library and medical databases in order to protect natural security” and allows them “to determine who is pregnant throughout the country” so that these pregnant women can be captured and forced to give birth under state-controlled circumstances (Erdrich 72), mirroring the way the Handmaids are kidnapped and forced to live with and attempt to give birth to the children of the Commander. The federal government also “has seized the cable companies,” just as Gilead takes control of all media in *The Handmaid’s Tale.* Later, after the federal government falls from power, a woman named Mother constantly appears on the TV and computer screens of citizens to watch over them and deliver pro-state propaganda, similar to how news stations in Gilead were riddled with propaganda. Finally, a religious fundamentalist government (very similar to Gilead’s) seizes control of the country in this vacuum of power. The first signs of this are the renaming of streets after Bible verses (Erdrich 101), and later it is explicitly stated that a new government has risen to power: “a church government. The Church of the New Constitution” (Erdrich 108). Like Gilead, the Church of the New Constitution uses extreme military force (i.e., drone strikes) and mass surveillance to further its goals (Erdrich 222). Escape to Canada becomes a primary option to escape the rule of this oppressive government, similar to how women in *The Handmaid’s Tale* traveled the Underground Femaleroad to Canada to escape Gilead. When Phil is captured by the police, he is scheduled for “a truth seminar . . . These truth seminars can only be administered by ordained ministers and overseen by the military. They are conducted according to certain laws — precedents set by the

church a few centuries back have come in handy" (Erdrich 191). This important line suggests that these "truth seminars" are nothing more than state-run torture sessions meant to persuade citizens into thinking how the government wants them to. Unfortunately, at the end of the novel Cedar is finally captured by the oppressive Church of the New Constitution and placed in captivity, forced to live a life of imprisonment and attempted birthing of healthy children. On the surface, this may seem like an ending as pessimistic as Atwood's, but, as I will prove later, the fact that several methods of resistance against the Church of the New Constitution make this novel a critical dystopia distinct from Atwood's anti-utopia.

Although Erdrich's society, like Gilead, is definitely a dystopian society in which a catastrophe results in an oppressive religious fundamentalist group seizing control of the country, the details are extremely unclear as to what exactly is occurring and why it is occurring. At the very beginning of the novel, Erdrich writes, "Our world is running backward. Or forward. Or maybe sideways, in a way as yet ungrasped . . . Whatever is actually occurring, there is constant breaking news about how it will be handled — speculation, really, concerning what comes next."[52] This contrasts Atwood's explicit explanations of the environmental causes of declining birth rates. Even the world's leading scientists in *Future Home* are unsure why exactly evolution seems to be regressing (Erdrich 52). These explanations (or lack thereof) are evidence of the fact that nearly all of society is unsure as to what is causing the strange physical characteristics of newborn organisms, and because society is largely in the dark, so is the reader. Towards the middle of the novel, a complete news blackout plagues the country: "no newspapers, no television, radio extremely sketchy. Nobody knows exactly what is happening" (Erdrich 84). This news blackout contrasts the way Atwood deals with the concept of government-controlled

[52] Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 3.

information; both societies gatekeep crucial information about that society from its most vulnerable members, but in Erdrich's novel that information is also kept from the *reader,* not just the characters, similar to how Atwood keeps crucial information about Mayday and resistance as a whole from the reader. These conscious choices about what sort of information to keep from the reader further help classify *The Handmaid's Tale* as an anti-utopia and *Future Home* as a critical dystopia.

Additionally, *Future Home* is littered with vague descriptions of the strange biological phenomena occurring in Erdrich's America: Cedar thinks to herself, "Every particle that I can see and not see, and all that is living and perhaps unliving too, is trimming its sails and coming around to port," but the reader lacks further, more explicit details. (Erdrich 13). Similar to how no one knows what is happening biologically, it is never really explained how exactly the federal government lost power and how the Church of the New Constitution rose to power or how they operate. Towards the end of the novel, even the rules of the new Church of the New Constitution are unclear: Erdrich thinks to herself, "Not that the rules are posted anywhere, or listed, or described" (Erdrich 143). This novel in which no one knows what is happening to society or why it is happening creates a unique reading experience in which we are forced to ignore the dystopian aspects of the story and focus on other, seemingly more important aspects.

Some of Erdrich's critics have agreed that America in *Future Home* seems like a somewhat undeveloped dystopian society: Ron Charles writes, "the political and environmental context is only vaguely and rarely hinted at in *Future Home* . . . Throughout the novel, we're kept largely in the dark with her as she hides or flees from people out to capture her and steal her

