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„Violence Has Never Been More Beautiful: the Aesthetics of Brutality in filmic adaptations of *The Handmaid's Tale*"

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1. Introduction

A truly good story is worth telling many times and in many different ways, especially when it touches upon fundamental questions such as human rights and freedom. Since its publication in 1985 the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Canadian author Margaret Atwood has been reincarnated in various forms. First of all, it was adapted to a movie (director Volker Schlöndorff, 1990), then it was performed as an opera (composer Poul Ruder, 2000), and it was also recorded as an audio book (read by Claire Danes, 2012). One of the recent reappearance of the story concerns the adaptation to a TV series (creator Bruce Miller, 2017) with vivid promotional art installations and free book giveaways. What is more, Atwood's work is about to shift form again as it is going to be turned into a graphic novel by artist Renee Nault in 2018. Apart from almost all possible fictional forms, the story's characters stepped into actual reality when, in the light of political regulations regarding reproduction rights in the US, there was a demonstration of feminist activists wearing the handmaids costumes and attending the court procedure. There is even a political action group called Handmaid Coalition with a mission "to combat misogyny"[1]. From these examples, it is obvious that Offred with her crimson handmaid's habit, who used to be just a character in a speculative novel, is becoming an iconic "serial figure" (Mayer) by crossing media[2]. As Sherlock Holmes's hat and pipe stand for ingenuity, Offred's recognisable red cloak with the white wings represents a warning that even in modern society the rights and liberties women enjoy cannot be taken for granted, and, should the control fall into the hands of radical thinkers, that same exact society is capable of the utmost cruelty.

So what it is that motivates creators to return to this novel? Offred's[3] story is set in a dystopian near future and begins when her real though never mentioned name is obliterated and can no longer be used in the new theocratic totalitarian regime of Gilead (the former USA). The new order is supposedly established to save the world that suffers from toxic pollution and faces extinction due to disease and infertility. The

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[1] https://handmaidcoalition.org/

[2] This point has been discussed by myself and my supervisor Univ.-Prof. Dr. Sylvia Mieszkowski in 2017 while I was working on my thesis. I would like to make a statement that it is professor Mieszkowski's original idea.

[3] See Appendix for the list of characters.

society is under the control of a religious regime, in which women are deprived of their rights, a theocracy in which those women who are still fertile are reduced to the sole function of breeding children for the state. The story is told from the perspective of the main character Offred, who has been turned into a handmaid and is forced to experience the horrors and violence of the new world. She is appointed to a household of a so-called Commander of the state, and each month has to undergo a ceremonial rape by him in the presence of his wife, so that she can bear children for them. This society represents a pessimistic vision of the future, where the most basic human rights are violated and the whole population is subjected to rigid state's control. As a group, the handmaids are the part of the society that take the heaviest toll: even though, from the Gilead's ideological point of view, they are supposed to be the crucial social segment that is supposed to ensure human survival, paradoxically they have to endure extreme suffering and are left traumatised and broken human beings. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a captivating story because it belongs to one of most thought-provoking genres - critical feminist dystopia. The dominant themes of this science fiction sub-genre are related to equal rights, the division of power, reproductive choices and rights, and sexuality.

The strength and appeal of this story has inspired the birth of all the adaptations mentioned above. This thesis, however, will narrow its focus down to the original novel and its two extant screen adaptations: the film by Volker Schlöndorff (1990) and the TV series (2017) by Bruce Miller. My choice of the objects of analysis is influenced by my passionate interest in the serial form of narration. Recently, TV series have become a powerful form of story telling. According to Gary Edgerton, the author of critical study *The Sopranos*, the TV series's strength lies in keeping the story alive for the viewers for weeks, even though the audience is not watching it all the time: the anticipation for the next episode makes the viewers discuss the story with the fellow fans. This medium is not only appealing to the audiences, but also to creators, as it attracts both talented and famous actors and directors, writers and producers, therefore it is safe to say that audiences are presented with a product of quality. What is more, as a film and media scholar Jason Mittell notices that when it comes to adaptations, the form of serial narration opens great possibilities for the creators: the inclusion of wide variety of characters, the space for complex plot development and tackling multilayered themes and problems. Therefore, I have chosen to explore the ways this particular novel is

adapted to a TV series, and compare this adaptation it to an earlier film version. I am interested in different possibilities each medium offers for the art of adaptation. One of my main inspirations regarding adaptation is Linda Hutcheon and her seminal work *A Theory of Adaptation,* alongside scholars Robert Stam, James Naremore, and James Monaco. Throughout my paper one of my research questions I attempt to answer is in what ways each medium is advantageous and disadvantageous when it comes to adapting *The Handmaid's Tale* for the screen.

The terrifying dystopian society in the story of *The Handmaid's Tale* fuels another of my research questions: what types of violence exists in the novel, and what are their visual representations in both adaptations. To clarify what the word *violence* means I would like to use a definition used by World Health Organisation: "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation"(WHO)[4]. This definition encompasses key words and concepts that I work with in this paper: physical force, power, injury, death, deprivation. In my analysis I pay considerable attention to violent acts and how they are transferred from the written to the visual form. To answer the question specified above it is essential to take an in-depth look into the aesthetic choices film creators make to visually construct violent scenes, and evaluate what effects such choices achieve in both mediums. During my exploration of *The Handmaid's Tale* story in its three selected versions I have identified two types of violence: violence against women and women as perpetrators of violence. The first type of violence is performed by the regime, and it is formal, contained, and void of emotion. It manifest itself in the form of social control by rigid rules, confinement and retraining of the handmaids, rape ceremony and body mutilation. This type of violent behaviour attempts to keep the appearance that such measures are necessary for the greater good. The only exception is the *Jezebel's* sex club, where the regime's statesmen remove their official masks and indulge themselves in abusing women. The other type of violence, where the women are the perpetrators, is brutal and raw. The handmaids are forced – or one could argue that they are 'allowed' – to perform violent acts such as stoning or hanging, or ripping someone apart with their bare hands. While both types of brutality

[4] http://www.who.int/en/

are visually present in the film adaptation, the TV series version tackles a much wider range of violence related problems, and therefore fully and successfully exhausts the original source. This proves my initial hypothesis: that the TV series is a more advantageous medium for adaptations.

Due to its form and length, the film version of *The Handmaid's Tale* approaches the theme of violence from a narrow point of view. The violence against women is expressed through the tragic destiny of one woman, who is sexually and emotionally abused by male protagonists. Serial narration as a medium, on the other hand, proves to be capable of handling multilayered problems related to violence that are present in the original novel. The TV series pictures violence inflicted both on individuals and social groups, and due to its format it can and does show it repeatedly. This repetition is an essential element in the serial narration of this particular story, since it correlates with the violent acts against the characters which occur repeatedly, such as the handmaids' monthly ceremonial rape, or the public salvaging imposed on the handmaids regularly. The TV series also employs highly aesthetic visual means to demonstrate violence: intense colours, slow motion shots, close-ups. Such representations not only create a strong effect on the audience, but, in comparison to the movie version, more fully explore and show the horrors that are hidden behind a story of one handmaid.

In my thesis, I will employ close reading and comparative methods of analysis working with all three objects of analysis. I begin my work by introducing Linda Hutcheon's dualistic definition of adaptation: adaptation as a process and a product. Furthermore, I explore the storytelling in Atwood's novel by supporting my interpretation of the theory of narratology. I particularly focus on the concept of focalisation, which explores the point of view of the storytelling, and I base my reading on the work of scholars Mieke Bal and Gerald Prince. The inclusion of focalisation is essential for the critical examination of how Offred's point of view in the novel is transferred to multiple perspectives shown on the screen both in the film and the TV series. In fact, in my analysis, the concept of focalisation serves as a connecting point between novel's narratology and the selected adaptations, where I investigate how Offred's voice in the novel is turned into various perspectives in the movie and TV series.

In an attempt to answer the previously indicated research questions about violence it is necessary to work with the definition of violence presented above, and explore where and how violence is present in the novel and its adaptations. First of all, I discuss the Republic's of Gilead social and ideological structure and explore how that structure gives rise to violence. To be more precise, I explore ways how violence is 'allowed' and inflicted upon female characters collectively. For this purpose I draw on the concept of biopower, which stands for government's involvement in the existence and control of human bodies. I will base my interpretations on the work of philosophers Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, who have worked with concepts of biopower and biopolitics. Biopower is an underlining ruling principle in the ultra patriarchal regime that governs Gilead, manifesting in complete control over female population and reproduction. Another level of collective control is corralling young fertile women and attempting to re-train them for the new order's purposes. Here the concept of liminality, introduced and theorised by Arnold van Gennep Bjorn Tommasen, will be of use, since the future handmaids are stuck in transitional period between the past and the future, which makes them vulnerable and thus turns them into objects of violence. As a state, liminality can be recognised in the handmaids' training centre and during public executions practiced in Gilead. Finally, in order to understand how the regime controls violent emotions such as anger and hatred against the regime that accumulate in the handmaids, the anthropological notion of scapegoating, introduced by René Girard, will be explored in connection to the brutal public salvagings and the punishments in which the handmaids have to participate.

Apart from the instances of collective violence, the handmaids suffer brutal treatment on an individual level. First of all, I claim that the social status of the handmaids is as low as that of prisoners. To prove this, I shall explore the visual representations of their confinement in the statesmen's households, their rigid diets and strictly regulated daily routines. Another method the regime employs to restrict the handmaids' freedom is to distinguish their clothes through colour, a bright red, which makes them the most visible objects in the colour-coded society. I also look into how Gilead differentiate the colour of clothes on gender level, making women wear different shades with different meaning, while all men share unifying black uniforms. The next level of brutality inflicted upon the handmaids concerns their bodies, and how the

regime marks, punishes and mutilates them. The cruelest form of violation in the story is the sexual abuse the female characters experience during the ritualised repetitive rapes. To support my analysis of the ceremonial rape's visual representations in both adaptations I incorporate a discussion on rape culture, and its presence in movies and television programs. My main inspiration at this point is Gina Messina-Dysert's analysis of rape culture in contemporary society and Lisa M. Cuklanz' exploration how rape culture permeates into television. In my thesis's final chapter I shall comment on one last act of violence through which the handmaids could escape Gilead: suicide. To support my interpretation related to suicide theme I draw from scholar Elisabeth Bronfen and her work femininity and death - *Over Her Dead Body.*

To sum it up, I have chosen to work with one story which is told in three forms, and through close reading and comparative method of analysis I am attempting to understand how those ways of story telling are interconnected. For the scope of this paper I have chosen to research one specific theme - violence and its representations. The wide theoretical framework mentioned above supports my arguments when dealing with this topic, and assists me in delivering in-depth analysis of the selected forms of *The Handmaid's Tale* - the novel, the movie and the TV series. The following sections of the paper include introductory theoretical material related to adaptation, narratology and the dystopian genre, while he subsequent sections will focus on detailed analysis of representations of violence in all three objects.

2. The Adaptation - General Overview of the Product and the Process

The main objects of the analysis in this paper are two different adaptations of Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Linda Hutcheon, one of the main scholars and theorists of adaptation considers adaptation a dual concept: it can be both a product and a process (16,18). In the first case, I will be working with products that Hutcheon calls "re-mediations": "translations in the form of intersemiotic transportations from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images)" (Hutcheon 16). The emphasis here is that an adaptation is a product in a different medium. Naturally,

moving from a written to a visual form does not mean that all visual results, the products of adaptation, are the same or similar. I will analyse this two-step shift from novel to film and TV show and argue that the adaptation products can differ quite significantly. If adaptation is viewed as a process, those who adapt the stories are discussed, alongside their motivation for adaptation, different mediums used for adaptation, cultural context and audience reception (Hutcheon xv). In my analysis, I will also attempt to look at the two adaptations as processes, and include the above-mentioned aspects in the discussion.

Though adaptations as products can take many forms and shapes, in popular culture the word 'adaptation' usually evokes the product adapted from a written work to a film or TV series. This form of adaptation is also the most relevant to my paper. I would like to comment on the end format of this transition: the multilayered visual object and its artistic elements. Robert Stam lists essential elements of film that are also found in other forms of art: "the visuals of photography and painting, the movement of dance, the décor of architecture, and the performance of theatre" (61). It is a multifaceted form that can use colours and shapes for expression, benefit from endless possibilities of settings, and employ actors' artistic talents. When it comes to adaptation, it is quite understandable that such a rich form is appealing to creators. Yet, film as form, in comparison with the television series, has its own drawbacks and limitations that will be discussed in the upcoming chapters, dealing with the specific case of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The ways of expression in a film (previously listed by Stam) are naturally shared by the medium of TV series as well. In addition, television shows as a format have something more to offer - the advantage of wide narrative space and possible continuity. This might be the reason why during the last decades this form of artistic expression has been gaining popularity both among the audiences and creators. It seems that we are witnessing the golden age of TV series. First of all, the spread and popularity of TV series are connected with establishing digital television networks, such as HBO (Edgerton 8). One of the first examples of high-quality series that was aired in 1999 on this network was *The Sopranos.* Around a decade later networks like HBO were followed by video-on-demand and streaming services provided by Netflix. This service

introduced a new feature for the audiences - a possibility to consume a TV show's entire seasons in one sitting. This enriched viewers' experience by allowing them to delve into their favourite stories for hours. Second of all, as a medium television shows are attracting critically acclaimed creators and actors who mostly were previously involved in the motion picture industry (Mittell 30). For example, the creative crew behind one of the most popular shows in the past years, *House of Cards*, included the Academy Award nominated director David Fincher and Kevin Spacey, who has won two Oscars (IMDb). Jason Mittell mentions "extended character depth, ongoing plotting and episodic variations" as aspects that attract the film makers (31). These features of TV series can allow them to fulfil their creative potential better in comparison to the artistic form of film.

When it comes to adaptation, it has long since found its way into the medium of film and TV shows. According to Hutcheon, 95% of all mini series, and 70% of TV movies are adaptations (4). It seems that appropriating literary works into TV series remains a trend among film creators, especially if such examples as *Game of Thrones* that has been aired since 2011 (original saga *The Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin), *American Gods* that is on-air since 2017 (original novel by Nail Gaiman) and *Big Little Lies* produced in 2017 (original novel by Liane Moriarty) are to be taken into consideration. It is worth noting that the last of these titles, alongside with *The Handmaid's Tale*, dominated the 69th Emmy Awards[5] and the 75th Golden Globe Awards[6], collecting the main prizes for directing, writing and actors' performances. These achievements demonstrate that adaptation in combination with television show medium produce results that are both popular among audiences, as well as acknowledged among professionals.

Successful adaptations as *Big Little Lies* or *The Handmaid's Tale* can be used as strong arguments in the discussion of inferiority and fidelity of adaptations. Their critical acknowledgement challenges the common opinion both in media and academia that adaptations from literature to screen are inevitably of lower rank, or "culturally inferior" to the original (Naremore qtd in Hutcheon 2). What is more, the adapted

[5] https://www.emmys.com/awards/nominees-winners/2017

[6] https://www.goldenglobes.com/winners-nominees/2018

versions should not be seen as a 'threat' to the original. According to Hutcheon, "[…] our interest piqued, we may actually read or see that so-called original *after* we have experienced the adaptation, thereby challenging the authority of any notion of priority" (xiii, emphasis in the original). This is exactly what happened after *The Handmaid's Tale* was aired: the novel's sales increased rapidly, and the book became a summer 2017 bestseller on Amazon[7]. What is more, based on Google Trends[8], Internet searches of Margaret Atwood's name and book titles soared in April 2017, which coincides with the Hulu's series' premier, and peaked at the end of September, around the time of Emmy awards. This example illustrates how adaptation is a mediator that can create a bond between different media, as well as a connection between the 'source' and the 'versions' of the story.

It is evident that TV series's popularity informed audiences about the novel's existence. But I would like to believe that the result of an adaptation is more than just that. Ideally, it produces a powerful synergy where the story under the title *The Handmaid's Tale* is being simultaneously read, watched, compared and becomes a ubiquitous cultural object. Ruth Mayer in her analysis of a serial character Fu Manchu provides a definition of seriality that is relatable to Offred and her story:

> […] seriality is a principle rather than a technique and […] this principle cannot be traced back to one author, author collective, or instigator. It gains a "machinic" momentum of its own in the course of its unfolding, propelled by the varying media and media formats of choice; by technological, political, and cultural contours of these media environments; and by the complex and uneven interactions of authors, audiences, and larger institutional configurations. (6)

First of all, Offred with her "visual repertory" of the red habit and white cap becomes a serial figure recognisable across mediums (Mayer 5). As it was mentioned earlier in the introduction, the story was recreated in opera, movie, TV series, and graphic novel. The best example that illustrates not only medium boundary crossing but crossing from fiction to reality is a protest against abortion restrictions in the USA, when the protesters

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[7] http://uk.businessinsider.com/the-handmaids-tale-was-most-read-book-of-the-summer-amazon-2017-9/?r=US&IR=T

[8] https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=Margaret%20Atwood

entered the court hall wearing handmaids clothes[9]. This event proves that adaptation is a process that expands creative limits and moves the principle of seriality forward because the variety of adaptations will show how widespread the principle of seriality can be.

3. The Voice of the Novel

Before moving on to analysing the selected adaptations, I would like to discuss the novel and its narrative elements. The reason to talk about focalisation in the novel, and later about points of view in the adaptations is related to the main focus of my thesis: violence. Violence does not exist without an object, someone on whom it is inflicted, so the primary task is to identify that object. Looking at the story's first medium - the novel - it is clear that the object of violence is the main character Offred, who is also the story's first person narrator. In trying to answer the question what violence exists in the novel and the adaptations, I have to 'ask' her. This is where I have to tackle focalisation: the story is told by Offred, which also means - the one who experiences first-hand violence I am trying to grasp and analyse in its visual representations.

In the discussion of any novel, it is impossible to avoid narratology and its few essential terms. Narratology is a branch of philology that represents a collection of theories on "narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that 'tell a story'" (Bal 3). In other words, it is a broad discipline that studies and theorises ways in which stories are told. In order to know how the story is told in the novel, it is essential to identify the type of narrator, the one who tells the story. *The Handmaid's Tale* is told by a "narrator-character", which is a type of first-person narrator since he or she is participating in the events of the story (Prince 13). The novel's opening sentence immediately allows the identification of the type of narrator due to the inclusive pronoun: "We slept in what had once been the gymnasium" (*THT*[10] 13). From this sentence it is clear that whoever is telling the story has been present in the events

[9] http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2017/03/21/texas_women_gathered_dressed_as_characters_from_the_handmaid_s_tale_to_protest.html

[10] The further references from the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* will be marked using the abbreviation *THT* and the page number.

described. In the second chapter of the novel the first person pronouns "I" and "my" establishes and confirms the narrator-character: "I pick up the shopping basket, put it over my arm" (*THT* 18). The events described in this minor episode are happening directly to the narrator and her body: 'pick up' indicates her hand, then the basket touches her arm. This quote and the description of events in minute details foreshadow that in case of violence or violent act, the narrator will be providing an intimate account of what is happening to her.