unborn baby."[53] While some may view this as a shortcoming of the novel, others have argued that this lack of knowledge serves a rhetorical purpose, and I agree. Martinez-Falqina puts it well when she says, "the uncertainty or lack of more detailed context is in fact the crux of the novel and the key stylistic choice around which Erdrich is making an important point. By constantly emphasizing the impossibility of knowing, Erdrich theorizes uncertainty as a way of denouncing the vulnerability of the rights of women and Natives, who live under the constant threat of violation."[54] Following this interpretation, readers being kept in the dark can be understood as "a strategic element in the narrative, expressed both explicitly and through literary subtlety . . . The insecure, vulnerable perspective of this young expectant woman is aimed at triggering an emotional reaction on the part of the reader, who has to face the fact that the world we have always known may not have a definite future" (Martinez-Falqina 2019). By choosing not to elaborate on the political and environmental context in *Future Home,* Erdrich is emphasizing that uncertainty and a lack of quality information would make vulnerable populations even more vulnerable in a dystopian setting. Also, in today's society women really do live under a "constant threat of violation," and the uncertainty in the novel could reflect the way women never really know when this sort of oppression could take place, making them an extremely vulnerable population. In this way, the uncertainty makes the novel's premise even more frightening than it would be if we knew everything that was happening. Of course, this is a distinctly feminist dystopia because women are the ones who are facing the worst forms of oppression in this society (wrongful imprisonment, forced birth, etc.). In an interview, Erdrich reflects on this fact:

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[53] Ron Charles, "Do We Need Another *Handmaid's Tale*?" The Washington Post, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/do-we-need-another-handmaids-tale/2017/11/13/54d8be52-c88d-11e7-aa96-54417592cf72_story.html

[54] Silvia Martinez-Falqina, "Louse Erdich's *Future Home of the Living God:* Uncertainty, Proleptic Mourning, and Relationality in Native Dystopia," *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies* 41, no. 2 (2019): 165.

"the first people who become vulnerable in a situation where there's fear of reproductive panic are, of course, young women."[55]

By lacking focus on the dystopian elements of her novel to emphasize the vulnerability of women and the fears and oppression associated with a lack of quality information, Erdrich diverts the reader's attention to the unfortunate experiences of the characters (and especially Cedar), which seem to reflect the many tragic experiences that people face in the real world. Obviously, the government implementing severe restrictions on the reproductive rights of women can call to mind any number of anti-abortion laws being considered at both the federal and state levels, and the novel's "representation of the treatment of women is not that far from reality."[56] However, there are more subtle examples of the experiences of characters echoing real-world suffering that communities face. For example, at the beginning of the novel when Cedar is trying to withdraw money from a Wells Fargo, the bank teller replies that the bank doesn't have enough cash to give her any. Cedar is upset and believes she is being denied because she is an indigenous woman: "Maybe I look more Native than usual today, darker and more raven-haired from being on the reservation" (Erdrich 46). Although she finally receives the cash after she reveals that she is pregnant, Cedar probably has been the victim of these sort of racist microaggressions from society before, as many real-world people of color sadly are. Later, Cedar witnesses two police officers aggressively arrest and take a pregnant woman away from her husband and her young daughter. When the husband protests, a "police officer . . . quickly flipped the man onto the ground and drew his gun. He pointed the gun at the man's face. The little girl, who had followed her father, stopped short and began to cry" (Erdrich 75). The

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[55] Joanna Demkiewicz, "Louse Erdrich: Reproductive Nightmares, Real and Imagined," Guernica, 2017, https://www.guernicamag.com/louise-erdrich-reproductive-nightmares-real-imagined/

[56] Silvia Martinez-Falqina, "Feminist Dystopia and Reality in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks." The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* (2021): 1-17.

pregnant woman “was stuffed, kicking, into the car,” by one officer while the other officer was “sitting on the small of his [the husband’s] back and twisting his arm. He was pointing his gun at the bystanders, who shied back” (Erdrich 76). The novel contains a lengthy and detailed description of a scene that, in the long run, doesn’t play a huge role in driving the plot of the novel forward. Erdrich may have included this scene to give Cedar (and the reader) an idea of how aggressive and oppressive the government was becoming; however, I would also contend that Erdrich included a scene like this to call our attention to exactly this sort of real-world overly aggressive police brutality that communities (and especially communities of color) face every day. Not only is this a sad, fictional (but realistic) example of police brutality; it is an example of a separation of a mother from her young daughter. This scene also calls to mind the family separation taking place on the Texas-Mexico border, where immigrant children are cruelly and constantly taken away from their parents and forced to live in horrible conditions. Additionally, the borders between the US and Mexico and Canada are closed off in *Future Home,* which calls to mind the sort of xenophobic and anti-immigration policies the federal government is attempting to implement and has been attempting to implement for years. Finally, a good portion of the novel describes Cedar’s conditions and experiences in captivity, either in the hospital-turned-prison she is first sent to or the actual prison she is sent to after she is recaptured. Although the US government doesn’t imprison women for being pregnant, the US has the largest prison population in the world and the highest per-capita incarceration rate in the world. I can only imagine how hopeless it feels to be incarcerated indefinitely, and these are the sort of sad feelings and experiences Erdrich may trying to be call to mind by having Cedar spend so much time in captivity. Clearly, Erdrich was inspired by real-world events when describing the experiences of her characters in the novel, both the explicit attacks on the reproductive rights

of women that occur in *Future Home* and also some of the smaller, less significant scenes. Although Atwood also was inspired by historical or current events, her focus on the more speculative elements of the novel limit her ability to focus on and describe many of the experiences of her characters which mirror the experiences of people living in the sort of real-world situations she bases her novel on. By contrast, Erdrich chooses to put focus on these sorts of scenes instead of the more dystopian or speculative elements of the novel, which may be her way of "blurring the borders between dystopia and the current reality"[57] and increasing the empathy the reader feels towards the characters. Erdrich is signifying that the real world is becoming more and more "dystopian" every day and that "fiction could soon become fact."[58]

In addition to focusing on the experiences of her characters to increase realism, Erdrich also focuses on several modes of resistance to the oppressive Church of the New Constitution (as Moylan claims critical dystopias do), and one of the main ways she does this is by placing a fair amount of focus on developing the background figure Kateri and explaining her influence in the novel. Kateri Tekakwitha is called "Lily of the Mohawks, patron saint of Native People,"[59] and at the beginning of the novel the reservation is considering erecting a shrine for her. When describing Kateri, Cedar's biological mother, Sweetie, says that she "lived a life of remarkable virtue, even, it is said, in the midst of scenes of carnage, debauchery, and idolatrous frenzy" and that "besides all Native people, she is the patron saint of ecologists, exiles, orphans, and . . . people ridiculed for their piety" (Erdrich 23). The council of the reservation decides to erect a shrine for her because she has appeared to members of the reservation several times. When

[57] Silvia Martinez-Falqina, "Feminist Dystopia and Reality in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks." The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* (2021): 1-17.
[58] Silvia Martinez-Falqina, "Feminist Dystopia and Reality in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks." The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* (2021): 1-17.
[59] Louise Erdich, *Future Home of the Living God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 22.

describing these apparitions, Sweetie says, “She wore a circle of flowers around her head, brandished by the lily of purity. She spoke. Actually, she wasn’t comforting. She was forthright, accusing, and even said specifically to Hap Eagle that he’d wasted good food money and his kids would now have to eat from the community warehouse” (Erdrich 24). Later in the novel, a letter from Eddy, Sweetie’s husband, to Cedar describes another apparition from Kateri: “a beautiful Native girl, traditionally dressed, gradually emerged from a cloudy ball and stood balanced on the point of her boulder. She jumped down in a swirly of buckskin and stood on the grass. On her face there was no beatific smile but a steely frown. She stared at him, for a long time he says. Her hair was brown, her eyes were brown, her skin a light gold” (Erdrich 103). Although she isn’t a major character, we learn more details about Kateri than we seem to do about the Church of the New Constitution. Through Kateri, Cedar is given someone she can look up to and try to imitate in the face of oppression. Like Kateri, Cedar is forced to remain virtuous amidst “scenes of carnage [and] debauchery,” and she often thinks of Kateri when she’s in tough situations (Erdrich 23). When she is finally captured by the government and forced to carry out the remainder of her pregnancy in a hospital-turned-prison for other pregnant women, one of the few items she feels is important enough to bring with her is Kateri’s biography. After she escapes and is re-captured, Cedar uses prays to Kateri in hopes that her dire situation will improve (Erdrich 253). As stated earlier, Cedar considers Kateri to be an influential figure in her life, one to whom she can look up to constantly. However, Kateri is not only a good role model that helps Cedar connect with her indigenous heritage; she is also a symbol to Cedar and the reader representing the fact that resistance to extreme oppression can come from anywhere, even seemingly unlikely places.

Erdrich's focus on Kateri is interesting and somewhat ironic; she portrays a *Catholic* saint as a source of inspiration for a young indigenous woman, which could be a little confusing considering the Catholic Church's brutal history of colonization of indigenous people and the fact that Christianity has been used to justify countless atrocities against indigenous people. Adding onto the irony is the fact Christianity is being used to justify the society in *Future Home*'s atrocities and that Kateri is a religious figure providing inspiration for resistance against this Christian government. However, we can make more sense of this contradiction when we consider Cedar's admiration for the Catholic priest Bartolomé de Las Casas. In her last issue of *Zeal,* she writes: "I believe in this issue that my colleague Father Mirin Thwaite sheds light, just as Bartolomé de Las Casas did in arguing for the existence of the souls of indigenous tribal people of colonial South America, that the children born during this present time will be possessed of souls whether or not they are capable of speech, and should be considered fully human no matter what scientists may conclude about their ability to think and learn" (Erdrich 205). Just as Las Casas believed all indigenous people were humans who possessed souls and thus shouldn't be persecuted, Cedar believes that all babies born in the novel's unprecedented era of backwards evolution will be humans with souls, so they shouldn't be persecuted. Cedar finds within the Catholic Church figures like Kateri and Las Casas who could resist the colonial power of the church from within, voices who speak out against the oppression of vulnerable communities. All this could be Erdrich's way of saying that forms of resistance to institutional oppression can be found in the most unlikely of places, even within the oppressive institutions themselves.

Indeed, Cedar is assisted by many unexpected forms of resistance throughout the novel. After the total news blackout, Erdrich explains, "People have quickly organized. There are dates

and times for everything to sell and trade, and neighborhood centers for information dispersal. There are already clandestine radio broadcasts and wildcat cable and some sketchy wireless internet connections, even a shadowy television signal" (Erdrich 89). When she is first captured, Cedar's stepmom Sera disguises herself as a nurse and then helps her to escape. Cedar's mailman Hiro (whom she was never particularly close with) slips her letters while she is in the hospital that detail her escape plan, and he even drives her and her mom away from the hospital as they are making their escape. After she escapes, Cedar is kept safe and comfortable on her reservation by her Native community. Finally, when she is condemned to captivity at the end of the novel, Cedar finds out that Jessie, one of the nurses from the hospital she was first imprisoned at, is actually an OBGYN posing as a nurse to help women escape from the hospital. Jessie even helped Agnes Starr, one of Cedar's first roommates at the hospital, get "out of the hospital, in a body bag punched with breathing holes" (Erdrich 263).