Once the narrator type is identified, it is important to look into another narratological concept: focalisation. According to the cultural theorist Mieke Bal, focalisation is "the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen', perceived" (142)[11]. It is thus closely connected to the type of narrator that tells the story. One might think that the focaliser can be identified automatically with the narrator, but this is not the case. The narrator could be narrating something that is seen and perceived by another character. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, as it was already mentioned, the story is told by the first person narrator, therefore, "when focalisation lies with one character which participates in the fabula as an actor[12], we could refer to internal focalisation" (Bal 148). Similarly to Bal, Gerald Prince refers to internal focalisation as "fixed internal the point of view", which stands for the point of view "when the perspective of one and only one character is adopted" (52). I would claim that in the case of Offred's narrative, we are witnessing the fixed internal point of view because the readers are presented with her perspective only. To better understand the point of the focalisation, Bal invites to ask the following three questions:

1. What does the character focalise: what is it aimed at?
2. How does it do this: with what attitude does it view things?
3. Who focalises it: whose focalised object is it?" (150)

This three-dimensional approach is the key to grasping and defining that special relationship between the object perceived and the vision of the focaliser.

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[11] Bal refers to other terms that define the same concept: point of view, narrative perspective, narrative situation, narrative viewpoint, narrative manner (146).

[12] For Bal fabula is "the sequence of events" and story is "*the way in which* these events are presented". In the discussion of fabula and story Bal uses the following distinctions: "'actor' in the study of the fabula, 'character' in the study of the story, and 'speaker' in the study of the text" (9).

To illustrate how these questions work in practice, I would like to analyse an example. When Rita, the household maid, greets Offred and the two women have an exchange regarding shopping tokens, Offred describes the encounter:

> Frowning, she tears out three tokens and hands them to me. Her face might be kindly if she would smile. But the frown isn't personal: it's the red dress she disapproves of, and what it stands for. She thinks I may be catching, like a disease or any form of bad luck (*THT* 20).

I will begin by answering Bal's third (and easiest) question: Offred is the focaliser in this excerpt. As to the first question, Offred's vision is aimed at and focused on Rita. Through the focaliser's eyes the reader can see that Rita has a certain facial expression - a frown. Offred does not ignore it, she analyses it and tries to understand its meaning. She tends to believe that her handmaid's attire is something that causes Rita to frown, not Offred herself. Offred's need to interpret this situation provides the answer to the second question, which concerns the focaliser's attitude to the object of her gaze. This question also serves as a tool to obtain a better understanding of the characters. Bal remarks that "the way in which an object is presented gives information about that object itself and about the focaliser" (156). This is true for the passage above, because Offred's attitude is involved and perceptive, and we learn that due to the process of focalisation. It follows that Offred is not indifferent to how Rita sees her, to what her opinion is about the handmaid of the house. It speaks of Offred's and Rita's personal relationship within the household they serve.

This passage can serve as an illustrative example of a fixed internal point of view (Prince) because it is only Offred's perspective that is demonstrated. There are no means for the readers to find out what really is behind Rita's frown, nor whether Offred's guess is correct or not. Offred's interpretation is all there is to be believed and trusted. This fixed internal point of view or 'fixed focalisation' if we were to combine Prince's and Bal's definitions, might not always be reliable. According to Bal, the process of focalisation has manipulative potential (157). This is particularly relatable to the way Offred's story is told. Not only is the novel written in first-person narration, with the "character-bound focalizor [sic]" (Bal 150), which implies that the readers are shown events from a single point of view, but the narration's questionable reliability is

also brought to the attention of the narrator herself. After a passage where Offred relates her first visit to Nick's room, the following paragraph plainly states: "But it didn't happen that what way either. I'm not sure how it happened; not exactly" (*THT* 275). This exclamation from Offred creates uncertainty and makes the readers doubt whatever was said before.

Throughout the novel there are quite a few self-referential remarks, where Offred comments on the way she is telling the story. In one of the most noticeable passages of self-reflexivity she contemplates her own narrative:

> When I get out of here, if I'm ever able to set this down, in any form, even in the form of one voice to another, it will be a reconstruction then too, at yet another remove. It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never be fully described, too many flavours, in the air or on the tongue, half-colours, too many. (*THT* 144)

In the quoted passage Offred's concern seems to be that the story is never whole but retold in fragments, as well as never "exact" to the events recounted. This particular excerpt can be fully appreciated or understood once the novel's ending is known because it reveals how the story was preserved. We are told that Offred managed to tape-record the events and the tapes were discovered and reconstructed. However, the records had never been arranged in any sequence, so the chronology is created by the academics who work on the material ("Historical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*", *THT* 311). So if according to Bal, "a character bound focalizor [sic] […] brings about bias and limitation" regarding the events described (150), then the revelation of the ending introduces even more limitations and bias. What happens is that the narrative composition is fragmented on two levels: first Offred records her story from memories, and in no chronological order, and then the academics might not have been able to establish the 'right' sequence of the tapes. The implication of this multi-layered fragmentation could be that the story's chronology is left to be established by readers themselves.

The content of fragmented storytelling can be justified by the way the story is delivered - Offred is retelling events from her traumatised memory. Bal offers an explanation of how memory and focalisation are connected:

> A special case of focalisation […] is memory. Memory is an act of 'vision' of the past but, as an act, situated in the present of the memory. It is often a narrative act: loose elements come to cohere into a story, so that they can be remembered and eventually told. But as is well known, memories are unreliable - in relation to the fabula - and when put into words, they are rhetorically overworked so that they can connect to an audience, for example, a therapist. *Hence, the 'story' the person remembers is not identical to the one she experienced*. This discrepancy becomes dramatic and, indeed, incapacitating in the case of trauma. Traumatic events disrupt the capacity to comprehend and experience them at the time of their occurrence. As a result the traumatised person cannot remember them; instead, they recur in bits and pieces, in nightmares, and cannot be 'worked through'. (Bal 147, emphasis added)

At the very end of *The Handmaid's Tale* it is revealed that what we have been reading is a sort of a diary. This revelation is a shifting point in discussing the novel's focalisation. It means that Offred has recorded her story much later than the events took place and the way she chose to retell them is not necessarily identical to the way they occurred. This ties in with the point expressed by Bal above, that memory is "a narrative act" where pieces are brought together by the narrator to make one piece, a story. The important questions arise: 'To what degree has the story been modified?' and 'Who is it written for?' Given the temporal and spatial distance from the narrated events, Offred has had an opportunity to reflect on what happened to her at that time and provide a retrospective, evaluative comment. For example, the description of the monthly ceremony includes immediate focalisation: how she is lying down on the bed, what she can see. But it also contains comments about the Commander and Serena, such "He [the Commander, JS[13]] is preoccupied, like a man humming to himself in the shower without knowing he's humming; like a man who has other things on his mind" (*THT* 105). This critical approach to the events is possible only with distance in time between the events and the narrating.

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[13] JS stands for Juste Stupuraite, and indicates that I have inserted an explanation into the original quote so that it reads better.

It is important to mention this metatextual ending because of its effect on the discussion of focalisation in the entire novel. It can be stated that it influences the way the story is read and understood: readers reconstruct the sequence of events from fragmented pieces. This fragmentation raises a further question: What possibilities or limitations does this offer to the adaptations?

4. Two Different Adaptations - The Movie and The TV Series

The previous section has established that the novel employs Offred as a first person narrator, who is also the main character and, in the most cases, the narrative's focaliser. It means that the story reaches the readers through her point of view, and in this way we learn about the life in Gilead at the time of the events described, as well as about the past from Offred's flashbacks. And since Offred's past resembles our current present, the representation of reality in her flashbacks increases Offred's reliability because the readers can relate to the past she describes, and verify its authenticity. In the following sections, both filmic adaptations will be analysed in terms of how this focalisation in the novel is changed to different perspectives on the screen.

I would like to start the analysis by looking at the 1990 film adaptation by the director Volker Schlöndorff and the screenplay writer Harold Pinter. Before thematic aspects are touched upon, this object of analysis will initially be scrutinised in regards to medium and form, and what perspectives are permitted within this frame. By medium I mean that it is a visual-aural adaptation of the story, and by form I mean that is it a 109 minute length motion pictures produced for the theatres (IMDb).

The film opens with a high shot over a desolated winter landscape on which a written message is presented, stating the following: "Once upon a time in the recent future a country went wrong. The country was called The Republic of Gilead" (Schlöndorff, 00:00:44 - 00:00:52). The wording of the message begins with "Once upon a time", which is a typical beginning of fairy tales, and it could be read as a

subtle reference to the wording of the novel's title, which contains the word "tale"[14]. The usage of "Once upon a time" could also be interpreted as an emphasis on the story's fictionality, as if reassuring that those events could not happen in real life. Though paradoxically, the message in the beginning of the movie does not include any fantastic elements typical to fairy tales. On the contrary, it provides basic information for the audience by hinting at a new political establishment and its possible negative effects on society, which is very realistic. This introductory text represents an omniscient point of view, which is later sustained in the movie in the form of TV programmes that comment on state affairs and the world. These shows, viewed by the Commander's household, also voice the new regime's ideology.

Apart from the TV programmes, the movie uses other channels to disclose the ideological postulates of the Republic of Gilead. The Aunts of Rachel and Leah Centre (sometimes referred to as Red Centre), where young fertile women are being turned into handmaids represent one of these channels. They play the role of 'educators', and through seminars and teachings preach how the new order will benefit the world that has gone into a disastrous demographic crisis, and enforce it by fierce trainings and punishment system. Another channel is the Commander himself in his dialogues with Offred in his office. Even though different perspectives are used, the audience is only ever presented with what Offred can know: she is present in all the courses at Rachel and Leah Centre, and she participates in the conversations with the Commander in his office. I would like to point out that Offred's focalisation from the novel is sustained almost entirely in the movie. There are only two minor scenes which cannot be viewed by Offred: Moira's leaving Rachel and Leah Centre, and Serena Joy watching herself sing on TV alone in the living room. These too exceptions do not contradict Offred's narration, because they are in line with what she says and knows[15], therefore her reliability remains strong. Apart from these two scenes, all that viewers are shown is seen through Offred's eyes. Even the state of the city, the barricades, the solders marching in the streets are presented as if seen by Offred from the bus or a car.

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[14] Offred's story is without a title when it is discovered, so the academics who find it and analyse it are at the liberty to name it the way they want. Their choice to call it *The Handmaid's Tale* might be interpreted as diminishing the text's historical value, meaning that Offred's records, in no particular order, and with fake names seems to be not a sufficiently reliable source.

[15] Offred 1) assist Moira to escape the Centre; and 2) she is told that Serena used to be a famous television singer.

In the debate about the perspectives and points of view in the movie adaptation I would like to draw attention to the story's ending. In her discussion of adaptations, Hutcheon enumerates various new elements that could be included in new appropriations, such as inevitable elements typical to a certain medium (for example, sound and props for screen adaptations), or universal plot elements, such as new characters, or dialogues (37). The 'happy ending' in Schlöndorff's version is mentioned in the context of special addition and changes in the adaptation, and it is justified as a substitution "to mute tragedy or horror" (Hutcheon 37). The novel's plot (disregarding the "Historical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*" section) concludes with an open ending, where Offred's destiny after she leaves the Commander's house, and the way she recorded her story remain mysterious. I would argue that the movie creators did not intend to dissipate the tragic reality of the story, but rather were more concerned with film's length limitations, and how to introduce closure and clarity for the audience under such circumstances. For that purpose they introduced the voice-over technique (it was used only once in the movie) which allows Offred to speak and reflect on her situation:

> "I don't know if this is the end for me, or a new beginning. But I'm safe here in the mountains held by the rebels. They bring me food. Sometimes, a message from Nick. So I wait. I wait for my baby to be born into a different world. I still dream about Jill[16]. About them telling her I don't exist. Or that I've never existed. But I know we're going to find her. She will remember me (Schlöndorff, 01:44:21 - 01:45:15).

Offred's voice-over perhaps creates a stronger effect of closure in the story. Had she been shown walking to the trailer in full pregnancy without any comment, the ending might not have been clear enough for the viewers. We will see later how differently the ending is processed in the TV series adaptations and how this way of adapting the story is related to the format of the TV series.

An adaptation's form implies a certain length and therefore limitations when it comes to adapting a novel to a movie. To cover the whole novel would have been

[16] Jill is Offred's daughter in this adaptation. In the TV series she is called Hanna.

impossible in a movie, so the creators had to deal with these limitations by eliminating certain parts of the plot. Porter H. Abbott labels this process of removing or excluding certain elements as "a surgical art" (qtd in Hutcheon 19). During this process what happens is that not only the stories content is trimmed, but also the focalisation we experience in the novel is reduced. First of all, the movie version presents Moira as a new person in Offred's life, someone she meets on the way to Rachel and Leah Centre. It is a small change from the first glance, but what it does is that it removes all flashbacks[17] about the past life and their experiences as friends. The result of this elimination is that in the movie version Offred is deprived of strong intimate connection from the past, and audience is deprived of their background stories. A similar method is used in case of Luke, Offred's husband, who is killed at the beginning of the movie, never mentioned again and thus practically eliminated. The novel, on the other hand, contains long passages of flashbacks where Offred reflects on her life with Luke, their love story, the family they had, and the pain of losing everything once the Gilead was established. The flashbacks and memories in the novel have a particular effect on the audience: they shock the readers how similar Offred's previous life is to the one we lead today, in the contemporary world. So the elimination of certain parts of the plot in the movie version of *The Handmaid's Tale* results in depriving the audience of important message: the warning the novel sends about the contemporary society is 'tuned down' with these eliminations.

Contrary to the movie, the format of the TV series has more opportunities to experiment with different perspectives. The first season of *The Handmaid's Tale* adaptation to a TV series comprises of 10 episodes, each approximately one hour long, which in total makes almost ten hours of screen time. Obviously, regarding the length of visual material, TV series possess clear advantage compared to the movie. What this extra time allows is to unfold the full breadth of the original story as told in the book, which can be done in greater detail. What is more, the story's division into to ten separate episodes allows "narrative complexity", which, according to Mittell, means "redefinition of episodic forms under the influence of serial narration" (both 32). The series medium allows arranging the story thematically into coherent units so that each

[17] The only flashback shown in the movie is the image of Offred's daughter wondering in the snow at the border, where they tried to escape (Schlöndorff 00:10:23 - 00:10:32).

unit reaches a degree of completion without total resolution or closure. Also each episode contributes step by step to the overarching mythology of the entire season (Mittell 33). In other words, the whole story can only be fully understood and put together if all episodes are viewed. It is similar to completing a puzzle, and this process of collecting the story piece-by-piece resembles the work of adapters: the creators take the source material, dismantle it and recompose it to something different.

Bruce Miller's[18] adaptation for Hulu first and foremost tries to recreate the closeness to Offred the readers experience while reading Atwood's novel. It is an ordeal since the medium of book and TV show is so different. Linda Hutcheon contemplates few important questions about the modes of telling versus the modes of writing that surely concern every adapter:

> "Are performance media limited to a third-person point of view? Or can the intimacy of the first-person narrator be achieved in performance? Do techniques like voice-over or a soliloquy work? What about the power of the close-up […] ?" (53).

Miller's television show proves that there are ways to maintain and even heighten that intimacy between the audience and the first-person narrator and focaliser. It is realised by using Offred's voice-over extensively, which for viewers creates the effect of being in her head or listening to her thoughts. The voice-over is the source of information about the heroine's inner and outer world. What is more, the voice-over is juxtaposed to the actual words Offred utters in a given situation. For example, when Nick asks Offred whether she is about to go shopping, two answers are given. First, her voice-over delivers her thoughts: "No, Nick, I'm gonna knock back a few at the Oyster House bar, you wanna come along?". Then the 'real' answer she gives Nick follows - a short and humble "Yes" (E1[19], 00:10:57 - 00:11:01). Whatever the sequence of voice-over and the real utterance is, what matters is the contrast between them. The voice-over technique works as a window into Offred's spirit, to her mind. It also demonstrates that she is not naive, but on the contrary, familiar with the hypocrisies and lies she has to live in. Her

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[18] The main producer of the HULU TV series adaptation. He was working closely with Margaret Atwood as a consulting producer.

[19] E and a number will refer to a particular Episode of the first season of *The Handmaid's Tale* TV series.

sarcastic comments on the situation she finds herself in may even cause a comic effect to show how absurd the Gilead's regime is. Natalie Zutten interprets the voice-over technique as follows: "It's her true voice, the one she used in her daily life before Gilead. The one that's forbidden now."[20] I strongly agree with Zutten and would like to add that using the voice-over in this TV series demonstrates how creatively the film-makers were able to keep Offred's past life and her attitude present in the story. It is also a time and space saving method: there is no need to include long flashback scenes to reveal Offred's true personality - all is done simultaneously as the story events unfold. I disagree with adaptation scholar Linda Seger's claim that devices such as voice-over can cause distraction or disruption (qtd in Hutcheon 54). The contrary is the case in Miller's adaptation, where it adds clarity and complements other techniques such as close-ups.

Apart from voice-over, the sensation of proximity to Offred is attained by camera's close focus on her face, and the time spent on capturing facial expressions that

(Figure 1: E1 00:11:31)

can be as revealing as words. Gilles Deleuze in his work *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* refers to close-up of the face as "affection image" (87). The way I understand this

[20] https://www.tor.com/2017/04/27/the-handmaids-tale-television-review/

concept is that the face filmed from close has a potentiality to express wide range of emotions. In the TV series adaptation sometimes both voice-over and close-ups are combined, and while listening to Offred's voice-over the audience can see her face change according to her line of thought. For example, her face changes radically from a pretended calm expression to concern and distrust when she considers the possibility of Nick being an Eye[21] watching her (see Figures 1 and 2). Her voice and close-up images are channels through which violence can be read and analysed in detail in the following chapters. They serve as radars, showing the intensity of her inner suffering.