Jessie (like Hiro, Las Casas, Kateri, Sera, and members of Cedar's reservation) is an unexpected figure who is fighting against institutional oppression from within these systems of oppression, all of whom provide courage to Cedar. Considering all the ways different characters in this novel unexpectedly assist or provide inspiration for Cedar, I argue that *Future Home of the Living God* can definitely be considered what Moylan would call a critical dystopia. Unlike anti-utopias of the past, Erdrich doesn't focus on the oppressive Church of the New Constitution and how it maintains power. Instead, she chooses to hopefully emphasize methods of resistance to the oppressive government, which can be seen symbolically through Kateri and literally through the helpful actions of the characters in the novel, as Moylan says critical dystopias do. In addition, Erdrich increases realism by focusing heavily on the relatable experiences of her characters, thus blurring the lines between dystopia and reality. This newfound realism increases

*Future Home's* effectiveness as a critical dystopia. Erdrich imagines a society without an all-controlling authoritarian regime of the anti-utopia, where resistance is impossible, because she doesn't have to; she is saying that if society were to devolve into a "dystopia," it probably wouldn't be too different from what society is like now. However, by not including this type of all-powerful government and by emphasizing these methods of resistance, Erdrich is saying that, even though dystopian fiction and reality are becoming more similar as time goes on, there will *always* be methods of resistance to extreme government oppression. This is a hopeful message that contrasts the bleak messaging of the anti-utopia Atwood creates in *The Handmaid's Tale,* where there is little to no hope of resisting the government of Gilead's oppression.

## PART THREE: DYSTOPIAN ELEMENTS AND *RED CLOCKS*

*Red Clocks* is set in a society that shares similarities with Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale's* in that both are full of governmental policies and practices that are meant to oppress women and restrict their reproductive rights. Two years before the events of the novel, "the United States Congress ratified the Personhood Amendment, which gives the constitutional right to life, liberty, and property to a fertilized egg at the moment of conception. Abortion is now illegal in all fifty states. Abortion providers can be charged with second-degree murder, abortion seekers with conspiracy to commit murder. In vitro fertilization, too, is federally banned, because the amendment outlaws the transfer of embryos from laboratory to uterus. (The embryos can't give their consent.)."[60] Additionally, in less than three months after the events of the novel, a new law called "Every Child Needs Two" will come into effect, which would codify that "unmarried persons will be legally prohibited from adopting children. In addition to valid marriage licenses, all adoptions will require approval through a federally regulate agency,

[60] Leni Zumas, *Red Clocks* (New York: Hatchet Bay Books), 32.

rendering private transactions illegal" (Zumas 34). The "Pink Wall" between Canada and the US means that "border control can detain any women or girl they 'reasonably' suspect of crossing into Canada for the purpose of ending a pregnancy. Seekers are returned (by police escort) to their state of residence, where the district attorney can prosecute them for attempting a termination" (Zumas 89). To make matters worse, "To help the ban take hold, the attorney general ordered district attorneys nationwide to go after the harshest possible sentences for seekers . . . Girls as young as thirteen were incarcerated for three to five years" (Zumas 310). Because of all these oppressive policies, women are made to feel as if their value is tied to their reproductive ability, similar to how Offred felt as if her value was solely tied to her body's ability to have children: When waiting at the fertility clinic at the beginning of the novel, Ro thinks to herself that she is "in a room for women whose bodies are broken," implying that there is something inherently wrong with not being able to have children (Zumas 4). Overall, the society in *Red Clocks* is designed in such a way that oppresses women while simultaneously dehumanizing them by taking away much of their bodily autonomy and forcing them to live under the threat of excessive police force if they attempt to reclaim some of that autonomy.

However, similar to Erdrich, Zumas doesn't spend a lot of focus trying to create a detailed, well-developed dystopian society in her novel. Interestingly, Zumas's lack of a well-developed dystopian society exists for a completely different reason. Instead of intentionally withholding information about the society from the reader as Erdrich does in *Future Home,* Zumas gives us some quality information regarding how the society functions and how it came to be. The issue is that there isn't much information that Zumas *can* give the reader, and that's because "In *Red Clocks,* life is apparently normal, except for the recent legislation that deprives

women of rights over their bodies."[61] Aside from a few new laws being implemented and the institutional effects of the newly implemented laws, society in *Red Clocks* seems to function extremely similar to contemporary America. Some critics have agreed that, "the novel does not dwell on politics and policy"[62] and that this realism provides a stark contrast to *The Handmaid's Tale: "*Red Clocks is set in a much less drastic dystopian world which appears very close and presumably contemporary with the times we are living in now, compared to the bleak theocracy of Atwood's Gilead" (Birkin). Zumas herself has even admitted that she doesn't consider *Red Clocks* to be a conventional dystopia: in an interview, she says, "I was kind of imagining this more as, not a dystopia, but a paratopia,"[63] "para" being a Greek prefix meaning "near" or "around."