(Figure 2: E1 00:11:42)

As it was discussed above, techniques such as voice-over, or close-ups, are quite successful means to represent the point of view of the character. However, in the visual-aural medium there are more options to explore. According to Robert Stam, "In a multitrack medium, everything can convey point of view: camera angle, focal length, music, *mise-en-scène*, performance, or costume" (Stam, Raengo 39, original emphasis). With such a variety of elements available, it all depends on which ones the adapter chooses, and to what end. Stam remarks that it is not the type of narrator (first or third person), but the "authorial control of intimacy and distance, the calibration of access to characters' knowledge and consciousness" should be taken into consideration mostly

[21] An Eye in Gilead is a spy who watches fellow citizens and reports transgressions to the government.

when discussing the point of view on the screen adaptations (ibid.). Stam's term "authorial control" is the key, meaning that the creators of the TV series can exercise the freedom of creativity and that any material for adaptation becomes another authorial product in the hands of the adapters.

A great example of how any element can create a point of view and access to character's consciousness is the scene of Offred violently brushing her teeth after the Commander made her kiss him "like she means it" (E6, 00:25:18 - 00:26:21). The shots frame Offred's face in a way that only half of her face is visible at a time: either her mouth and the frantic movement of the toothbrush, and her head turning to the sides, or her upper face showing tearful eyes shot with determination. These two lower and upper face shots are shown interchangeably every other second, and that creates an impression of a blurry vision because her face and the toothbrush are moving fast. This hazy image that the audience is shown represents the vision that Offred would have of herself through eyes full of tear if there were a mirror in her bathroom[22]. The sequence even includes a two-second shot in which Offred is filmed from the back, standing by the sink and facing the bare wall that still has the mark where a mirror used to hang. Moreover, the foamy mouth is associated with extremely strong emotions, therefore perfectly reflects Offred's rage she must feel after the kiss. The scene culminates with a close-up and zoom towards the sink hole, where bloody water and saliva slowly disappears. The image of blood has a symbolic meaning because of association with menstrual blood. In this scene the blood can be interpreted as a reminder of her position as a handmaid, which is defined by the fact that she menstruates regularly, which implies that she is fertile, hence her destiny in Gilead is to be a handmaid. In this one minute scene Offred's feelings of disgust towards the Commander are turned into a vivid visual experience that successfully encompasses a range of emotions that are so well expressed visually, as it would be in words in the novel.

The TV series also includes several additions or expansions of the story. These are presented in the shape of events shot from an omniscient perspective that is not accessible to Offred or, in other words, something she cannot see. Their purpose is to

[22] All the mirrors are removed for the fear of handmaids hurting themselves.

complement the story, to add complexity, and to extend its narrative space. First of all, episode seven is an odd one out[23] in comparison to the rest of the series, because the action takes place outside of Offred's territory (outside of Gilead, and thus beyond Offred's vision), and the audience sees what happens to her husband Luke. Even though Offred cannot witness the events demonstrated through omniscient prism, such scenes do not compromise her as narrator's reliability, because the world represented visually coincides with the world she describes. What this omniscient perspective demonstrates is essential to my research, because it shows violence that is inflicted by the regime also on the male part of the society (men, husbands, fathers). Nick's story is another male protagonist's perspective on the matters. Before the regime change he is presented as a young soldier: jobless, confused, isolated and without perspective and therefore easily recruited. He can also be seen as a free agent, who "hasn't even been issued a women yet" (E1, 00:10:53 - 00:10:54), but, as it is later revealed, romantically involved with the household's handmaids. What is more, episode six shows the regime's genesis and tells the story of how both the Commander and his wife Serena Joy were involved in creating the Republic of Gilead. This perspective is both political and can also be read from the feministic point of view, focusing on Serena's ideals before the regime, her actual sacrifices for the sake of it, and her final role in it. For the purpose of this paper the emphasis on various perspectives is essential because the more perspectives are shown in the TV series, the more diverse and wider spread of violence is visually presented.

5. Genre Commentary

In terms of genre, *The Handmaid's Tale* has been assigned to various categories; scholars have evoked broad terms such as science fiction and speculative fiction or referred to more narrow sub-genres, such as feminist dystopia and critical social dystopia. I would argue that the story possesses a wide range of elements that make it eligible for all the above-mentioned categories. In order to gain a better understanding

[23] Mittell comments on unconventional story telling devices in serial narration, one of which is an inclusion of an episode that stands out as somewhat different in the context of an entire season (33-37).

of the novel's position regarding genre classification, I would like to present an introductory generic overview of various definitions of science fiction and its sub-genres. I would also like to comment on why *The Handmaid's Tale* could be considered as an illustrative example of the evoked categories.

Science fiction, being one of the most popular genres in the history of literature, has been defined and interpreted by many scholars, authors and readers. I find Graham D. Martin's explanation of the term a good starting point to understand the basic premise of the genre: "Science Fiction may be defined as a story in which the laws of nature (as at present understood) are obeyed, but the events take place in the future, or on some other planet, or one or more new scientific inventions or discoveries have been made" (xviii). This definition distinguishes science fiction from other genres, such as realism or fantasy, on the basis of adherence to nature's laws and typical settings. Ursula K. Le Guin's, a renowned science fiction writer, in her interpretation adds a prophetic element to it:

> Science fiction is often described, and even defined, as extrapolative. The science fiction writer is supposed to take a trend or phenomenon of the here and now, purify and intensify it for dramatic effect, and extend it into the future. "**If this goes on, this is what will happen."** A prediction is made. […] Strictly extrapolative works of science fiction generally arrive about where the Club of Rome arrives: **somewhere between the gradual extinction of human liberty and the total extinction of terrestrial life.** (155, emphasis added).

Le Guin implies here that the predictive power of science fiction is achieved not by random guessing, but by observing reality as it is, noticing the tendencies or developments, and critically evaluating them. The two alternative destinies for the humanity suggested by Le Guin are particularly relatable to *The Handmaid's Tale*: Gilead's people either face the extinction of the human population or witness elimination of human liberty by creating slave-mothers to ensure reproduction.

Martin's and Le Guin's definitions of science fiction extract the genre's essence. Even before engaging in discussion of the sub-categories of sci-fi, it is clear that *The Handmaid's Tale* belongs under this umbrella term. Firstly, the basic laws of nature as we know them are respected, and the story is set in the near future. By 'near' future I

mean that the world is very familiar to the one we live in now, but it is obvious that some changes have happened that indicate the future setting. For example, the fact that there is a new country called the Republic of Gilead in North America. Or that the toxic waste damage to the people and the planet is much worse than it is at present, causing the critical infertility problem that puts human race at the risk of extinction. Secondly, the story invites the readers to observe the current reality critically. As Peter Fitting points out, *The Handmaid's Tale* "contains an implicit warning that this may be where we are heading, as well as an account of those elements in our present that have produced this future" (156). In the narrative's temporal setting the past (which mirrors our current present) is shown as having disastrous consequences for the present (which is our possible future), and both of these time spans are contrasted. The novel distances itself from 'our' present time in a way that it as if 'zooms out' and adapts a historical point of view on what is happening today. The current events or tendencies in the society are fast-forwarded to speculate what might occur in the future.

Labelling *The Handmaid's Tale* as science fiction has caused a discussion on genres between Le Guin and Margaret Atwood. The latter rejects the classification on the basis that her books[24] contain "no intergalactic space travel, no teleportation, no Martians", and prefers her work to be placed under the speculative fiction (qtd in Thomas 2). Le Guin, on the other hand, has criticised Atwood for shying away from being called a science fiction author as a way to avoid being placed in "literary ghetto" (qtd in Thomas 7). Eventually, however, both authors agree that whether a novel like *The Handmaid's Tale* is called speculative or science fiction, it is "not directly realistic fiction", and that the main premises of it is the 'what if…' question (Le Guin, Atwood 28:10 - 32:30). I believe that the term "social science fiction" represents the middle ground of Le Guin's and Atwood's initial disagreement. According to Rosinsky, the term describes a shift from using 'hard' sciences to 'soft' sciences such as anthropology, sociology, economics, and linguistics in the science fiction in the second half of the 20th century (115). So one could claim that in the social science fiction the attention is focused not necessarily on technologically advanced flying vehicles or stories set in other planets, but more on the actual today's world, and how it could

[24] She comments on both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake.*

change if some tendencies continue. As it is often the case, today's life and its problems are hyperbolised in social science fiction, thus this genre usually deals with pessimistic worlds.

Dark future projections are mostly encountered in a sub-genre of speculative fiction, namely the dystopian fiction. The word 'dystopia' represents the opposite of 'utopia', which means "an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect" (*OED*). Thus 'dystopia' can be defined as a place "worse than the ones we live in" (Baccolini, Moylan 1). In the classic dystopian novels, such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), or George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) the setting is usually bleak and depressing, the societies are structured and controlled by oppressive regimes, in which the characters struggle for fundamental human freedoms. Aside from these general plot elements that are also found in *The Handmaid's Tale,* the novel qualifies to be placed alongside the mentioned works due to more specific aspects.

First of all, Baccolini and Moylan distinguish the control over language as one of the main features of dystopian narrative (5). A classic example of language control is a propaganda language Newspeak[25] from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell. Similarly, in *The Handmaid's Tale* the aunts are using new words such as 'particicution', which means participation and execution[26]. An instance of resistance can be found in Yevgeny Zamyatin's dystopia *We* (1924), the main character of which, named D-503, starts writing a secret journal which is a forbidden activity in his repressive society. The use of language is also strictly constrained in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The women in the Republic of Gilead are forbidden to read, or touch anything that is printed, be it *The Bible*, magazines or books. Even the shop signs on the streets contain only pictures of the produce, but no words. This is the reason why Offred cherishes a sentence *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum* that she finds scratched in her room by a previous handmaid of the house:

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[25] "[…] Newspeak is an altered form of regular English designed and controlled by the state in order to suppress free thought, individualism, and happiness. […] By choosing which words the populace can use, The Party can choose to shift thought in a more positive or negative direction to suit their needs; *ungood*, for example, makes the populace feel less negative than bad would […] (see https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2014/09/30/george-orwell-newspeak/).

[26] More examples of language control can be found on p. 43 in the analysis of Aunt Lydia's talk.

> "I didn't know what it meant, or even what language it was in. I thought it might be Latin, but I didn't know any Latin. Still, it was a message, and it was in writing, forbidden by that very fact, and it hadn't yet been discovered. […] It pleases me to know that her taboo message made it through, to at least one other person, washed itself up on the wall of my cupboard, was opened and read by me. (*THT* 62)

Offred focuses on the letters themselves and what sensation they bring to her. She does not care about the meaning of the words, but about what the words stand for: that it is a way of communication between the past, her, and perhaps someone who will come after her. She savours the sentence because it means that a girl before her resisted the regime by breaking the rules and leaving the message. This example explains why the control over language is so crucial for the regime. Language has the potential to function as a tool of forbidden communication, and could possibly endanger the stability of the system by enabling the resistance to rise.

Another distinctive element of classic dystopias is their beginning in *medias res* (Baccolini, Moylan 5). In case of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred's story opens immediately in the dark and gloomy society, without any introduction, just her describing Rachel and Leah Centre for the handmaids. However, the tone of the initial narrative does not change as it does in typical dystopias described by Baccolini and Moylan:

> As in a great deal of sf, the protagonist (and the reader) is always already *in* the world in question, unreflectively immersed in the society [original emphasis]. However, a counter-narrative develops as the dystopian citizen moves from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance. (5)

Offred does not move from ignorant happiness to alienation because she is aware of her desperate situation right from the beginning. Her sense of alienation is re-enforced by her flashbacks to the normal life she and her family, friends and colleagues used to lead. Offred differs from classical dystopian heroes[27] in a way that even though her narrative begins right in the middle of the horrible reality, she instantly reflects on its

[27] If I was to consider expanding this research in the future, it would be worthwhile looking into gender-related issues in the comparison of Offred as a female heroine to classic dystopian male heroes, such as Winston Smith or D-503.

unbearableness. Compared to, for example, the case of Winston Smith from *1984*, Offred's attitude to the regime does not experience the change Moylan comments on above. This is one of the aspects that makes *The Handmaid's Tale* stand out in the context of classic dystopias. At this point it is necessary to look into another sub-genre to which scholars[28] have been classifying the novel - the critical dystopia.

In the wide range of science fiction sub-genres, *The Handmaid's Tale* is considered to belong to critical dystopia. Moylan claims that the novel was one of the first examples of the critical dystopia: "[…] [*Handmaid*] *begins* the trend of critical dystopias as it offers a social map that traces both the depredations of state power and possible vectors of hope within the ambit of that hegemonic force" (137, both emphasis original). The key ideas in Moylan's statement are the critique of the state power and the element of hope. The latter also stands out as a main feature in Lyman Tower Sargent's interpretation of what critical dystopia is:

> "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intend a contemporaneous reader to view as worse that contemporary society but normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia". (qtd in Baccolini, Moylan)

The objects of analysis of this paper suit Sargent's definition, as hope can be traced in the novel and both of the adaptations of *The Handmaid's Tale*. First of all, Offred often mentions hope in her narrative in the novel, abut she thinks about hope as though it was something that must be treated with care. What is more, an open ending is considered to be a factor that indicates a possible positive future (Donawerth 30). The novel version's open ending accordingly could be viewed in a positive light, because it might confirm that Offred, at least for some time, is free, since she can record her story. Similarly, some optimism can be traced in Schlöndorff's interpretation of the ending, where the film allows Offred to escape with the rebels, and it ends with the hope of her giving birth and reuniting with Nick.

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[28] see Moylan 151, Note 6

From the three versions, the TV series offers the widest scope of possible hopeful scenarios. First of all, the episode 7, titled *The Other Side,* is dedicated entirely to Luke's story. It shows him crossing the borders of Gilead with the help of a resistance group and safely reaching Canada. Later on, Offred is even able to send him a message with a help of an official delegate (E7, 00:43:17 - 00:45:29). Another hopeful moment is created when Offred tries to convince Moira not to give up and not to accept her destiny as one of the Jezebels (E9, 00:31:31 - 00:32:14). In this particular scene Offred demonstrates rebellious spirit that inspires Moira to escape. Moira's reunion with Luke at the Canadian refugee establishment is an emotionally charged moment that shows the triumph of hope (E10, 00:52:17 - 00:53:18). Finally, even though Offred is taken away by the black van in the first season's final episode, moments before that happens Nick whispers to her to trust him, and the viewers are left to believe that the heroine is taken to a safe place since she is carrying Nick's child. What is more, the fact that the TV series continues and the second season will be aired in 2018, can be considered as an extra-diegetic sing of hope.

Alongside the theme of hope, genre blurring seems to be another distinctive element of the critical dystopias. Baccollini and Moylan point out that new critical dystopias favour "impure or hybrid text that renovates dystopian sf by making it formally and politically oppositional" (7). What makes the novel hybrid is the final meta-textual chapter of the book, titled *Historical Notes on The Handmaid's Tale.* The section is written as a transcribed speech from an academic conference in which *The Handmaid's Tale* is revealed to be a "*soi-disant* manuscript" from the times when the Republic of Gilead still existed (*THT* 321, original emphasis). Viewing the novel as a whole, its structure proves to be 'impure' in a sense that it includes a transcribed speech at the end, and the main part of the novel is a blend of dystopian and diary genre. What is more, regarding the content, Offred's story is her sound-recorded diary where she expresses her critique of the regime, which can be considered her personal political manifesto.

So far the discussion of *The Handmaid's Tale* in terms of genre definitions has moved from the broadest interpretations of sci-fi and speculative fiction to more specific generic sub-types. To narrow down the genre review even more, I would like to include

the term "feminist dystopia". As the key words indicate, the sub-genre deals with dystopia that mainly concerns itself with questions related to women. Ildney Cavalcanti offers the following explanation of the genre:

> "[…] the narratives usually referred to as feminist dystopias envision imaginary spaces that most contemporary readers would describe as bad places for women, being characterised by the suppression of female desire (brought into effect either by men or by women) and by the institution of gender-inflected oppressive orders (49).

Cavalcanti's definition summarises the main socio-political problems of *The Handmaid's Tale*. However, in Atwood's diegetic world the handmaids and, to a lesser extent, its other female characters, such as Wives or Marthas, not only have to suppress sexual desire, but all yearning for human freedom or its expression. This state of affairs is enforced by Gilead's male population, with the help of some female groups[29]. What is more, it is not a state of exception[30] or temporary situation, but the state is established and governed by a totalitarian regime that consists exclusively of men.

In her discussion of the feminist dystopias of the 1990s, Donawerth lists two significant features that such works demonstrate:

> "[…] a) the urban apocalyptic spaces, repressive governments, dysfunctional families, problematic sex, prominent machines, and liberated gender roles that are "symbols for the dangers and possibilities of women's freedom"; b) a nonlinear, fragmented, postmodern form that is often modelled on the slave narrative" (qtd in Baccolli 129).

Even though Donawerth mainly focusses on the feminist dystopias of the 1990s, it seems valid to refer to *The Handmaid's Tale* as an earlier example that supports her arguments. First of all she indicates the setting and important elements of the stories that

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[29] Those female groups that support the regime are the Wives, who are from a privileged social level,and the Aunts, older females who are less subjected to regime's control because of their age and the fact that they are no longer fertile.

[30] Giorgio Agamben, an Italian philosopher, analysis and attempts to theorise the concept of state of exception. The state of exception takes place when because of certain political circumstances, for example ciliv war or terrorist attack the government suspends the law in order to deal with the crises (Bellina vii). One example Agamben uses is the state of exception established by USA government after the terrorist attack in 2001, in an attempt to capture the criminals. In Agamben's words, this is how the state of exception affects captured individuals: "it radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally un-namable and unclassifiable being" (Agamben, *State*, 3). In case of the young women in *The Handmaid's Tale*, they come "un-namable and unclassifiable being", however, not temporarily, but indefinitely.

the readers view as horrible for women. Secondly, she comments on the type of narrative these stories are built in. The second feature is particularly relevant to the way Offred's story is passed on. The slave narrative means "[…] an account of the life, or a major portion of the life, of a fugitive or former slave, either written or orally related by the slave personally" (Andrews n.p.). These autobiographical accounts refer to the stories told by the former slaves in American South at the end of the 19th century (Andrews n.p.). Even though *The Handmaid's Tale* is a contemporary novel that is not set in the South of the United States, and it does not concern itself with African American slavery, the work echoes some of the most crucial elements of the slave narrative. Offred's story is an orally recorded account of what horrors she has survived in Gilead. It is also the evidence of one social group cruelly oppressing the other and exploiting it.

Baccolini claims that the themes of memory and history are defining features of feminist dystopias because they represent spheres of possible resistance and hope:

> "Because authoritarian, hegemonic discourse shapes the narrative about the past and collective memory to the point that individual memory has been erased, individual recollection becomes the first, necessary step for a collective action (130).

Resistance in the form of memory and history is present in both the novel and the TV series version of *The Handmaid's Tale*[31]. First of all, Offred's story is a fruit of her efforts not to forget or to be forgotten. At the end of the novel it is clear that she has been able to escape and record her own history. She creates an imaginary audience for herself: "But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone […] *Dear You*, I'll say. Just you, without a name. […] *You* can mean more than one. *You* can mean thousands" (*THT* 49). In not choosing a specific person to be her listener but rather a multitude Offred expresses both desperation and hope. She wants to believe that her story will not be forgotten, and it would only be possible if at least someone finds it and listens to it. Her dedication sounds desperate because she no longer expects that her story will reach someone she knows, and so she has to rely on strangers, on anyone.

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[31] The movie version lacks the examples of history and memory as a form of resistance which I mention in connection to the novel and the TV series. The resistance is, however, present in the movie, but in the form of rebel group that tries to recruit Offred. She eventually attacks the Commander and is taken away to secure place by the rebels, but she is pushed to do that, she is not driving it. Offred in the TV series, on the contrary, encourages Moira to resists, and even convinces her to pass her the secret package, which could endanger both of them.

Moreover, the elements of memory, collective history and hope are all demonstrated in the last episode of the TV series. When Offred open's a secret package sent to her by Moira from a resistance group, she finds written messages, pieces of letters and pictures of other handmaids that are confined in Gilead (E 10, 00:35:30 - 00:36:50). The messages contain essential data: women's and their family members' names, capture dates and locations, placement references. They resemble the excerpts from the police reports or archives, or even case histories from the context of psychotherapy, where patients narrate their life stories in first-person. One of the letters desperately asks: "Whoever is getting this, please don't forget me" (E 10, 00:36:05 - 00:36:08). Each of these letters symbolises a person and her existence within the regime that tries to obliterate their individuality, or even delete the traces that they ever existed. Despite the tragic nature of the messages, Offred is in happy tears, literally embraces them and caresses the forbidden paper covered with forbidden letters, because it is the sign of resistance. The implication of those written, collected and read message is that pockets of resistance exist in the Republic of Gilead, and as long as there is someone fighting against the oppression, there is hope.

Definitions may vary or disagree, as well as overlap with each other. The latter is true for the genre definition relevant to *The Handmaid's Tale*: the novel contains the elements of two reviewed sub-genres, namely the feminist dystopia and critical dystopia. Baccolini states that feminist dystopias that tackle the concepts of hope and memory and include critique of social and political systems could be defined as "critical dystopias" (129). Therefore, one way to categorise the novel, as well as its adaptations, is to assign *The Handmaid's Tale* to hybrid genre of 'critical feminist dystopia'. If I was to narrow down and specify the genre from all the definitions that have been reviewed in this chapter, I could categorise the object of my analysis using Anna Gilarek's term - speculative feminist critical dystopia. It is a niche genre that, according to her, serves as a form of a thought experiment for the female writers to explore the feminist topics (222). One of the ways to perform such an experiment could be to create a fictional society and invent new concepts and rules that would govern it. What Atwood does is something different, however: in her story she includes phenomena that actually happened or existed in the past (Thomas 3). This method of using past circumstances

can be related to Cavalcanti's idea that female dystopias often use "forms of gender-polarised oppression belonging to different histories and geographies" (53). Atwood combines the predictive speculation of 'what if…' with real events that took place in different societies at different historical periods. For example totalitarian regimes (Soviet Union), religious communities that dress their members in conservative costumes (Amish, Hutterites), states or countries that control reproduction by issuing governmental regulations (Abortion Bill in the USA) or impose religious ideologies (Catholic Marriage Sacrament). The effect of using these real phenomena and speculating with it in fiction is terrifying because it demonstrates human inability to learn from mistakes, and it reminds the audiences of the ominous possibility that history may repeat itself.

6. Violence on Screen

Violence is an inherent part of human society[32] and it has been depicted in all forms of art: one can see human shapes with spears chasing animals in cave paintings, Biblical stories tell tales of brutal wars, or one can engage in virtual massacres while immersed in sophisticated video game graphics. Films and TV series are media that benefit from limitless possibility of visual expression, so naturally brutal images also appeared on screen. Some thinkers even claim that there is a connection between violence and the way movies are made:

> […] the flickering passage of twenty-four frames per second through the projector, the vertiginous movement of the camera, the continuous shifting of view point, the rapid change of image in both size and character, the very idea of montage, make films - irrespective of their subjects - a violent experience for the audience (French qtd. in Bruder n.p.)

In this passage Philip French focuses on the combination of elements used to create any motion picture, even the non-violent ones, and its intense effect on the viewers. What is important for my research is to see how moviemaking elements, such as camera

[32] Violence in society will be discussed further in more detail in connection to René Girard.

position or choice of colour, can intensify the brutality on screen. In other words, I try to see what film creators, and in case of my objects of analysis, the adaptors are capable of while dealing with a story with a violent plot. Prior to the analysis, I would like to include a short overview of types of brutal images on screen and their functions.

Violence on screen can be categorised by how intense it is and how it affects the audience. Devin McKinney distinguishes two types of violence in films - the strong and the weak (16). To define strong violence he analyses three movies[33] that contain a high degree of brutality – including murders, rape, mutilation –, which is present not for its own sake (as happens to be the case in weak violence movies), but as essential plot elements that move the story forward as well as shifts audience's "moral positioning" (17, 21). Having discussed these movies McKinney concludes that strong violence films make the "audience feel dead inside, yet, somehow, more alive than it was two hours before" (19). In contrast, weak violence, as Julia O'Brien summarizes, is something that "is made into a spectacle, calling attention to itself rather than to a message" (123). The best example of how weak violence functions in movies[34] is McKinney's interpretation of one scene[35] from *Reservoir Dogs* by Quentin Tarantino:

> […] the combination of pop music, self-infatuated dance, and offhand amputation inspires no clashing sensation in a viewer, perhaps because incongruous ingredients are too obviously chosen for their effect on creative perversity. […] When Blonde cuts off the cop's ear, it's not a determined act in any real sense, but a show of flamboyance for its own hip, photogenic sake (21).

From McKinney's evaluative comment of the scene it is clear that, according to him, stylized violence is inferior, and that it might not move the audience as much as the one he refers to as 'strong'. Margaret Bruder challenges McKinney's dualistic approach to brutality in film arguing that "the aestheticized violence" has a potential of meaning (Bruder n.p.). I support Bruder's attempt to elevate stylized violence from its inferior

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[33] *The Crying Game* (1992) directed by Neil Jordan, *Bad Lieutenant* (1992), directed by Abel Ferrara, and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986), directed by John McNaughton.

[34] McKinney uses three example movies with weak violence: *Basic Instinct* (1992) directed by Paul Verhoeven, *State of Grace* (1990) directed by Phil Joanou and Michael Lee Baron, and *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) by Quentin Tarantino.

[35] McKinney refers to the scene of Mr. Blonde torturing a policeman - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9rIBE0KM-w

position because, in case of the *The Handmaid's Tale,* both adaptations contain artistic representations of brutality that move the audiences in exactly the same manner that McKinney would describe as 'strong'. In contemplating the potentiality of violence on screen, McKinney maintains: "perhaps it [violence, JS] must bring the heart and mind together, and aim for the emotions as much as the viscera" (16). The brutality shown in *The Handmaid's Tale* does exactly that - it is multilayered and evokes both to emotional and mental responses with examples of imprisonment, totalitarian control, family destruction, rape, torture and body mutilation.

No matter what type of violence appears on screen, one should always ask why it is there. Julia O'Brien firmly states that "no film violence is gratuitous: violence in film performs a function, even if that function is to generate an audience" (15). Quentin Tarantino, a master of brutality in films, declares that violence is a way to "play" with his viewers: "I feel like a conductor and the audience's feelings are my instruments. I will be like, 'Laugh, laugh, now be horrified'. When someone does that to me I've had a good time at the movies"[36]. So according to Tarantino, violence on screen seems to be one of the keys to good entertainment. Whether violent images in *The Handmaid's Tale* adaptations are entertaining is a complex question I shall be attempting to answer during my close reading of the selected screen adaptations.

Regarding other functions of violent images on screen I would like to include Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytical approach to film theory. Mulvey discusses the experience of film using two terms: scopophilia, which refers to pleasure of looking, and narcissism, which refers to how viewers identify themselves with what they see (O'Brien 115). Mulvey states that mainstream film represents the patriarchal system, and thus the point of view it offers is that of a male viewer, whereas women are presented as passive and sexualized objects of this gaze rather than its subjects (837): "Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen" (Mulvey 838). Employing Mulvey's theory, O'Brien explains how violence

[36] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/6975563/Quentin-Tarantino-violence-is-the-best-way-to-control-an-audience.html

functions on screen: viewers identify with the perpetrator who is harming a woman and find pleasure in this brutality because with this "fetishizing and punishing of a woman, male castration anxiety is "resolved" (116). This approach to brutality on screen is productive for interpretation of my objects of analysis because in many cases the violence present in the story of *The Handmaid's Tale* is committed by men against women. The male hostility towards women run across the story on many levels, but the culminating example of it can be seen in ceremonial rape scenes in both adaptation. In the chapter *Defiling the Body from within: Rape* I will comment on Mulvey's narcissistic identification and I-camera in regards to both the movie and the TV series visual representations of ceremonial rape.

If one looks into other types of violence in *The Handmaid's Tale*, there are some cases of brutal behaviour where the perpetrator is not necessarily a man mistreating a woman. In the upcoming chapters I comment on violence that Aunts inflict upon the handmaids, which is a 'female-on-female' violent act. In chapter *Scapegoating* I analyse instances where the handmaids are forced to execute alleged criminals of the state, which proves to be brutality committed by female against male. There is no 'classic' "male-on-male" violence, which is one of the most common cases of violence on screen, such as brutal fight scenes among men in gangster movies or depictions of war, (O'Brien 119). But in chapter *Body Punished and Tortured* I discuss one particular instance of male on male violence where a committee of commanders condemns Commander Putnam for his mistreatment of a handmaid, and the doctors amputate his arm.

7. Collective Violence

7.1 Biopower

The world of *The Handmaid's Tale* is dystopian because people find themselves in a society worse that the current situation in contemporary Western world. The reason why the structure and rules that govern Gilead's society are terrifying is because of the political intervention to "the simple natural life" (Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 1). This term refers to one of the two meanings of the word "life" in Greek language: "*zoē*, which

expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios,* which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group" (ibid.). The connection between politics of the state and the simple natural life was tackled as early as the 4th century BC. Aristotle in *Politics* states that the simple, natural life should remain in the sphere of home, and should not be included in the affairs of the state:

> Aristotle takes the greatest care to distinguish the *oikonomos* (the head of an estate) and the *despotēs* (the head of the family), both of whom are concerned with the reproduction and the subsistence of life, from the politician […] (Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 2).

Giorgio Agamben, an Italian philosopher who is most famous for his work related to state of exception and biopolitics, summarises the split between the political and the natural life in Aristotle's time in the following way: "[…] to speak of a *zoē politikē* of the citizens of Athens would have made no sense" (*Homo Sacer,* 1). If one takes into consideration the citizens of Gilead, the three terms mentioned above - politician, *oikonomos,* and *despotēs* - become blended into one person. This means that the Commander is given the power to rule over all spheres of life. He is managing the life of the family and the household, and at the same time he is the embodiment of governmental ideology. The Commander not only represents the politics of the state but with his own body executes the law.

Such a connection between politics of the state and the simple natural life can be referred to as biopower. A French philosopher Michel Foucault introduced this term in his work *The History of Sexuality* (1976). It is a broad term used to "describe power as it concerns human life, in particular with regard to the human body on one hand and human populations on the other" (Arnason 295). In his comment on the political changes that characterise the modern era Foucault refers back to the Ancient Greek philosopher and contrasts two ways of thinking about state power in relation to simple life: "For millennia man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question" (qtd in Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 3).

Agamben comments on Foucault's idea and acknowledges the significance of this paradigm shift in political thought:

> […] the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the *polis* - **the politicisation of bare life** as such - constitutes the decisive **event of modernity** and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought. (*Homo Sacer,* 4, emphasis added)

In *The Handmaid's Tale* Margaret Atwood takes this "event of modernity" to extremes and demonstrates the possible outcome of such society. The "politicisation of bare life" is the defining mechanism behind Gilead's regime. It is the process by which basic elements of peoples lives - marriage, love, reproduction, family - are controlled. If we go back to the discussion about the qualities of speculative fiction, we know that Margaret Atwood used historical facts and social phenomena that actually happened in human history. Some of the real examples of modern biopower with Agamben are concentration camps and the establishments of the totalitarian states (*Homo Sacer,* 4). These examples could have been the inspiration behind the structure of Gilead's state. The rulers of Gilead take control over bare life on several levels: the transformation of fertile women into the handmaids, the traumatised lives of children taken away from their parents, the parentage of the children to be form, the total reconstruction of family units, and the elimination of individuals whose beliefs are not fitting the ideology.

'Biopower' is a term that incorporates two ways of control over human life: anatomo-politics, which refers to control over human body, and biopolitics, which stands for the control of human population (Arnason 295). Control over reproduction is the core theme of *The Handmaid's Tale*, thus it is safe to state that the regime in the novel is biopolitical at heart. However, I would like to draw the attention to few instances that prove the story to be anatomo-political as well. Foucault claims that anatomo-politics came into being as early as the seventeenth century as the first industries were established, and continued to exist throughout the eighteenth century (Arnason 298). The human body became the object of this anatomo-political power:

> […] it [anatomo-politics, JS] focused on the **body as a machine** and sought ways to discipline it, to make it **both useful and docile**, as it was integrated in

> the new economic system of industrialised societies. […] At first, the main institutional field of the anatomo-politics, or discipline, of the human body were **the school and the army**, but this aspect of biopower soon operated also in prisons**, hospitals**, and factories. (ibid. 298, emphasis added)

The anatomo-political control over the bodies in the industrial era reminds me of the ways in which handmaids are controlled in Gilead. In the quotation above I have highlighted certain keywords because they resonate with the anatomo-political practice in all of my objects of analysis. In the following paragraph I would like to analyse specific examples of this practice.

To begin with, the body of a fertile woman, a soon-to-be handmaid, is considered a mechanism that has to serve a particular goal - to produce children for the state. To make the body "useful" for the community by guaranteeing its survival, it has to be kept healthy and functional by prescribing a strict diet:

> A baked potato, green beans, salad. Canned pears for dessert. It's good enough food, though bland. Healthy food. You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel. No coffee or tea though, no alcohol. Studies have been done. (*THT* 75)

Offred mentions the "studies", which refers to the scientific knowledge of food's connection and effects on the body. In this works from 1970s Foucault discusses the involvement of legal (courts and their judges), medical (hospitals and their doctors) or scientific (universities or laboratories and their professors) establishments in the control process. He claims that the concepts of power and knowledge are mutually connected, or as Arnason paraphrases: "There is no power without knowledge, and no knowledge without power" (295). The example above illustrates this connection: the handmaids' nutrition is regulated and restricted by the state (power over someone) according to scientific findings (because something is known). What is more, in order to track their physiological status, the handmaids are subjected to regular medical checks:

> When I'm naked I lie down on the examining table, on a sheet of chilly crackling disposable paper. I pull the second sheet, the cloth one, up over my body. At neck level there's another sheet, suspended from the ceiling. It intersects me so that the doctor will never see my face. He deals with the torso

> only. […] A cold finger, rubber-clad and jellied, slides into me, I am poked and prodded. […] "You're soft," he says. "It's time." (*THT* 70, 71)

In this passage Offred is objectified and depersonalised: she is not supposed to be visible to the doctor because it is only her lower body that matters. Due to the medical knowledge of reproductive organs, fertility, and the process of ovulation the women are turned into birthing machines that are supposed to be functional.

Even before they are sent to households and hospitals, the handmaids experience the anatomo-political power at 'school'. Rachel and Leah Centre is an establishment to which the captured young fertile women are sent for 'retraining'. First of all, their daily life changes completely, as every basic activity is arranged and takes place in group: sleeping, eating, 'studying'. The Aunts deliver lecture about the life before the regime often using visual materials for the greater effect:

> Once a week we had movies, after lunch and before our nap. […] Sometimes the movie she [Aunt Lydia, JS] showed would be an old porno film, from seventies or eighties. Women kneeling, sucking penises or guns, women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed. Once we had to watch a woman being slowly cut into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out. (*THT* 127, 128)

The purpose of using such brutal films as 'educational' material was to present the past and the women in it in the most negative light. The Aunts either show pornographic movies with women being humiliated or documentary recordings with feminist protesters that Aunts refer to as "Unwomen" (*THT* 127, 128). The Red Centre's goal is to brainwash the future handmaids by purposefully selecting and misrepresenting some aspects of women's lives from the past.

Besides the movies, the Aunts are using demographic statistics to inform the women about the catastrophic situation (see Figure 3 below). The graph on the blackboard indicates the decreasing birthrate supposedly from the '60s till the second decade of the 21st century. For this statistics Aunt Lydia blames the toxic waste that polluted people, but also the women who decided not to have children at all (ibid.)

Figure 3: Schlöndorff 00:11:31)

During these lectures the Aunts attempt to create an impression that the future handmaids' mission is to set everything right, and that it is their duty to God and to the state to bring children into this world. Figure 3 also captures a group of handmaids exercising at the back of the hall. Not only the food is strictly regulated, but also physical exercises are prescribed so the 'girls' stay fit and increase their chances of conception.

Apart from being taught the ideological truths, the handmaids learn about the ceremony that awaits them once they leave the Red Centre (see Figure 4 below). The camera shoots this scene from above, showing the circular arrangement of women in beds. This ceremony training resembles a group exercise at the gym on training mats, because the women have to work with their bodies and have to work in pairs. It is a semi-theoretical exercise, however, because there are no men involved, and the place of the wife is taken by a fellow handmaid. Nevertheless, the handmaids are instructed how to position themselves (where to place their pelvis and how to hold hands), so that they know what to do or not to do during the ceremony. Rachel and Leah Centre chooses to embed this knowledge not by clear verbal explanations, but by preparing the handmaids physically - showing what position their bodies should be in.

(Figure 4: E4, 00:12:35)

The physical aspect of the ceremony training illustrated above is supplemented by an ideological explanation. While the trainer Aunt is in the middle observing the 'students', Aunt Lydia vaguely comments on their situation:

> Aunt Lydia: Now girls, soon you will be leaving us for new homes, a new family. And they won't judge you for your looks, or your clothes, or your ability to sound clever. […] They will love you for the blessing only you can provide.
>
> Handmaid One: So, what? Is this like practice for labour, I mean, if we get pregnant?
>
> […]
>
> Aunt Two: These poses are similar to the ones we will take during the childbirth, but today we are practising for the ceremony (E4, 00:12:38 - 00:13:14).