Because Zumas's America seems to closely resemble real-world America, there is an inherent and eerie realism to her novel, and some critics have agreed: Cody Delistraty writes, "Today's 'dystopia' hews closer to reality than ever before. Novels like Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* . . . lead us to wonder at what point the so-called 'dystopian novel' will become simply a reflection of the world in which we live."[64] In the same interview I mentioned earlier, Zumas admits that increasing realism was a goal of hers: "Something about dystopia seems so solidly separate from us, and I wanted to invite the reader to experience *Red Clocks* as, 'This is actually happening, maybe next week.'"[65] Erdrich chooses to focus on the experiences of her characters

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[61] Silvia Martinez-Falqina, "Feminist Dystopia and Reality in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks." The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* (2021): 1-17.
[62] Larua Birkin, "Life Without Roe v. Wade: A Review of Red Clocks," *Femspec* 19, no. 1 (2019): 116-119.

[63] Maddie Crum and Louise Erdrich, "When Your Feminist Dystopia Becomes a Work of Realism," Literary Hub, 2018, https://lithub.com/when-your-feminist-dystopia-becomes-a-work-of-realism/
[64] Cody Delistraty, "Welcome to Dystopian Realism," Vulture, 2019, https://www.vulture.com/2019/01/modern-feminist-dystopia-is-basically-realism.html.
[65] Maddie Crum and Louise Erdrich, "When Your Feminist Dystopia Becomes a Work of Realism," Literary Hub, 2018, https://lithub.com/when-your-feminist-dystopia-becomes-a-work-of-realism/

living under an oppressive regime that, despite the totalitarian nature of the government and the far-fetched speculative element of evolution regressing, mirror the real-world experiences of oppressed populations everywhere in order to increase realism in her novel. By contrast, some of the experiences of the characters living in *Red Clocks* are not entirely grounded in reality, which I will describe in the next paragraph. However, Zumas doesn't need to increase realism in this way; although some of the characters' experiences may be unrealistic, the society in *Red Clocks* is similar enough to the real world that it carries enough inherent realism with it to warrant a belief that all the drastic and semi-unrealistic actions women living in *Red Clocks* take could be actions that real-world women will take in the near future if abortion were to be heavily criminalized as it is in the novel.

Indeed, *Red Clocks*, like *Future Home*, definitely is "focusing . . . on the very personal stories of its characters" (Birkin). Throughout the whole novel, Ro is desperately trying to either become pregnant or adopt a child, and she is facing a fast-approaching deadline because of the impending implementation of Every Child Needs Two. She struggles with whether or not to ask Mattie to give her child to her after Mattie gives birth, and the desire to have children, reinforced by distorted societal values, eats away at her. Mattie is struggling with how exactly to handle her unexpected pregnancy because having an abortion, which would be her primary option in a more civilized world, is both illegal and seemingly impossible. Additionally, through the experiences of Yasmine she's seen what can go wrong when a young woman tries to have a homemade abortion and things go poorly. Despite her fears, she is driven to attempt to travel to Canada to have a legal abortion and eventually ends up obtaining one from a secret underground resistance group. Gin, a woman who generously provides the women of her community with effective alternative healthcare and abortions if desired, is arrested and has to endure a lengthy, dramatic

trial because of the healthcare she provides and because she is accused of a conspiracy to commit murder (assist with an abortion). Mattie, when watching this trial, breaks down and has a panic attack because she witnesses firsthand just how cruel this oppressive government can be and what could possibly happen to her if she were to get caught attempting an abortion. As stated before, while women may not explicitly have to contend with things like federally-mandated adoption deadlines, heavily criminalized abortions, traumatic and lengthy trials for these criminalized abortions, or obtaining abortions from underground radical anti-government organizations (yet), they aren't extremely hard to imagine, and if fictional laws like the one in the novel were ever to be implemented in the real world, it's easy to assume that many women would face the tough choices and decisions that the characters in *Red Clocks* do and be forced to take the sort of drastic actions that they do, too.

Although Zumas doesn't *have* to increase realism in her novel by having her characters' experiences mirror the experiences of real-world oppressed populations because the setting in *Red Clocks* is extremely realistic already, some of the experiences of characters in the novel actually *do* mirror the real-world experiences of oppressed population like they do in *Future Home.* When considering what it would be like to have a child, Ro remembers that, "On her teacher's salary she will die holding notices from credit-card agencies," indicating that she would struggle as a single mother to financially support the child she so desperately wants (Zumas 67). Additionally, when it's revealed Ro is infertile and her doctor suggests she travels to a country where IVF is legal, Ro sadly realizes that her financial situation will not allow this: "Maybe he genuinely, sincerely believes she has the money for 'international travel'" (Zumas 177). The idea that lack of money can severely limit a person's life choices, especially the choice of whether or not to seek essential healthcare, calls to mind the same sort of tough choices that many real-