From the handmaid's question it is clear that 'the girls' have not been given an actual explanation of how they will get pregnant. This is the first time the women realise they will be forced to have an intercourse with the men. None of the Aunts utters this word, but they rather use biblical quotations as answers to the women's questions. The lack of clarity can also be traced in Aunt Lydia's speech, since she avoids referring to things by

their real names. The usage of the word ‘girls' is idealogical here: even though these are adult women Aunt Lydia is addressing, some of them even have children, the regime as if gives them back the status of virginity by using the word ‘girls’. In her discourse this word has a purifying power - it is as if after spending some time in Rachel and Leah Centre the women will be cleansed of their dirty past, and will become 'pure' again, like virgin girls ready to serve the state. They will be liberated from the troubles of the past, such as their appearance and wit. There is a new beginning waiting for them, and it is encoded in Aunt Lydia's words "new home" and "new family”. In this sequence the camera angles change between shots from above that show intimidating Aunts pacing among lying handmaids, and close-up shots of terrified women who realise the gravity of their situation. These contrasting shots represent the mixed ambience in the training hall: the mighty power of the regime with its symbol on the floor in the middle of arranged beds, and the terrified women who are arranged like sacrificial “flowers" around that symbol, waiting to be “seeded” (Aunt Lydia, E 4).

7.2 Liminality

In *The Handmaid’s Tale* biopower is the fundamental principle of Gilead’s regime. While it has an impact on the whole society, the handmaids are particularly affected by it. But before they are called 'merely women, who happen to be fertile'. I would like to discuss the transition in their experience from being young free women to becoming handmaids by introducing and exploring the concept of liminality.

Liminality is now widely used in the social sciences, but it was first introduced as a concept a century ago by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in his work *Les Rites de Passage* (1909). In his book, van Gennep categorises existing rites “that mark the passage of an individual or social group from one status to another” (Thomassen 3). Some of the most common examples[37] of such rites include the Christian sacrament of baptism, the Jewish *bar mitzvah*, ceremonies for weddings or divorces. In his exploration of rites, van Gennep distinguishes three stages of a rite: separation,

[37] https://www.britannica.com/topic/rite-of-passage

transition and incorporation, referring to the middle stage as "liminal period" (qtd in Thomassen 3). Based on van Gennep's tripartite logic we can interpret the liminal period as a stage of being in-between separation and incorporation. Bjorn Thomassen provides the following definition of this notion:

> Liminality refers to moments or periods of transition during which the normal limits to thought, self-understanding and behaviour **are relaxed, opening the way to novelty and imagination,** construction and destruction. (1, emphasis added)

There seems to be a positive tone in Thomassen's explanation of the concept, especially because he mentions novelty and imagination, which imply that the liminality stage is a space of creativity and birth of new ideas. What is more, he believes that in this transition period one acts and contemplates one's identity in a stress-free manner. It seems as if the ones living through this period are voluntarily participating and embracing the transition. Agnes Horvath, on the other hand, points out that liminality entails uneasiness that is present in the transitional situations (qtd in Thomassen 2). This unsettling uncertainty can be expressed in hypothetical questions one might ask if one finds oneself in such a situation:

> Whenever previously existing borders or limits are lifted away or dissolve into fundamental doubt, the liminal presents itself with a challenge: how to cope with this uncertainty? Who can lead us out of here? How so? What is my own role in this chaos? (Thomassen 2)

The last question in particular resonates with the identity crisis the handmaids must be experiencing during the schooling at Rachel and Leah Centre, or already in their placements. They are a group that is caught in the chaos and attempts to make sense of the new reality.

I would like to connect the inquiries listed above by Thomassen to one specific question that Offred asks herself right before the ceremony at the Waterford house: "I would like to know what I did to deserve this" (E1, 00:26:05- 00:26:08). In this question two points in the timeline are connected: she is referring back to her previous life as an attempt to explain the current crisis. This confusion, fear and rejection is predicted by the regime. Right after the regime is established and women arrive at Rachel and Leah

Centre, Aunt Lydia addresses a classroom full of them (some still wearing regular clothes from the time before) with a reassurance: “Girls, mh… I know this must feel very strange. But ordinary is just what you’re used to. This may not seem ordinary to you right now, but after a time it will. This will become ordinary” (Aunt Lydia, E1, 00:19:29 - 00:20:30). Her words encode a crucial message - the regime plans to secure the matters as they are now, and that after a while, the women will get used to the situation they are in, and will eventually accept it. Her smiling face and calm voice is contrasted with the daunting music that accompanies her speech. This visual and aural dissonance represents anxiety the young women must feel hearing this. Their terror is very well reflected through a slow motion zoom-in into Offred’s face - one can almost see how the message slowly sinks in and terrifies her.

The government’s long term plan is to raise the generations of handmaids that will not remember how things used to be and therefore neither rebel nor question the regime’s right to treat them in this manner:

> You are the **transitional** generation, said Aunt Lydia. It is the hardest for you. We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make. […] For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts. She did not say: Because they will have no memories, of any other way. She said: Because they won’t want things they can’t have. (*THT* 127, emphasis added)

The word **transitional** encompasses the handmaids’ liminal existence and state of uncertainty as it is described by Thomassen. Offred, together with the rest of the girls from the first generation of handmaids, is not blessed with ignorance. This is exactly the reason why they are experiencing the liminal: they still recollect the life before, and they still perceive their identities as free women, wives, lovers and friends.

Trapped in this transitional space the women are vulnerable and exposed to various types of violence: they are not only the objects of violence inflicted upon them, but also the subjects who are expected to be violent with others, and also silent witnesses of violence performed as a spectacle. Violence becomes a tool that ‘breaks’ the disciples of the new regime into docile objects. One of the ways the regime is trying

(Figure 5: Schlöndorff 1:14:22)

to incorporate (the last stage of the rite) the handmaids into the new order is by forcing them to participate in punitive processes. The handmaids are gathered and forced to execute brutal punishments on the ones that fail to adhere to Gilead's laws. Those punishments take place in public staged executions (Figures 5 and 6).

Foucault refers to public executions as 'political rituals' that serve as the manifestation of power (47). From the Figures 5 and 6 taken from Schlöndorff's film version it is clear that the Woman Salvaging is the ideal occasion for Gilead to demonstrate its authority. The gathering resembles an official event, because every movement is strictly organised (for example, how the handmaids march in), and everyone has their designated place. The high angle shot chosen for the scene in Figure 6 functions as a zoom-out technique that allows the film viewers to see the entire arrangement of the event: the Aunts, who are the spokespeople of the state, are placed high up on the stage, facing the kneeling handmaids and the rest of the audience (daughters, Wives, Marthas, guards). The power manifestation in these scenes lies not in publicly hanging the criminal, but in orchestrating the ritual in such a way that forces

(Figure 6: Schlöndorff 1:15:03)

the handmaids themselves to punish the criminal, who happens to be one of their former members. In this manner the state makes the handmaids its 'partners in crime', and also demonstrate that their obedience and loyalty to the state should be stronger than the bond the handmaids create among each other[38]. Thus, not given much choice and securing their own temporary safety, together they pull a huge rope that is laid down between them till the accused dies. The significance of that rope is expressed by employing low angle shot, where the rope is the main object of the shot, and the marching handmaids stay in the background (Figure 5). To observe such a violent punishment is naturally a shocking experience, but what is more disturbing for the handmaids is that they themselves perform this act of brutal violence. According to Michael Kirwan, a group participating in aggression of "all against one" feels "unified […] in the action of expelling or destroying the victim" (38). As a liminal group, they are given duties that expose them to unknown experiences and identities. Within this group, during the ritual, they all become the murderers.

[38] A different case of public execution in TV series will be discussed further in the chapter *Scapegoating* on p. 51-55.

7. 3 Scapegoating

The Women Salvaging could also be interpreted by exploring another anthropological concept - the scapegoat mechanism. René Girard in his book *Violence and the Sacred* (1988) introduced this term in connection to his theories on interpersonal violence and social behaviour (Kirwan 38). According to Girard, violence is an integral part of society, and if it is not controlled or channelled, it might cause damage, so the scapegoating is a social process, which establishes and maintains order in society (qtd. in Kirwan 38). To achieve this order, the violence inherent in society has to be harnessed:

> […] any community that has fallen prey to violence or has been stricken by some overwhelming catastrophe hurls itself blindly into the search for a scapegoat. Its members instinctively seek an immediate and violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of. (Girard 84)

Exactly as Girard describes, Gilead's society is "stricken" by shocking changes and is ruled by violence. The difference between Girard's scenario and *The Handmaid's Tale* lies in the handmaids' powerlessness. They have no means to "seek an immediate and violent cure" (ibid.), but rather they are provided one from the state. Gilead is eager to do that because that 'cure' can secure order and obedience in the regime.

In the society governed by strict rules, the scapegoating creates space where temporarily its members are allowed to 'misbehave'. Michael Kirwan explains how certain events function as space to release accumulated violent energy:

> Prohibitions cordon off or 'quarantine' the objects or behaviour which are the potential sources of conflict. By contrast, ritual (especially sacrifice) is a momentary relaxation of taboos, whereby the community allows itself an 'acceptable' dosage of violence and chaos, much as a small dose of a virus may inoculate against the disease in its more virulent form. Myths are, typically, rationalisations or disguised accounts of an original act of violence, the truth of which the group needs to conceal or displace from itself. (Kirwan 39)

In my opinion, Kirwan's formulation "an 'acceptable' dosage of violence and chaos" (ibid.) captures the essence of public executions that are present in all of my objects of analysis. The staged punishment rituals could be interpreted as prearranged sacrificial rituals during which, through the scapegoating, the violent energy contained in the handmaids is released. The ventilation of that energy happens in a form that is still relatively contained and controlled: it is staged at a certain place, at a certain time, and it is regulated by signals[39].

The best example of the scapegoat mechanism can be found in the TV series adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, during the "Particicution"[40] (E1, 00:43:30 - 00:48:06). The handmaids are assembled and the (alleged) crime is announced: a man raped a handmaid, and the baby died, which means the criminal will receive the death penalty. The sequence of almost five minutes has a dual structure: the official event is taking place, but at the same time Offred is experiencing a personal intimate drama: right before the announcement Offred hears a rumour that Moira has died. Shocked and

(Figure 7: E1 00:46:31)

[39] In the movie the Aunts initiate the salvaging by giving verbal order via microphone, and in the TV series the salvaging begins and stops at a whistle blow.

[40] Aunt Lydia uses the ideological term invented by the regime, which is a blend of *participation* and *execution.* This is related the discussion on control over language in dystopian fiction in chapter *Genre Commentary,* p. 26.

grief stricken, Offred plunges herself towards the culprit and looses herself in a violent frenzy. The attack of the criminal becomes a way to ventilate her pain for losing Moira, and her anger towards the regime. The accused man is a scapegoat used to channel the emotions and tension that has been gathering in the handmaids. Those antagonistic emotions the handmaids have against the regime are redirected towards a scapegoat, and in this way the regime safeguards itself: once the handmaids release their anger towards a 'criminal', there is less chance the handmaids will in one way or another attack or harm a representative of a state. In this sequence a range of emotions is demonstrated: shock, grief, anger, rage, and finally - ecstatic dizziness that is expressed by Offred's empty stare, open mouth, and misbalanced movements. Once the frenzy is over her countenance resembles of one under the influence of drugs, or in a state of trance. After this intense experience her face even has a serene look. This is precisely how the scapegoat mechanism is supposed to work: to 'cure' the participants and provide them relief.

(Figure 8: E1 00:46:44)

This Women Salvaging is also a part of Schlöndorff's movie (1:16:21 - 1:17:34), where it can be seen that the scapegoat mechanism can work in two ways. The previously discussed scene from the TV series focuses on Offred's emotions and how they are ventilated by attacking the victim. The salvaging, in a twisted way, proves to be beneficial for her, because after the attack she seems calmer, more docile. This

emotional state of the handmaids is obviously favourable for the regime, because they cleanse themselves from the negative energies, therefore there is less chance that they would disobey or rebel. Another way how the scapegoating works can be seen in the movie version: it is a means for eliminating state enemies. After the savaging is complete, and delirious Janine walks away with a handful of bloody hair, Ofglen mentions to Offred that the victim was not a criminal, but a member of the resistance. So the salvaging against this particular victim was arranged by the state, because he had to be eliminated from the society. He was accused of false crimes and conveniently turned into a scapegoat.

From the examples above the scapegoat mechanism can be considered successful, because the handmaids, who are the objects of violence themselves are also easily manipulated into participating in violence. The state channels their anger towards a victim the state choses. However, there is one instance that demonstrates the failure of this manipulative method. It is the scene of Janine's planned execution in the final episode *The Night* of the first season of TV series (E 10, 00:42:51 - 00:50:56). This plot element is an addition introduced by the TV series creators, therefore non-existent in the novel nor the movie.

The particicution begins as the Woman Salvaging described previously: the handmaids are gathered outside in a park, Aunt Lydia's speech follows, then the girls have to form a circle and finally the alleged criminal is brought in. In the 'ideal' scenario the execution should work the way Robert Buch describes - as a beneficial purgative experience for the handmaids:

> The ultimate target of the procedure [public execution] is the audience: the condemned person's repentance and dignified acceptance of death aims at arousing the public's compassion; suffering is supposed to invoke the pain of Christian martyrs, leading to a form of catharsis on the part of the spectators. (Buch 33, original emphasis)

Buch refers to 'classic' execution, where the audience is looking at someone before or during the execution. Janine's execution, however, is a particular one, because the audience is also the executor. The women gathered around Janine are not supposed to be

passive witnesses of the 'state justice' being done - they are required to execute that 'justice'. So, it is not Janine's repentance that evokes compassion or sympathy, but the fact that she is one of them - another handmaid. The handmaids demonstrate solidarity with each other and with the convicted. In this scene the spectator's role is blended with that of the executor, which results in resistance against the state's order. In other words, the mechanism of scapegoating backfires and produces the opposite of the anticipated result. Janine's execution is a hopeful example of resistance and a proof that the handmaids as a liminal group, do not reach incorporation, which is, according to van Gennep, the rite's final stage (qtd in Thomassen 3).

The execution is challenging not only for the audience but also for Aunt Lydia, who represents the state. The tension in the sequence begins to rise already while she delivers her speech:

> Good morning, girls. Well… Look at you. My special girls. So beautiful. Look at this day. The sky… God's world is full of miracles, isn't it girls? […] Yes… There is no greater miracle than the miracle of life. The miracle of a child. And there is no greater sin than harming a child. Putting a child in danger. Am I correct, girls? […] Now up. Wings. Come forward, please. Quick quick, you know what to do. Don't be picky, just take one. Watch the space between you. There's enough for everyone. […] Ofdaniel has been convicted of endangering a child. The punishment for that crime is death by stoning[41]. I know how difficult this is, girl. I do. But God gives us blessings, and he gives us challenges. The price of his love is sometimes high. But it must be paid. Now… You all know what to do. When I blow the whistle, you are free to begin. (E 10, 00:43:00 - 00:46:10)

This rather short excerpt represents a 3-minute speech, in which the flow of her utterance is uneven, interrupted by pauses that indicate doubt and inner struggle[42]. In her statement instead of moving straight to the main point, which is the criminal and her crime, Aunt Lydia takes her time and engages in the ideological discourse, as if she needs to convince herself that what is about to happen is just. This seems to indicate that

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[41] Janine, or Ofdaniel, according to her second placement, runs away and kidnaps her daughter from Putnam's household. She attempts to jump off a bridge together with her child in disappointment that Putnam did not keep his promise to be a family. This is how Putnam's abusive behaviour with his handmaid is revealed and later punished by amputating his hand (see Episode 9, *The Bridge*).

[42] Through the TV series Aunt Lydia is shown to favour Janine, even though, paradoxically, Janine's eye was removed under Aunt Lydia's orders. The scene before the ball for the Ambassador Castillo indicates Aunt Lydia's special attachment to Janine (E6, 00:28:54 - 00:30:00).

even for her the upcoming ordeal might be reaching the limits of her ideological beliefs. After Janine is lead into the centre of the circle, Aunt Lydia's close-up shot reveals her tears, and her trembling voice indicates that she is struggling to deliver the final verdict.

Aunt Lydia's speech causes verbal and physical resistance against the mechanism of public execution. Her last sentence before the whistle blow - "When I blow the whistle, you are free to begin (ibid.) - is ironic because it sounds as if it were up to the handmaids' decision when Janine will die. The handmaids are not *free* by default, and they are asked to do something that goes against the concept of freedom, not to mention their moral beliefs. Janine's audience and the executors are the same people, and they have to fight against the task that is given to them. What makes this execution impossible to complete is the fact that Janine is also the handmaid, and she represents the same miserable status the rest of them have. The whole arrangement seems unbelievable to them. Ofglen's[43] comment to this 'assignment' expresses its absurdity: "Aunt Lydia, come on, we can't do this. […] Seriously? Guys, this is insane" (E10, 0:46:31 - 00:46:31). The second Ofglen's "come on" attempts to appeal to Aunt Lydia's common sense, and also expresses her disbelief in the request. Her exclamation sounds as if an actress were protesting to stage directors' exaggerated ideas, stressing that there are limits to how 'insane' the spectacle could be. Ofglen speaks to and for the rest of the stupefied handmaids when she addresses them with "Guys, this is insane". Her words are the first signs of the resistance, for which she is brutally hit by one of the guards (see Figure 9) and dragged away.

Once the order is disturbed by Ofglen and she is removed from the scene, Offred takes over the resistance into her hands almost literally. One of the most powerful images in Janine's failed execution is Offred's dramatic stone dropping moment (Figure 10). Offred releases from her hand the stone, that was meant to be the tool of the execution, and its fall is shot in slow motion. The fall of the stone seems even slower because it is falling together with light snowflakes. This slow-motion shot captures the climatic point of tension that has been gathering from the beginning of the sequence. It

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[43] In the TV series Ofglen is a name given to two different characters: the first one is the one that undergoes the clitoridectomy (played by Alexis Bledel), the second one is her replacement (Tattiawna Jones). In this final episode I refer to the second Ofglen, played by Tattiawna Jones.