world impoverished Americans face. These impossible choices are extremely common in the US, a country with an almost incomprehensibly large wealth gap between the rich and poor and where healthcare is oftentimes tied to employment and is otherwise extremely expensive. Also, right before the extremely unpopular Personhood Amendment is passed "against the will of most of the people," Ro "wrote emails to her representatives. Marched in protests in Salem and Portland. Donated to Planned Parenthood" (Zumas 175). Unfortunately, the efforts of Ro and the other resisters were to no avail, and "she couldn't believe the Personhood Amendment had become real with all these citizens so against it" (Zumas 175). This sad situation calls to mind the sorts of (seemingly futile) protests and calls to action that Americans have been using for years to try and obtain meaningful and helpful policy changes like Medicare for All, student debt cancellation, and police reform. Despite widespread popularity, Medicare for All still hasn't been implemented by the federal government. Likewise, despite the countless police killings over the last several years and nationwide calls for police reform during the same time (and especially summer 2020), little to no actual police reform has taken place in most major cities in the country. This sort of inaction on crucial, life-or-death policy issues calls to mind the fictional federal government in *Red Clocks;* the government in the novel does what it wants, and Ro, being a history teacher, knows "how many horrors are legitimated in public daylight, against the will of most of the people" (Zumas 175). Although *some* people must have voted for the lawmakers that implemented and supported the fictional oppressive laws in *Red Clocks* (because there will always be supporters of state-mandated oppression), it's unfair that the federal government is able to take such sweeping action that affects the lives of a large percentage of its population without most of their consent. I think it's safe to assume that most women in *Red Clocks* were opposed to the implementation of these new oppressive laws, and Ro "couldn't

believe the Personhood Amendment had become real with all these citizens so against it" (Zumas 175).

The way Zumas describes (or doesn't describe) the implementation of these new laws parallels how Erdrich chooses to tell her story; Zumas doesn't dwell on the political situation that enabled these laws to pass, and no main characters support these laws. Instead, the reader only experiences the story from the POV of characters who oppose the novel and is left in the dark about the government, its supporters, or the overall political climate of society which led to the creation of Zumas's dystopia. By leaving readers in the dark regarding this sort of information, Zumas leaves room to focus on the experiences of her characters and the way in which they resist oppression, making *Red Clocks,* like *Future Home,* a prime example of a critical dystopia. Overall, by combining the believable experiences of the main characters that emerge because of the implementation of the new laws with the other experiences of the characters which reflect experiences of real-world oppressed populations, Zumas greatly increases the realism of her dystopian novel, even going as far as to blur the lines between dystopia and reality (like Erdrich does). However, she has a good reason for this: Martinez-Falqina puts it well when she says that *Red Clocks* "raise[s] a call to take action against the loss of women's reproductive rights."[66] Similar to in *Future Home,* the realism in *Red Clocks* is meant to persuade the reader that America may not be as far removed from this dystopian vision as we may think and that if we don't take urgent action we will end up like the America in *Red Clocks.*

As stated before, in addition to creating a somewhat normal society and detailing the tragic but realistic experiences of her characters to increase realism, Zumas, like Erdrich, also places focus on several modes of resistance to government oppression. One way she does this is

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[66] Silvia Martinez-Falqina, "Feminist Dystopia and Reality in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks." The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* (2021): 1-17.

by spending a fair of time developing Eivør Mínervudottir, a fictional polar explorer, the subject of the biography Ro is working on throughout the novel, and an (admittedly unexpected) role model Ro looks to for strength and courage when trying to navigate life under an oppressive government (similar to Kateri's role in Cedar's life). Every couple of pages throughout the whole novel, Zumas includes a short excerpt from Ro's biography, detailing the life, expeditions, and eventual death of the historic explorer. When first describing Eivør, Zumas writes that she is, "a nineteenth-century polar hydrologist whose trailblazing research on pack ice was published under a male acquaintance's name. There is no book on Mínervudottir, only passing mentions in other books" (Zumas 32). Towards the end of the novel, Zumas includes a letter Eivør received when she tried to submit her research to the Royal Society of London: "Dear Miss Mínervudottir, I am in receipt of your submission 'On the Contours and Tendencies of Arctic Sea Ice,' a paper which, it is patently clear, you did not write. Notwithstanding the stirring discoveries it contains, unless its true author is acknowledged, the Royal Society cannot publish it" (Zumas 299). Clearly, Eivør is a woman who has been largely ignored both in her lifetime and throughout history.

Although she was an ignored and oppressed woman, Eivor is without a doubt a powerful, intelligent figure in the novel. In the late stages of Eivør's career, she embarks on a voyage with a Captain Holm and his crew from Copenhagen to the Polar North in order to assist with collecting of magnetic and meteorological data. Towards the end of their journey, Eivør notices that ice was closing in on some of the belts of open water that they were able to travel through, and she also notices that "the straighter leads seemed to stay open longer than the wavy, eel-shaped ones: was there something about the irregular margins that sped the knitting of the ice?" (Zumas 239). When she shares her astute observations with the captain, he snidely replies, "And

will you be pointing out the snow fairies too?" (Zumas 239). Later, when the ship is stuck in solid ice and the crew is forced to travel by foot with few supplies, Zumas shares a sad entry from Eivør's journal: "The blacksmith harpooned a polar bear. Cook made stew from the liver and heart. I did not take a portion, though it was agony to smell the rich broth. After supper the sailors grew sluggish — slept poorly — by morning, the skin around their mouths was peeling. The skin on their hands, bellies, and thighs began to slough away. They did not believe me that vitamin A occurs at toxic levels in polar-bear livers. They are saying I cursed the stew" (Zumas 259). Finally, after wandering the icy landscape alone, Eivør dies, alone, frozen and trapped under ice. Overall, Eivør lived a sad life that ended tragically because the men in her crew refused to take her seriously or heed her warnings, despite her probably being a smarter explorer than all of them.