(Figure 9: E10, 00:46:46)

(Figure 10: E10, 00:48:41)

is the moment when Offred makes a choice and acts. As an individual she might be condemned and punished for such subversion. But what follows after her brave act saves the entire group of the handmaids. One by one the handmaids step forward and release their stones disobediently saying “I’m sorry, Aunt Lydia” (E10, 00:48:53 - 00:49:36), assuming that Aunt Lydia will not allow the guards to beat them all. Their

resistance resembles the crowd's protests against public executions in the nineteenth century discussed by Foucault:

> Preventing an execution that was regarded as unjust, snatching a condemned man from the hands of the executioner, obtaining his pardon by force, possibly pursuing and assaulting the executioners, in any case abusing the judges and causing an uproar against the sentence - all this formed part of the popular practices that invested, traversed and often overturned the ritual of the public execution. (Foucault 59,60)

Since a public execution can be considered a manifestation of power, the failure to execute the planned punishment diminishes the state's authority. In Janine's case, the subversion of the regime is even stronger than in 'actual' public executions of the past, because the handmaids who are thought to be powerless and scared, and who are forced to perform the execution rebel against all odds fearlessly. In this sequence the state loses its control not only over the 'criminal', but over the 'audience-executors'.

In *The Night* episode the audience witnesses one of the most brutal images in the whole TV series – an individual on the verge of complete destruction. Janine is presented as someone deranged, with her hair loose and messy[44], with a scared and confused look, and her empty scarred eye socked reminding of previous brutal punishments she received. She evokes an image of someone who is already destroyed as an individual and now used as an object to spread fear and suffering among the rest of the handmaids. Even Janine's only escape to freedom, her attempted suicide has been prevented. She is an example of how many various stages of suffering can be imposed on a person by a violent state. The regime stages her last punishment with intention to manifest supreme power by making a group of friends kill one of them. However, the handmaids fail to fulfil their assigned roles. When a guard hits Ofgen and she falls, Janine shows concern by leaning towards her to see how she is, which is an honest impulsive gesture and natural reaction to a violent act. This is a very moving moment, because it shows their solidarity, and that as a group they are in this staged theatre together. Their march home after the failed execution is a symbol of their unity and

[44] She is presented as a mad woman, similarly to how Offred is depicted during her confinement in her room (see Figure 12, p. 59).

(Figure 11: E10, 00:51:40)

solidarity (Figure 11). The handmaids are lined up in pairs and their synchronised steps evoke associations with how an army marches. They walk so close to each other that their robes move together and blend in one red object, one united mass. It makes them look bright in the empty and grey street. They resemble a resistance group, not obedient objects any longer. The misfortune of one of the handmaids united them and showed them that together they have some leverage. This scene is one of the last ones in whole TV series, which may hint at the possible resistance that will develop in the upcoming season 2.

Even though Janine's failed execution proves that as a group the handmaids can have agency and fight back, when isolated in the households they are even more vulnerable in their liminal state. Here I would like to return to van Gennep and his concept of liminality discussed in the previous chapter: the fact that the handmaids are 'stuck' in the state of transition between the old and the new order. As the Figure 11 above shows, the handmaids seem strong when they march in a group, but sooner or later they have to leave the 'army' and turn to their households individually. The moment they are alone they become objects of manipulation. One of the instances in which the incorporation (the third stage of rite of passage) of a handmaid into the new

paradigm of thought is almost successful is Offred's and the Ambassador Castillo's meeting[45] (E6, 00:10:19 - 00:13:19). The Mexican Ambassador Ms. Castillo and her assistant Mr. Flores stand side by side when they are introduced to Offred, who turns and greets the assistant as the Ambassador. When the Commander corrects her, her face shows astonishment at the fact that in the room full of men it is Ms Castillo who is the most important person. Her facial expression gives Offred out: she automatically thought that the man was the Ambassador, which indicated that after a rather short time of being brainwashed by Gilead's ideology Offred adapted and succumbed to sexist patterns of thought. After living in the society where men rule and women are even forbidden to read, it becomes 'ordinary' (as Aunt Lydia predicted it would) that such a high political position could not be occupied by a female member of society. At this very moment Offred temporarily loses her previous identity and beliefs, and behaves as a dutiful handmaid. However, later in the sequence there is a breaking point when the Ambassador asks her whether she is happy as a handmaid. The camera changes to slow motion immediately after the question, and it creates a sensation as if time has stopped. There is a close-up shot of Offred wringing her hands so hard that her knuckles turn white, which expressed the tension she feels inside, and the self-control she has to demonstrate. The following close-up shot focuses on her mouth to draw even more attention to the significance of the words that will come out of it. This question as if wakes Offred up and brings her back to the harsh reality, where she has no choice to speak the truth.

For the handmaids the existence in transition, or liminality, is related to their own identity, and the changes that identity has to face. Their identity crisis is closely related to them being in a precarious position. Not only they no longer know who they are, but they are tormented by not knowing what can be done to them, how different

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[45] This scene is an interpretation and adaptation of one minor event in the book: there is a foreign delegation mentioned, as Offred and her shopping partner Ofglen meets a group of Japanese tourists who are visiting the town and want to take their pictures (*THT* 38). The TV series episode with the Ambassador Castillo is a great example of expanding the 'original' material. The TV series creators take just few sentences from the novel and use the opportunity to create a politically themed episode that widens the story's territory. This addition is possible with the TV series formal due to longer screen time. What is more, it adds complexity to the plot: Ambassador's assistant secretly delivers Offred's message to Luke who is in Canada, so it has implications for the upcoming second season and raises few questions: is there a resistance movement, who will lead it, will Offred be reunited with Luke or Nick? The Japanese delegation episode from the novel is not adapted or in any other way reflected in Schlöndorff's movie. This is a proof that the movie format, in comparison to the TV series, lacks space and therefore its creative possibilities are limited when it comes to the process of adaptation.

social groups can treat them. The definition of precarious is “vulnerable to the will or decision of others” (*OED*), which resonates too well with state the handmaids find themselves in. Offred is stripped off all her rights and freedoms, and is imprisoned in a rigid system. As if that was not terrible enough, she is caught up in a double bind: she is constantly forced to break the rules and thus is exposed to even more dangerous within the system. One of the best examples of double bind situations is when the Commander asks Offred to meet him in his office or join him in Jezebel's club, which is strictly against Gilead’s rules. Another instance of a double bind is when Serena orders Offred to have intercourse with Nick, for which she could be condemned to death. In the upcoming chapters, I will look into these examples of being caught between two fires in more detail.

8. Individual Violence

8.1 Body Confined and Marked

In Atwood’s novel, the initial violation of freedom and expression of violence happens when the body is captured and confined. After Rachel and Leah Centre training, the handmaids are appointed to ‘their’ Commanders’ houses where they are supposed to take part in each household’s life as a family member. However, for them “the circumstances have been reduced”, and they are spatially limited (*THT* 18). The novels second chapter begins with a meticulous description of Offred’s room, which lists the items and her relationship to them. For example, the narrator draws the reader’s attention to a single bed where nothing but sleep or no sleep takes place. This alludes to an association one makes between bed and sexual intimacy, which is then discarded, indicating that Offred is not allowed any company. What is more, it is pointed out that she cannot open the window properly, and that the glass is “shatterproof” (*THT* 17). And even though the door of the room closes well, what Offred is describing, is a prison cell.

In just society to be imprisoned means to be punished for something. Yet the handmaids committed no crime, except that they are females who are still fertile. Their bodies define their situation, and because of their bodies, they are captives of the

regime. Imprisonment, apart from a loss of liberty, also entails punishing the body by "rationing of food, sexual deprivation, corporal punishment, solitary confinement" (Foucault 16). The handmaids' bodies become the space for the regime to execute its purposes, as well as its power. Before I move on to examples of brutality, such as rape and torture, I would like to begin the discussion of violence over the body by discussing confinement and restriction of movement as one of its basic forms.

The TV series adaptation in comparison to the movie[46] depicts Offred as a prisoner on many different levels. Her room is located at the end of a long dark corridor on the top floor. It is the most remote corner of the house, where the handmaid is hidden away from the other household members, especially from the Commander's wife Serena. When Offred fails to fall pregnant, Serena drags her up the stairs and orders her not to leave the room (E3, 00:48:05-00:48:43). Her room becomes a solitary cell that tests the heroine's limits.

(Figure 12: E4, 00:02:23)

In Figure 12 Offred is pictured kneeling on the floor in front of the window, trying to open the closed blinds. She is shown from behind, positioned in the centre of the shot,

[46] The movie does not explore the theme of confinement in great depth. On the contrary, Offred is allowed to move from the household back to the Red Centre on the nights the Commander is not at home.

right in the middle of the window where the hazy beams of light enter the room through the gap in the blinds. This image fully expresses her desperation to escape. What is more, Offred's messy hair and loose white nightgown evoke an association with an asylum inmate. From her voice-over, we know she has been 'locked up' in the room for almost two weeks (E4). At this point, it is not only her body but also her mind that is being tortured.

The longer Offred stays at the Commander's home, the more restricted her existence becomes. From being imprisoned in stranger's house to being confined in one room, Offred's spatial freedom shrinks so much so that she finds herself hiding in her wardrobe (E4, 00:04:06 - 00:04:49). There, lying on the floor Offred notices an engraved writing on the wall. This mark, left by the previous handmaid, confirms Offred's prisoner's identity since it evokes an image of prisoners writing or scratching the days off on their cell's walls. For Offred, the sense of her confinement culminates in Episode 8 when Serena brings her a very symbolic present - a music box. She sees the little dancing figure as a representation of her status in the household: "A girl, trapped in a box. She only dances when someone else opens the lid. When someone else winds her up" (E8, 00:47:22 - 00:47:39). The protagonist places the doll in her room, and it stands there as a sinister object reminding her what she is. However, the presence of the doll seems to stir the rebellious spirit in Offred. The camera slowly moves away from the dancing doll on the windowsill to the opposite side of the room, where Offred is carving her own writing in the cupboard, which reads "You are not alone" (E8, 00:47:22 - 00:48:21). The next shot shows Offred staring at the other side of the room. The camera starts zooming out from her face showing her body leaning against the cupboard back wall, framed by hanging red dresses. These camera movements (first, from the doll to Offred, then - back to the doll) create an illusion that the doll and Offred are staring back at each other, comparing each other's statuses. The tension between the toy and the 'living doll' is heightened by the monotonous music that is coming from the box. The same tune played over and over again creates a hypnotic illusion: if one listened to it for too long, one might lose one's mind. The combination of that sound and Offred's silent figure staring from the wardrobe raises a question: whether Offred is strong enough to stay sane in the given circumstances.

The regime's control over the body and its freedom does not end in territorial confinement. Since the handmaids are assigned daily routines such as shopping, they have to leave their rooms at some point. The rulers of Gilead make sure that on those occasions their bodies are encaged in rigorously concealing costumes:

> Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. The skirt is ankle-length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, the sleeves are full. The white wings too are prescribed issue: they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen. (*THT* 18)

The handmaids' attire is designed to cover their bodies completely, as well as restrict their vision. However, there is a contradiction between the desire to make them invisible, and the intense colour of their dress. In nature and civil surroundings, red colour signals danger, for example, poisonous berries or red traffic lights. It is a colour that draws immediate attention. In Western Culture, it is commonly accepted that red symbolises blood, passion and love. In *The Handmaid's Tale* this shade can be directly related to the menstrual blood, which indicates that a woman is of a childbearing age, and is still fertile. Therefore, it could be interpreted that the handmaids' dresses symbolise the danger the society faces - it is on the verge of human extinction. The red gown also means that the handmaids are the only ones that can prevent such an outcome. This 'mission' makes them the most precious members of society, and thus they have to be easily noticeable and controlled.

But being 'precious' does not mean they are given any privileges. On the contrary, a parallel could be drawn between handmaids' costumes and the clothes used for prisoners:

> These convicts, distinguished by their 'infamous dress' and shaved heads, "were brought before the public. […] they were encumbered with iron collards and chains to which bombshells were attached, to be dragged along while they performed their **degrading** service, **under the eyes** of **keepers armed** with swords, blunderbusses, and other weapons of destruction. (Robert Vaux qtd in Foucault 8, emphasis added)

This vivid description of the prisoners working in public in the 18th century can be related to the image of the handmaids walking in the streets of Gilead with their crimson dresses. The phrase from the quotation above -'Under the eyes' - resonates too well with

the regime's slogan "Under his Eye", meaning that the handmaids are constantly being watched, and red colour suits the purpose of constant surveillance. What is more, both TV series and Schlöndorff's film depict the streets being patrolled by the black-dressed 'armed keepers' at all times. The only difference between the prisoners Foucault mentions and the handmaids is that the service the latter provide to the state in state's ideology is not presented as 'degrading', but as a honourable duty of which the handmaids should be proud.

The colour-coded 'uniforms' symbolise the regime's control and watchfulness over the handmaids. It is also a sign of how few choices they have. Offred despises her attire; she sees herself as "a parody of something, some fairytale figure in a red cloak"[47] (*THT* 19). Her attitude towards the clothes she has to wear is well sustained in the TV series adaptation. After her evening attire (the same red dress she always wears) has been approved by the Commander's wife, Offred's comment to her own looks is charged with sarcasm: "Red's my colour" (E6, 00:05:37 - 00:05:40). Serena perfectly knows that as a handmaid, Offred has no right to choose her own clothes, and red is her only option, whether it suits her or not. This deprivation of choice in the matter of clothing represents all the other choices Offred no longer has. What is important in this scene is that she is not afraid to risk and express her sarcastic attitude towards the wife. It is one of the few liberties left to her, and she is not afraid to use it. At this point of the story Offred has been living in the household for sometime, and she is aware that with this comment to Serena she is not stepping over the line. For Offred it is a chance to ironically express her opinion about something that has been decided for her. A similar ironic exchange takes place a few minutes later in the same episode, when Nick tells her she looks pretty. Offred returns his compliment with a retort: "I wore it just for you" (E6, 00:09:03 -00:09:11), which mocks his gallantry, because both of them know that Offred has no choice in her clothes. What is more, knowing that they spent a secret night together, and from now on will become lovers, Offred's answer gains another level of meaning. It refers to the times before the regime, when women had the freedom to choose their clothes, and in this way visually stimulate and please their lovers. In

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[47] This is a clear reference to the main character of the *Little Red Riding Hood.* It evokes some of the sexual interpretations of the fairytale that claim the story to symbolise rape and abduction. See *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* by Catherine Orenstein.

given circumstances her red gown stands as a constant reminder that she no longer has that freedom. Her dress clearly indicates that her only purpose is to belong to the household as a potential bearer of children, deprived of any sexual or romantic relationships.

The government's issued dresses affect not only the handmaids but the entire female population in Gilead. The episode six, titled *A Woman' Place*, demonstrates the shift that takes place in the wives' clothing before and after the regime. Serena's classic pink coat and skirt together with high-heel shoes are being discarded as trash once the Republic of Gilead in established (E6, 00:38:30 - 00:40:20). This is what she used to wear in the past when it was still possible for her to work and be active in public affairs. What substitutes the previous piece is a collection of conservative long dresses in minimalistic cut and in all shades of turquoise. This change of attire symbolises much bigger changes for Serena. Her own book is placed on the top of her colourful clothes ready to be thrown away. It is a symbol that represents what Serena could do in the past, and also foreshadows the future, where she will not be allowed to ever read anything. With her new green dress, Serena begins her role of a housewife. While she arranges her wardrobe, the Commander enters the room with his new uniform, ready to leave for an important meeting. His appearance in this scene creates a contrast between their new positions: him, as a senior ruler of the state on his way to work, her - as a docile wife, staying in and trying to create a harmonious home.

Even though wives possess a high status in Gilead's society, their colour-coded attire could be seen as degrading as the one for the handmaids. Despite the fact that the two adaptations slightly differ in colour choices for the wives (Schlöndorff's movie sustains the novel's version of blue, while Miller's series dress wives in turquoise green), what matters is that both shades are sharply contrasted to the red colour of the handmaids. While red symbolises menstrual blood, hence the possibility to bring a new life to the world, turquoise green and blue are cold shades that could be interpreted as symbols of emptiness and infertility. The wives' inability to conceive is thus visually distinguished as much as the handmaids' fertility is with the crimson red. There exists an asymmetry in gender system because the female part of the society is colour coded and defined by their ability to reproduce, whereas the male part stays colourless, thus

the difference between fertile and infertile men is hidden behind the common black outfits. All the Commanders, drivers and guardians are wearing dark colours. This visual inequality represents the inequality when it comes to sharing responsibility for fertility. In Gilead, only the women are the ones who are divided into colour groups according to their reproductive abilities, while the word "sterile" for a man is a taboo (*THT* 70).

The misbalance between male and female clothing in Gilead is not an innovative element after all. It only exaggerates something that has always been present in society. If one imagines a picture of any official social gathering in the contemporary Western society, it is certain that all men would be wearing dark suits, whereas women would be clothed in a variety of styles, cuts and colours. So the difference between colour coded clothes in the past (from the story's timeline) and in the present Gilead is that the colours are assigned to women based on their fertility, and the colourful dresses of the past varied based on women's choice of self-expression or wish to indulge in diverse roles those clothes implied. It is like the models from the old fashion magazines Offred contemplates:

> They dealt with transformations; they suggested an endless series of possibilities, extending like the reflections in two mirrors set facing one another, stretching on, replica after replica, to the vanishing point. They suggested one adventure after another, one wardrobe after another, one improvement after another. They suggested rejuvenation, pain overcome and transcended, endless love. The real promise in them was immortality. (*THT* 165)

The regime has destroyed all the women's magazines as the objects of obscene past, full of fantasies and illusions they created. The new rulers disapprove of women wanting anything else[48] than to "fulfil their biological destinies" (Commander, E5, 00:31:23 - 00:31:30). However, the description of the magazines and their purpose is so familiar to what we see in the Jezebels, the secret club for the government officers. The diversity and possibility from the women's magazines is embodied in the Jezebels's visual masquerade:

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[48] In the new order the regime creates woman's sexuality or desire is non-existent: "Arousal and orgasm are no longer thought necessary; they would be a symptom of frivolity merely, like jazz garters or beauty spots: superfluous distractions for the light minded. Outdated" (*THT* 105). In this retrospective comment about the ceremony Offred stresses the desexualisation of the sex act. This paradoxical attempt to go against the nature needs to be compensated somewhere, and that is the Jezebels club.

> Some of them [women, JS] have on outfits like mine, feathers and glister, cut high up the thighs, low over the breasts. Some are in olden-days lingerie, shortie nightgowns, baby-doll pyjamas, the occasional see-through negligée. Some are in bathing suits, one-piece or bikini; […]. Some are in jogging shorts and sun halters, some in exercise costumes like the ones they used to show on television, body-tight, with knitted pastel leg warmers. There are even a few in cheerleaders' outfits, little pleated skirts, outsized letters across the chest. […] All wear make-up, […], their eyes look too big to me, too dark and shimmering, their mouths too red, too wet, blood-dipped and glistening; or, on the other hand, too clownish. (*THT* 246, 247)

The Jezebel's club represents the ultimate collection of male fantasies that are created by clothes. The prostitutes' wearing different outfits create the illusion of different types of woman: a voluptuous lover in negligée, or a naive schoolgirl in a cheerleader's skirt. While women in Gilead are forbidden to choose their own daily clothes, and their fashion magazines have been burned, the privileged amongst men are allowed to indulge in illegal prostitution, served by slaves who embody their fantasies. While clubs like that used to be accessible to any male citizen in the past, in Gilead, however, such luxury is possible only for the elite. Therefore the exclusivity of this place creates an intoxicating aura of power. It is ironic because the male rulers of Gilead are the ones who have forbidden the magazines, but they desire the exact same diversity and fantasy, so they recreate it in the exaggerated version of the past in their club.

Both Schlöndorff's and Miller include the Jezebel's episode in their versions of *The Handmaid's Tale.* The TV series, in addition to all the prostitutes' outfits, create one costume that looks like a provocative version of the handmaid's dress (see Figure 13). The girl wears a white cap and a loose red robe that reveals her naked shoulders and breasts. Later in the night, while Offred wanders the corridors of the hotel, she witnesses an intercourse between a man and two prostitutes, one of whom is wearing the fake handmaid's costume, and the other one is dressed in green shade gown, which resembles the typical wife's attire (E8, 00:35:14 - 00:35:23). The scene appears to be a pornographic version of the monthly ceremony: the man stands in front of the bed, but, contrary to the ceremony, where he performs the sexual act while the handmaid lies down in between wife's knees, in this scenario he is penetrating her from behind while 'the handmaid' is kissing and caressing 'the wife'. It reveals the hypocrisy of the Gilead's patriarchal theocratic regime - the statesmen are preaching dogmas they later

(Figure 13: E8, 00:22:42)

disgrace in blasphemous behaviour. The handmaid and the wive, in the context of the nightclub, become the characters with their distinctive colour costumes, and their purpose is to embody yet another male fantasy.

When the restriction of freedom by confinement or garment reaches its limits, the regime employs methods that get even closer to the body. Should the handmaids be lined up naked, their bodies have to carry a visible mark that shows who they are and to whom they belong. In the novel, four digits are tattooed on the handmaid's ankles (*THT*, 75). I assume these numbers refer to a general registry of the handmaids and serve as a passport number by which the regime can maintain filing system with all necessary information for each number, such as background history, placements, births or miscarriages. The Schlöndorff's movie 'accessorises' the captured future handmaids with an unremovable numbered bracelet that contains a tracking chip, and is used to swipe at the point of entree and exist at home or Rachel and Leah Centre (00:11:17 - 00:11:29). The bracelet serves as a visual marker as well as a means to control and surveil the handmaids' movements.

Miller's TV version chooses a more brutal and intrusive way of marking the bodies - the handmaid's ear is pierced with a numbered earmark (E10, 00:04:20 - 00:05:40). In the sequence, June (at that point of the story she has not yet been given her new name) has no clue what is going to happened to her in that dark room into which she has been lead. She is seated on a chair and surrounded by the Aunts' brown uniforms like a trapped animal. The camera captures June's body from above, showing her from the Aunts' eye level, the way they would see her, circling above her head. This camera angle creates a tense atmosphere and emphasises June's inability to escape. She looks like an animal trapped in a corner. Aunt Lydia's nonchalant comment gives the captive a hint of the procedure's purpose: "This will be painful, I'm sorry to say. But you are so very precious, we wouldn't want to lose you" (E10, 00:04:55 - 00:05:06). What the regime wants is to make sure their "natural resource" is visually marked and cannot leave 'their pastures' (*THT* 75). The scene above could be interpreted from the eco-feministic point of view because the paradigm views women and nature as equal victims of destructive masculine power systems (Mies, Shiva 15). The handmaids' earmarks evoke an association with cattle branding when the farmers tag their livestock with an earring so that the property bears the owner's sign and thus can be controlled.

8. 2 Body Punished and Tortured

Physical punishment and torture are one of the most visual examples of violence in *The Handmaid's Tale*. And even though the story is set in the future, the Republic of Gilead's punitive system is in no way modern or sophisticated. On the contrary, its methods resemble those of the past. In his discussion of how the ways of punishment changed in the nineteenth century, Foucault emphasises the shift from physical punishment to less brutal methods: "The old partners of the spectacle of punishment, the body and the blood, gave away. […] The apparatus of punitive justice must now bite into this bodiless reality" (Foucault 16,17). The "bodiless reality" stands for focusing on the spirit of the criminal: "The expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations (Foucault 16)". Enlightenment philosophers during the eighteenth century

were considering the way of moving from corporal punishments to those that "should strike the soul rather than the body" (Mably qtd in Foucault 16). The complete opposite is witnessed in *The Handmaid's Tale* because the 'criminals' have to suffer both confinement and the physical punishments. The punitive system seems to be reversed to the brutality of middle ages. But there is one more element added to it: the violent punishments are delivered in official institutions, under surgical precision and state's supervision.

The penal system in *The Handmaid's Tale* strikes the bodies of the handmaids for the 'crimes' of their souls. Since the body is already spatially confined and robed, the regime moves to the extreme ways of possession by physically removing or damaging the parts of the body:

> It was the feet they'd do, for a first offence. They used steal cables, frayed at the ends. After that the hands. They didn't care what they did to your feet and hands, even if was permanent. Remember, said Aunt Lydia. For our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential (*THT* 102).

The most essential parts of their bodies are their reproductive organs, and as long as those are kept from harm, the rest of the body can be mutilated and tortured. What is being punished is a transgression against ideology in various forms: the verbal expression of disagreement, running away or even a minor disobedience. Anything that is more serious, for example, reading, would cost "a hand cut off, on the third conviction" (*THT* 287). The body becomes a mirror of that transgression. The punishments have to be carried openly and be visually accessible to others so that various mutilations would serve as warnings to other potential rebels.

The brutal punishments described in the novel have a potentiality for screen adaptations: it is a source of 'raw material'. However, the violence inflicted upon a body in the form of a punishment is demonstrated with reservations in Schlöndorff's movie. There are only two scenes that refer to physical mutilation: one example is when a girl is shown with bleeding feet in Rachel and Leah Centre's kitchen (00:12:27 - 00:12:54), and the other instance is Moira, wearing gloves that partly cover her damaged fingers (1:27:08 - 1:27:19). In terms of body as an object of violence, it seems that the movie

adaptation is more oriented towards demonstrating the sexual abuse and public punishments[49].

Contrary to the film, the creative team of the TV series extends the physical violence present in the novel by introducing more examples of bodily mutilation in the show. One of the most striking cases is the one of Janine and the removal of her eye. Janine is punished for mocking Aunt Lydia's ideological discourse in the classroom. Moira explains the punishment to June when Janine is brought back crying to the sleeping hall: "If my right eye offends thee, pluck it out" (E1, 00:21:54 - 00:21:59). This quote is a biblical reference which means that losing a part of your body might prevent you from further sinning: "If if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that why whole body should be cast into hell" (*The Bible*, Matthew 5:29). So even though Janine's mouth offended the regime, the mouth was expressing her critical *view*, therefore the eye was symbolically removed. Throughout the whole show the consequences of Janine's mutilation are explicitly shown to the audience: her open scar in the place of where her right eye used to be stares back at the viewers. Since she is one of the main characters in this adaptation, her face becomes a constant reminder of the barbarian methods the regime uses.

(Figure 14: E6, 00:26:29)

[49] A detailed analysis of sexually violent images in the movie will be discussed in the chapter *Defiling the Body from within: Rape* and public executions will be discussed in chapter *Scapegoating*.

The cruelty practised in the regime is best demonstrated in the scene where the handmaids are about to attend a trade union event (E6, 00:27:20 - 00:28:40). Serena requests some of the girls, “the damaged ones”, to be removed from the group (ibid.). Aunt Lydia calls their fake names so that they come forward: one girl bears a burning mark from an iron, two of them miss their right eye, another girl’s face and neck are covered in cutting marks, and one girl is missing a limb. While some of the punishments are officially approved, the others, for example, burning with iron and cutting, are the obvious signs of sadistic behaviour towards handmaids exercised either by Wives, Commander or Aunts. This scene reveals how hypocritical the system is: it applies a certain set of rules to control the handmaids, but it is not willing to expose the results of that control to the foreign guests. In this scene, Serena is political, whereas Aunt Lydia is ideological. Aunt Lydia is rooting for the girls, whereas Serena is concerned with Gilead’s image in the international context. Serena knows that if they want to be successful in this trade deal, they need to present only the positive sides of the regime. She knows they need to wash the blood away (Figure 15) from the walls before the foreign guests arrive.

(Figure 15: E6 00:03:07)

Another case of physical mutilation presented in the TV series is the clitoridectomy performed on Ofglen. She suffers this punishment because she is discovered to be having an affair with a Martha[50]. While the latter is hanged in front of

[50] A female household servant.

her eyes, Ofglen, since she is still a fertile woman, and thus an important resource for Gilead, is spared her life. However, before she is moved to another household, she undergoes a surgery (E3, 00:49:18 - 00:51:39). The audience is kept in suspense regarding the nature of the operation until Ofglen stands up from her bed and slowly lifts up her nightgown. Instead of underwear, she finds a large bandage that covers her genitals. The white patch could be interpreted as a symbol of emptiness, a place irreversibly deprived of physical satisfaction. Ofglen is standing in the room surrounded by blinding whiteness. The sterility of the hospital is contrasted to the object that has been removed. The white walls and fluorescent lights represent the coldness of the regime that is capable of intervening with one's body and surgically removing the organ with the exclusive function to provide pleasure. Aunt Lydia's sarcastic comment "But things will be so much easier for you now. You won't want what you cannot have" makes Ofglen realise what has been done to her (ibid.). The rock music in combination with a close up of Ofglen's face mirrors the shock and horrific realisation that from now on she is deprived of sexual pleasure for the rest of her life. At first her eyes are wandering in disbelief, then one can recognise rage and anger in her glance, which is later expressed by a hateful cry towards the door through which Aunt Lydia has left.

This scene creates a foreboding effect because the physical punishment is ordered by the regime, and performed officially by the doctors in the hospital. The involvement of institutions makes the punishments legal, and the ones who perform them - unaccountable. There are no torture rooms full of metal tools, and we do not see Ofglen suffering during the procedure. What is being shown is the power the regime has over one's body by overtaking legal and medical establishments under its control. The show includes one scene where one surgery (the removal of the Commander Putnam's hand as a punishment for seducing Janine) is explicitly demonstrated (E10, 00:29:59 - 00:30:57). In this quite disturbing scene the audience witnesses the precision of the surgeons: the Commander's hand is being marked for the cut, then the scalpel is slowly applied to the skin, which then is followed by scissors cutting the flesh and finally, a surgical saw used for cutting the bone. The scene culminates with the removal of the hand, and the thump sound when it is dumped on a steel tray. This is the only case of physical mutilation that is shown in detail, and without any censorship. The reason could be that the creators wanted to satisfy the audiences by at least one fair punishment

that is applied to an official of the state. For my research purposes the scene is important because it represents a specific type of violence that is present throughout the story's adaptation: it lacks the entertaining element that is often present in violent movies, but it is utterly shocking in its sterile and pristine aesthetics.

8.3 Defiling the Body from within: Rape

When the physical 'shell' the handmaids wear has been marked and mutilated, there are still other ways to deprive them of freedom and dignity. The highest degree of possession and control is the physical intrusion to their bodies through rape. Gina Messina-Dysert critically reviews definitions of rape from various legal systems worldwide, and provides her own interpretation of the act:

> […] rape must be understood as the vaginal, anal, or oral penetration of any person, including spouses, children, other family members, and acquaintances, with any body part or object, without consent. In addition, it must be recognised that in order to consent, one cannot be coerced, threatened, or be under the influence of any substance. Thus, submission or non- resistance do not equate to consent (64).

The story of *The Handmaid's Tale* revolves around exactly this type of violence – the rape of young women. As it was discussed previously, according to the theocratic ideology that dominates in Gilead, the handmaids are entirely defined by their reproductive abilities - their main purpose of existence is to conceive and bear children. Due to their reproductive abilities they are destined to undergo the act of sexual intercourse that is arranged by the state and is systemic. It is such an unthinkable act that even Offred herself is considering how she should call it:

> My read skirt is hitched up to my waist, though not higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. **Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for.** There wasn't a lot of choices but there was some, and this is what I chose. (*THT* 104-105, emphasis added).

With an analytical and neutral approach Offred is trying to find a definition for her own experience, and among the terms she uses she rejects 'rape' on the basis that some alternatives were suggested to her. However, those alternatives are death or exile to toxic colonies, so the women succumb to the order. Thus, if Messina-Dysert's definition of rape is taken into consideration, the handmaid's are the victims of rape who consent under threat.

In order to achieve the goal of repopulating the nation, the Gilead's regime creates a scripture based[51] ceremony during which the leaders of the state can impregnate the handmaids. They base their ideology on the story of infertile Rachel, one of the wives of the biblical character Jacob. She asks Jacob to impregnate her handmaid Bilhah, so that she can adopt the children as her own. In this story of two rivalling sisters[52] whose value is defined by how many children they have, Bilhah's wellbeing and destiny are not given much consideration. This example illustrates how often the victimisation of female characters in the interpretation of biblical texts are ignored (Messina-Dysert 6). This rape story is one among others that are found in *The Bible*[53]. According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Bible* is "authored by men, written in androcentric language, reflective of male experience, selected and transmitted by male religious leadership. Without question, the Bible is a male book" (qtd in Messina-Dysert 6). In the hands of Gilead's radical leadership this text becomes a weapon and a tool to justify their violent behaviour. The regime's Commanders camouflage rape with ceremonial elements: the bathing, the household praying, and finally, the de-eroticised intercourse. In Gilead this form of violence becomes an accepted practice that occurs repeatedly and the perpetrators are never punished because they are guarded by the ideology.

The fictional world of *The Handmaid's Tale* is permeated with rape culture, which is, unfortunately, also a cultural state outside of fiction. Messina-Dysert defines rape culture as "cyclical system where rape is viewed as inevitable and is accepted as a

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[51] The Book of Genesis, Chapter 30.

[52] Leah is Rachel's sister who is also Jacob's wife, and who conceives and gives birth to Jacob's children.

[53] "The rape of Dinah (Genesis 34), the rape of the unnamed pilegesh 15 (Judges 19), and the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13)" - these are the "rape texts" that are selected and analysed by Gina Messina-Dysert in her *Rape culture and spiritual violence: religion, testimony, and visions of healing.* See p 8.

fact of life and impossible to change"[54] (62). She uses the case of Steubenville high-school rape[55] to illustrate the alarming public reactions towards rape crime. Rape culture not only tolerates the crime, but negatively affects the victims lives after the rape experience: "when a woman is raped, she is not only dominated and controlled but often experiences shame and ultimately feels rejected by her community […]" (Messina-Dysert 65). In *The Handmaid's Tale* the Aunts and the Wives stand for the 'community' that surrounds the handmaids. Even though they are females too, who only due to age or rank escape the handmaids' destiny, there is no empathy or solidarity found in them towards the unfortunate ones.

Both Aunts and Wives express contempt towards the handmaids either because of past lifestyles they led and incidents they experienced or because of the conditions handmaids find themselves presently. The first example is Janine's story of how she was gang-raped as a teenager. Her story is adapted in both Miller's and Schlöndorff's versions, showing other handmaids circling Janine around while she is retelling the incident and the rest of them shout "Her fault" (Schlöndorff, 00:17:10 - 00:17:14; E1 00:27:29 - 00:27:35). Messina-Dysert uses the term "second rape" to describe the aftermath of the rape - it is a phenomenon that occurs in rape culture when the victims are blamed for what has happened to them (1). The second rape concept is embedded in this scene of Janine's shaming. The aunts interpret Janine's case as not a crime on the perpetrators' side, but as something Janine caused herself.

When it comes to Wives, there is little solidarity shown between them and the handmaids. When Offred takes part in Janine's birth ceremony, she finds herself in presence of Serena and other two Wives. After a short exchange and an embarrassing

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[54] This impossibility of change is reflected in the scene where Offred tells Ambassador Castillo the truth. Ambassador's answer is perplexing: "I can't help you. […] There hasn't been a child born aline in Cipica in six years. My country is dying" (E6, 00:49:45 - 00:51:00). What Ambassador means is that for the greater good they will need to have handmaids, otherwise the human beings face extinction.

[55] In 2012 in USA a sixteen-year old girl was repeatedly raped by two boys, and the incidents was watched, taped and tweeted about by the witnesses (see Messina-Dysert 62).

'cookie scene[56]', Offred leaves the room, but the Wives make sure that she overhears the following:

> Wife One: Little whores, all of them
> Serena: But still, you can't be choosy. You have to take what they hand out (E2, 00:20:27 - 00:20:32).

The handmaids are being insulted unfairly, because, obviously, they do not have much choice in given circumstances. The Wives seem to disregard their precarious status and they express their hatred whenever it is possible. There is, however, one example of a compassionate Wife, who seems to apprehend the horrors the handmaids have to suffer, and thus attempts to reduce the pain as much as possible. It is the case of Ofglen's new placement after her circumcision. The Wife approaches Ofglen at the ceremony day and alludes to a way how that could be avoided:

> The Wife: You know, I'm not feeling very well. I'm might be getting the flu. Maybe we should skip tonight's ceremony? What do you think?
> Ofglen: You can't be sick every month.
> The Wife: No. I can't (E5, 00:26:24 - 00:27:40).

It is not only her words that suggest support but also how she gently touches Ofglen's shoulder and gives her a warm smile that shows her tender attitude and sympathy towards the handmaid. This scene demonstrates that even in such circumstances there is a place for understanding and solace. The Wife's caring attitude towards Ofglen shines a bad light on the rest of the Wives, who deliberately choose to act in evil and patronising manner. These examples prove that the rape culture is present in *The Handmaid's Tale.*

The analysis of both filmic adaptations has shown that the creators have taken different approaches regarding the visual representations of rape in their work, and achieved contrasting results. While the TV series presents the ceremony as an official and traumatic act, in Schlöndorff's movie the ceremony is embedded in eroticised and dramatic ambience.