As stated before, Ro finds strength in this strong, intelligent female subject of her biography. When she is standing in front of Mattie's house, nervously trying to build up the courage to ask her if Mattie will let Ro have her child after she gives birth, Zumas writes, "Bike-lock key at her throat, gloved fingers fisted tight against the cold. Her fingers ache, but not as much as the fingers of Eivør Mínervudottir once ached. All the plunges that woman took — gigantic plunges — the biographer can make one too" (Zumas 219). Like Kateri, Eivør is a somewhat unexpected source of inspiration for a character in the novel. A nineteenth-century Scandinavian explorer is not an obvious choice for a source of inspiration for a woman who is facing restrictive abortion laws. Additionally, Ro acknowledges that the polar knowledge Eivør contributed allowed settlers to steal from indigenous people and allowed oil and gas drilling to become prolific in the Artic, which is a major cause of climate change. She sadly writes, "Mínervudottir may have felt free; but she was a cog in a land-snatching, resource-sucking,

climate-fucking imperialist machine" (Zumas 271). While this is problematic and may not sound very inspiring, Ro is probably drawn to the fact that Eivør never gave up on her goals, even in the fact of extreme oppression and adversity, and this is also probably why Ro decided to write this biography in the first place. This sort of resilience would resonate with Ro, a character who is doing everything in her power to have a daughter even though the odds are stacked against her. Thinking of her like this, Eivør and her unwavering courage and determination can serve as a symbol for the fact that women everywhere have the ability to remain courageous and resist institutional oppression, even when it may seem impossible, a fact that heavily inspires Ro and has the potential to inspire real-world women everywhere.

In addition to Eivør, the events of the novel also signify that sources of inspiration and resistance can come from unlikely places. Similar to Cedar in *Future Home,* several characters in *Red Clocks* receive unexpected help in seemingly impossible situations. When Ro finds out she is unable to have children, her doctor (illegally) suggests that she travel to another country for an IVF treatment, a well-intentioned act that could, in theory, dispel him from the medical community and result in his incarceration. Gin, a woman branded by society as a modern-day witch and lives in solitude in the forest, offers low-cost alternative medical treatments to basically anyone who asks her, including offering to assist with illegal abortions. Gin also serves as a source of help for Mattie; Mattie goes to her for a homemade abortion, and Gin enthusiastically agrees (but is unfortunately arrested before she can actually assist Mattie). After she is caught trying to cross the Canadian border to receive an abortion, Mattie is unexpectedly assisted by a female police officer who lets her go with a warning even though she could've very well arrested Mattie, which probably would've resulted in Mattie's incarceration. Mattie is also assisted by Ro, a great history teacher who isn't afraid to express her disdain for the historical

and continued oppression of women by the US government. Being as understanding as she is, Ro helps Mattie through her pregnancy by talking her through some of her feelings and even driving her to obtain a secret abortion. Finally and probably most importantly, the secret group known as the Polyphonte collective is revealed to be a primary and effective source of organized resistance against the oppressive government. At the end of the novel, Mattie receives a low-cost, high-quality abortion from the Collective, and they also offer "sliding-scale mental health counseling. Sliding-scale legal services for women who are unhoused, undocumented, battered, addicted. Free childcare during court appearances. Cop watching at protests." (Zumas 317). Polyphonte is a character in Greek mythology who rejected Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and chose to live in the mountains with the Artemis, the goddess of the wild, which greatly angered Artemis, who believed Polyphonte was failing to uphold her womanly duty.[67] It makes perfect sense that a group who offers organized resistance against a government that heavily oppresses women is named after a figure who rejected what society deemed to be her "womanly duties" (similar to the duty to have children that the federal government in *Red Clocks* implies that all women share). Additionally, the story of Polyphonte, like Kateri and Eivor, can also be read as a symbol for the fact that one can always find ways to resist institutional oppression, and this radical group poses a clear and explicit challenge to the policies implemented by the fictional government. By focusing on Eivør and her power as a source of inspiration for Ro and supplementing this symbolic figure with several other examples of resistance from unexpected sources (including Polyphonte), Zumas is saying that as long as there is oppression there will be resistance, which encourages the reader to not give up hope in the face of extreme disaster (as Erdrich encourages also the reader to do). As mentioned before, Erdrich has explicitly stated that, after a years-long

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[67] Samuel Oliphant, "The Story of the Strix: Ancient," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 44 (1913): 133-149.

hiatus, she began to write her novel again after the 2016 presidential election because she viewed Cedar as a symbol of hope who could help her navigate life in a troublesome political climate: "I picked up *Future Home of the Living God* again, after the 2016 election, because I needed Cedar. Maybe I'm writing the biological equivalent of our present political mess. And of course it feels like things are going backward again."[68] Evidently, both Erdrich and Zumas believe that their novels and the resistance they emphasize can be read as symbols of hope for real-world women suffering because of government oppression.

Considering Zumas's lack of focus on the oppressive government and the diverted focus onto the several methods of resistance against the oppressive government, I argue that *Red Clocks,* like *Future Home,* can also be classified as a critical dystopia. The government in *Red Clocks* isn't all-powerful, and several methods of resistance can be seen throughout the novel, both symbolically (through Eivor and Polyphonte) and literally (through the altruistic actions of several characters in the novel). In addition, like in *Future Home,* Zumas's emphasis on increasing the realism in her novel helps *Red Clocks* to succeed as a critical dystopia. Zumas makes a conscious choice not to include an all-powerful totalitarian regime because she feels as if such a regime wouldn't be necessary for the widespread oppression of women. Instead, she believes reality may soon begin to look like society in *Red Clocks*: very similar but with a few key changes that drastically limit the bodily autonomy of women and force them to take drastic measures to gain some of that autonomy back. Overall, Zumas's vision of a dystopian reality doesn't include an all-powerful government. Therefore, she is emphasizing the fact that even though society may be moving closer to dystopia as time goes on, methods of resistance to state-

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[68] Margaret Atwood and Louise Erdrich, "Inside the Dystopian Visions of Margaret Atwood and Louise Erdrich," Elle, 2017, https://www.elle.com/culture/books/a13530871/future-home-of-the-living-god-louise-erdrich-interview/

mandated oppression will always exist, the sort of hopeful messaging is characteristic of critical dystopias and greatly contrasts the bleak messaging of the anti-utopia *Handmaid's Tale.*

**CONCLUSION**

The dystopian setting in *The Handmaid's Tale* greatly contrasts the settings created in *Future Home of the Living God* and *Red Clocks.* Atwood's dystopian society is extremely well-developed, and the government appears to have all the power; by contrast, the details of Erdrich's society are unclear, and Zumas's society isn't too different from contemporary America. Interestingly, both Erdrich and Zumas decide to emphasize several methods of resistance to the widespread oppression of women, something Atwood (with her all-powerful government) fails to do. It's helpful to think of Moylan's distinction of older anti-utopias v. newer critical dystopias; *The Handmaid's Tale* is an anti-utopia because the endless power of the government and total lack of modes of resistance to it are emphasized, and it's probably this way because of the influence of previous dystopian literature. By contrast, the two newer novels are critical dystopias; the governments don't seem to be all-powerful, and several examples of characters resisting the oppressive policies exist in both novels. Furthermore, the reader's experience of not seeing how the largely off-scene government functions makes it hard for the reader to imagine these new dystopian governments as all-powerful or all-encompassing in how they control their subjects. Although they may at times be as oppressive as Gilead, the reader doesn't get a clear enough understanding of how the new governments function for it to really feel this way. By doing this, these newer authors take our attention away from these governments and their power, leaving more room for them to focus on methods of resistance, which further the novels' status as critical dystopias. In conclusion, these methods of resistance combined with the frightening realism of the newer novels result in the critical dystopias sending a more

positive message than the hopeless anti-utopia, emphasizing that methods of resistance to institutional oppression will always exist and encouraging real-world women to seek out these methods in the face of oppression.

# Chapter Four: Conclusion

In conclusion, the feminist dystopian genre has definitely evolved since Atwood popularized it in 1985 with *The Handmaid's Tale.* The new wave of contemporary feminist dystopian novels published in the latter half of the 2010s may represent society's resurging fears of government curtailment of women's rights. However, the authors of these newer novels innovate the genre in such a way that makes it more representative of real-world society and oppression. For one, these newer authors include much more diverse casts of characters and focus on the sad experiences of these minority (and the rest of the) characters in their novels, increasing the realism of the genre. This emphasis on diversity and inclusion lines up well with the increased focus on inclusion that the real-world feminist movement has seen as time progresses, especially since the end of the twentieth century. The authors make room for this newfound focus on inclusion and experiences of the characters by choosing *not* to emphasize or develop the more dystopian or speculative elements of their story, the same elements that Atwood and other older dystopian authors like Orwell and Huxley choose to describe in great detail. This results in the reader of these newer novels not experiencing the fictional governments as irresistible. Additionally, by lacking focus on these sort of dystopian elements and not depicting oppressive governments as all-powerful, newer novels like *Future Home of the Living God* and *Red Clocks* are able to emphasize several methods of resistance against institutional oppression. In contrast, by heavily emphasizing how oppressive Gilead's government is and how little opportunity one has to combat its harmful policies, Atwood and older dystopian authors don't leave any room for resistance against these sorts of dystopian governments. Overall, the newer feminist dystopian novels' increased realism and focus on resistance sends a hopeful message to readers everywhere, especially struggling real-world women: resistance to

institutional oppression is very possible, and one must not give up hope when trying to combat it and improve the conditions of oppressed communities everywhere.

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# BIOGRAPHY

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