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[56] One of the Wives suggests to Serena she might want to offer Offred a cookie, since Offred has been behaving politely in the gathering. For Offred, who is deprived of any indulgences, the cookie becomes a tool of humiliation. Serena theatricality asks Offred if she would like to have one, and Offred, knowing that she would be in trouble if she refuses, accept the cookie and leaves the room. Later in the sequence she spits it out and leaves the rest of it on purpose in the fancy bathroom of the host. In this way she shows that she will not allow the wives to humiliate her and treat her like a child.

A combination of particular visual choices creates the erotic tone of the ceremonial act in the movie adaptation (Schlöndorff, 00:28:54 - 00:31:59). First of all, the titillating atmosphere is achieved by the lighting. The intercourse takes place in the bedroom that is lit by the moonlight coming through the window. The moonlight, in combination with other two sources of light - the candles and the fireplace - creates erotic cosiness, because the whole room seems to be drenched in a soft mist. Such lighting arrangement is typically seen in the movie scenes involving intimate and sexual interactions between the characters, where the lack of light helps them to feel less restrained and increases self-confidence. This scene lacks visual clarity and openness because of the dimness in the room, and also because the Commander performs the sexual act with his eyes closed. The image of closed eyes can be associated with the sensation of pleasure. The ambience of the scene becomes more intensified when the Commander, eyes still closed, leans against Offred passionately (see Figure 16).

(Figure 16: Schlöndorff 00:30:01)

This movement shows that he is enjoying the act. Another detail that renders this scene erotic is the veils both the handmaid and the Wife wear. Their facial features are partially obscured by the material of the veil, and at the same time illuminated by the moonlight, which makes them look mysterious, and sexually arousing. Finally, Offred's

behaviour and reactions in bed intensifies the intercourse. She is breathing heavily, is contorting her face, and her moaning could have double meaning. It could be interpreted as a sign of physical pain, or it could be understood as expressions of sexual pleasure. In combination with other elements mentioned above, the sounds she is making resemble scenes from pornographic movies. The film positions the camera in way that the audience sees the Commander for the most part of the scene. The effect of this side angle shot is that it represents Gilead's ideology, in which the man is superior to women.

During the rape ceremony scene in the movie adaptation the creators interchange the side angle shot with "I-camera" shot (O'Brien 120):

> When the I-camera films from the position of the killer viewing the Final Girl, we identify with her terror, just as in *Jaws* the I-camera films from the viewpoint of the shark in order that we might see the victim's terror and identify with it. (ibid. 120)

In the rape scene Offred and Serena are filmed from the Commander's point of view, and so this shot enables the viewers to identify themselves with the Commander. It ties in with Mulvey's identification theory: "We find the violence against the film woman pleasurable because in this fetishizing and punishing of a woman, male castration anxiety is "resolved"" (O'Brien 116). The male viewers can identify themselves with the Commander because he is inflicting pain (physical or emotional) not to one but two women, and the women are depicted in distress and tears.

The visual and audial elements used in the sequence render the ceremonial intercourse too intense and emotionally charged given the context. To begin with, the atmosphere of the scene is contrastive to the ideology that sees the act as a necessary 'procedure' to breed the nation's off-springs, but not something one should indulge in. After all, the sexual intercourse, according to Christian ideology, is a sin, and is only justified when it is performed in order to reproduction. What is more, even though the regime labels the act as 'ceremony', it is nothing more but a major sexual violation of one's body, which in Schlöndorff's visual realisation is given an erotic tone. Zutter mockingly summarises the final shots of the sequence:

> After suffering through her first Ceremony as a Handmaid, Offred runs to her room, rips off her red gown, and throws open the window, baring her breasts to the outside as she sobs brokenheartedly. It's such an incongruously eroticized shot, seeing as it takes place (a) in a dystopian thriller and (b) after a violent, agency-robbing rape. (Zutter n.p.)

In her comment she points out the inadequacy between the ambience of the sequence and the 'bigger picture' of the story. I do agree with her point, and I would also like to add that the similar concupiscent mood is retained in the adaptation of Offred and Nick's meeting.

The planning of their encounter and the meeting itself has an aura of mischievous secrecy around it. Serena acts as a confidante to Offred, and mentions an option of Nick, being young, handsome and possibly still fertile, impregnating her. She then coquettishly asked if "we just won't tell him [the Commander, JS], won't we?", as if the inclusive pronoun 'we' should make them true partners in crime (Schlöndorff, 00:57:23 - 00:57:27). Serena sounds like an amused conspirator, which is a strange choice of tone knowing that both of them are about to do something so dangerous that they could lose their lives. The meeting takes place at night, in Nick's apartment. Offred is shown running barefoot across the yard, her hair is loosely tied, and she wears only her white nightgown and red coat. Her dishevelled appearance (she is not wearing any shoes) creates an over-dramatised impression of a clandestine heroine. Just before she knocks at his door, Offred arranges her hair to make sure she looks good and slightly smiles. Both of these small gestures indicate anticipation on her part, and does not reflect properly on the situation: she is supposed to feel horrified because what she is walking into is another disgraceful rape. On the contrary, Nick and Offred display no stress during their encounter, which they start with a witty exchange:

> Nick: Have you come to do your duty for the father land?
> Offred: Yep.
> Nick: Boss's wife was real Lady-like, she said: "I want you to fuck her Nick, I want you to give her the works." I said: "Yes, Ma'am. Anything you say, Ma'am." (Schlöndorff, 00:57:47 - 1:00:10).

During this short dialogue they both seem joyful and relaxed enough to make fun of their situation. Afterwards they indulge in passionate kissing, followed by Nick slowly undressing Offred, and finally engaging with her in ardent sexual intercourse. They act as if they are two lovers meeting in circumstance not involving oppressive regime, sexual abuse, and a threat of death penalty for their deed. While the impregnation ceremony with the Commander is represented as eroticised sexual violence, the depiction of this meeting abandons the consideration of violence completely, leaving the audience with the partial female nudity and a genesis of a romantic plot line.

The sexual acts discussed above are also presented in the TV series adaptation, however, they are depicted in a considerably different light. I would like to begin with the analysis of the ceremony night and demonstrate that the aesthetic choices employed in this version of *The Handmaid's Tale* create a formal and discomforting ambience, deprived of any erotic allusions. What is more, apart from being sexual violations, the encounters with the Commander and Nick are depicted as more complex experiences. They trigger Offred's self-contextualisation where she goes through a traumatic realisation of her current existence in comparison to her past life.

The ceremony extends beyond the bedroom and the actual insemination, as it stretches out through the day and involves certain preparations. It is an event that begins much sooner and includes ritualistic elements. The bathing of the handmaid is one of them, and this pre-ceremonial moment is given a particular significance and length in Miller's version (E1, 00:22:44 - 00:25:12). Offred is shown standing in front of a drawn bathtub and slowly beginning to undress. Her voiceover explains that the bathing is necessary before the ceremony because they have to be "clean, washed and brushed; like a prize pig" (ibid.). A mocking tone is obvious in her voice, because she is about to make her body clean, just so that it can be defiled by the Commander later. This sequence uses what in cinema studies is called "bathtub code": "The codes are the medium through which the "message" of the scene is transmitted" (Monaco 204). Codes can also be understood as "systems of logical relationships" that exist outside the film and are used in film creation to express meaning (ibid. 204). In real life the bathtub is a place that is associated with cosiness, warmth, relaxation, self-reflection. In the cinematic history the bathtub code has been used in various situations: as a murder

setting, as an expression of character in distress, or nudity suggestion without showing it (ibid. 198-203). The bathtub scene in *The Handmade's Tale* creates a contrast of what it should be - relaxing and calming - and what it actually is - cleaning oneself and 'offering' your body for violation.

The bathtub code also serves as an expression of Offred's grieve and pain. While she is taking a bath, she experiences a flashback of her family visiting an aquarium. The flashback is smoothly woven into the bath scene by "transcended match cut": a montage technique used by filmmakers to connect two non-chronological scenes (Monaco 243). Usually this technique is used with visual images: one image resembles another and that resemblance is making the connection between two scenes uninterrupted (ibid 243). In Offred's bath scene, however, I recognise the audio match cut: when she is lying in the tub, the sound of the water moving gently becomes the noise water makes in the aquarium, and that sound takes her to the past. The flashback signifies Offred's fear to be forgotten. And it could be assumed that this fear returns to her every time she has to take that bath before the ceremony. At this particular moment she feels less of herself, and her past life seems more and more distant. With every bath she takes, the more time passes, and the bigger the chances are that she begins to disappear from the memories of her loved ones.

The visual representation of Offred's first ceremony at the Waterford's placement is created by blending two spaces: the living room, where a short sermon is read to all the members of the household, and the bedroom (E1, 00:29:31 - 00:33:53). While the Commander's voice, reading the Bible script "[…] or else I die"[57] still resonates in the room, Offred's eyelids close with the word "die", and open up in the next cut where she is already lying on the bed. Offred's face takes up all the shot space, is shown from above, as if from the Commander's point of view. Her eyes are wide open and it is visible that her body is moving back and forth in slow motion. Even though it is not revealed yet, it is clear that the Commander is penetrating her. The next scene demonstrates Offred's point of view: the camera must have been placed right

[57] The whole excerpt goes as follows: "And when Rachael saw that she bear Jacob no children, Rachel envied he sister and said unto Jacob: "Give me children, or else I die". And she said: "Behold my maid Bilhah, go in onto her, and she shall bear upon my knees that I may also have children by her". And she gave him Bilhah, her handmaid, to wife. And Jacob went onto her." (E1 00:30:16 - 00:31:31).

below her chin, showing her breasts closest to the camera, while her spread legs and the Commander are in the far end of the shot. This shot creates a perfect chance for the audience to 'see' the rape from Offred's point of view. The whole sequence is composed of close-up shots of the actors' faces, and is run in slow motion. Offred's face shows detachment, as she attempts to stare at the empty space above her, while Serena is shown watching the Commander closely. Besides face close-ups, the camera focuses on details that represent the formality of the entire act. First of all, the Commander's shirt, vest and watch are zoomed in, as if to exaggerate that there is nothing sexual about the intercourse that takes place. Another shot focuses on Serena's tight grip around Offred's wrist, which symbolises that she is still in charge in this ceremony.

The visual elements of the sequence are supplemented by two layers of sounds: the Commander's voice reading the Bible script, and Arthur Sullivan's hymn *Onward, Christian Soldiers* (libretto written by Sabine Baring-Gould in 1865). The hymn's title, and the rest of the lyrics[58], clearly indicate Christian crusade ideology: to spread the God's word by conquering. The Salvation Army[59], a religious charitable organisation established in 1865 in London, has chosen this hymn as one of its representing theme songs. Taking into consideration that the 19th century British Empire was built on colonising ideology, one could make a connection to how Gilead is using Christian ideology to conquer and colonise women[60]. The hymn stops the moment the Commander ejaculates. This sudden disappearance of the music means that the ceremony is complete and that the female has been conquered. The combination of the visual and the audial in this sequence creates an impression that whatever happens in the bedroom is the result of the ideology that is preached in the living room. After the ejaculation, what remains in the room is silent and awkward atmosphere all the 'actors' of the ritual have to face (Figure 17).

The room is shot from an upper camera angle showing all the participants of the ceremony a few seconds after it is over. Each of their positions represents the state they

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[58]http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Onward_Christian_Soldiers/

[59] https://www.salvationarmy.org/

[60] Here I would like to acknowledge that the interpretation of the hymn in this scene was inspired by my supervisor Univ.-Prof. Dr. Sylvia Mieszkowski's competent advice and direction.

(Figure 17: E1, 00:32:24)

are in. The Commander avoids facing the room with the two women. He is picking up his jacket, which clearly indicates that he feels uncomfortable and does not intend to stay in the room longer than it is necessary. While both the Commander and his Wife moved, Offred remains in exact same position where she was during the ceremony. Her stillness expresses the shock she has just experienced. Her stupefied posture speaks of her uncertainty about what should follow, or what she is supposed to do. Serena, on the other hand, has moved away from the spot where she has been lying. Her reluctance to remain in bed can be interpreted as a sign of repulsion to the ceremony act. When Serena and Offred all finally alone, the latter is ordered "to get out" immediately (ibid.). Together with the Commander the authority and ideology has left the room, and Serena is pictured as a hurt human being, who needs solitude so that she can grieve. One might sympathise with her in this scene, because the ceremony is humiliating for her. It reminds her that, according to the ideology, she is failing her husband by not being able to conceive. In the novel even Offred after the ceremony rhetorically asks: "Which of us is it worse for, her or me?" (*THT* 106). In the TV series adaptation this questions is asked silently with the last shot of the ceremony sequence: it is a close-up of Serena alone in the bedroom, in tears.

In Waterford's household the ceremony is not the only rape Offred is forced to endure. While the movie adaptation presents Nick's and Offred's relationship as a romantic involvement, the Miller's version of *The Handmaid's Tale* portrays their situation as complex and traumatising for both. Since Offred is transferred to her new placement, the dynamics between Nick and her is ambiguous. First of all, she is told that there is an Eye in her house, thus she develops a careful and distrustful attitude towards Nick[61] (E1). Nick, on the other hand, on several occasions demonstrates empathy and kindness towards Offred, which creates additional confusion for her in the matters of who to trust or not (E3). Eventually, Serena's meddling with the order of things compels Nick and Offred to undergo an arranged rape so that he could impregnate Offred, which further complicates their relationship.

The arranged intercourse between Offred and Nick brings great distress to Offred for two reasons: she will risk her life, but she will also face humiliation in the eyes of someone who might have been her comfort and object of tender fantasies. The first reasons is obvious: Offred is aware that for this 'crime' both Serena and she would receive the harshest punishment in case Nick is really an Eye and decides to expose

(Figure 18: E5, 00:20:50)

[61] It is a common knowledge among the citizens of Gilead that the help (drivers or maids) are most likely to also serve as government spies.

them. The second reason is suggested by the composition of Episode 5, which is titled *Faithful*. It suggests that the rape Offred has to undergo with Nick effects her more profoundly than the ceremony with the Commander. Serena's organising of their meeting is intertwined with flashbacks of Offred meeting and falling in love with her husband. The reason why impending intercourse with Nick brings Offred these particular memories is that for her Nick represents a possibility of intimate human connection in this regime. Knowing that their first sexual experience will be arranged on Serena's request Offred feels humiliated physically and emotionally.

Offred's and Nick's meeting is deprived of any allusions to their mutual affection or sexual interest (E5, 00:20:20 - 00:21:29, 00:23:40 - 00:25:12). Serena accompanies Offred to Nick's room in the middle of the day and stays there throughout the intercourse (Figure 17 above). The image above shows the tension in the room: neither Nick nor Serena looks at Offred when she starts slowly moving towards the depth of the room. The camera tracks her movement across the room, and even though it is not visible yet, it is obvious from her facial expression that she is approaching the bed where she will be raped. The sequence is interrupted by a flashback of June's first intimate encounter with her future husband Luke. The flashback's light and romantic atmosphere contrasts with the embarrassment in Nick's room. This flashback reveals to the viewers Offred's love story from the past and shows that this happiness is no longer possible in this regime. Instead, Offred is forced to engage in humiliating sexual intercourse not only with the Commander but also with someone for whom she might have romantic feelings.

The defining theme of the episode is the freedom to love and be able to express it. When Offred has to act according to Serena's plan she believes that she has lost that freedom. The physical violation which Offred experiences negatively affects her desires and hopes, and paralyses her abstract self, her identity. Earlier in the episode Offred has a conversation with the Commander about Ofglen's circumcision, which shocks her. In a mocking tone he tells her that for Oglen's 'crime' of gender treachery the doctors punished her by taking care of her "small problem" (E5, 00:33:08 - 00:33:32). Offred's astonished face reveals that she understands very well what part of Ofglen's body exactly was removed. In the context of this episode about freedom to love, Ofglen's

circumcision symbolises the brutal violence the regime is capable of to completely destroy the desires of the handmaids. However, later in the episode Offred witnesses Ofglen publicly killing an officer, and this incident has an encouraging effect on Offred to rebel and regain that lost freedom. Despite the risk, she decides to go see Nick alone. Before she leaves the house and goes to Nick her voiceover reflects on Ofglen: "They didn't get everything. There was something inside her they couldn't take away. She looked invincible" (E5, 00:47:00 - 00:51:52). When Offred arrives to Nick's room, she immediately starts undressing herself and Nick without any introductions or dialogue. Her movements are crucial in this scene: facing Nick and approaching him slowly she makes him move backwards towards the bed. This straightforward behaviour shows that she wants to establish agency she did not have the previous time she was in that room: the act was forced on them, Serena was watching them all the time, so any kind of intimacy was impossible. This time it is the same path to the same bed, but the circumstances are different: she is in charge, she is going at her pace, and the most important thing - she is in his room by her own choice. In the context of the entire episode, one could interpret Offred's bold act as a tribute to Ofglen. Especially because she also takes charge during the sexual act - she is 'on the top' and reaches orgasm at the end of the sequence[62].But I view her decision to go to Nick as a tribute to herself, and as a proof to herself that she can also be "invincible". For Offred it is also a way to negate the traumatising rape both of them had to endure previously.

The sexual violence in the TV series version of *The Handmaid's Tale* is present in visual, as well as verbal form. According to Messina-Dysert, in the broad context of rape related issues, talking openly about it is essential: "[…] explicit details demand attention and impress images into the mind whereas generic descriptions are easily ignored and forgotten"[63] (3). The non-fictional brutal reality of the rape victims can be related to rape presented in my objects of analysis. For example, the following short verbal exchange between Serena and Offred after their first ceremony entails the explicit details of the sexual violation:

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[62] Earlier in the same episode in the flashbacks of her and Luke's first night together she tells Luke she needs to be on top, otherwise she will not have orgasm.

[63] In her book Messina-Dysert includes numerous testimonies given by rape victims, and claims that talking openly about the crime should confront its taboo status, remove blame from the victims, and acknowledge the severity of the perpetrator's act (3).

> Serena: Get out. Are you deaf?
> Offred: The chances are better if I lay on my back afterwards. (E1, 00:32:46 - 00: 33:13).

This conversation refers to the sperm that is inside Offred's body now, 'invading' her reproductive organs. A similar exchange takes place when Offred is taken back to the house after seeing Nick, and Serena asks her how she feels. Offred reacts without scruple: "You don't just feel pregnant 30 seconds after a man comes" (Offred, E5, 00:25:24 - 00:25:28). Her reply again contains a bare fact of a man ejaculating inside her. These graphic details serve as a supplemental force to strengthen the images viewers see.

The Handmaid's Tale TV series, compared to the movie, provides an insight into how complex the rape problem is. The violent crime is shown repeatedly, it concerns more than just the main character of the story, and it is referred to in explicit details. This straightforward approach towards the issue creates a shocking effect and has potential to provoke thought in the audiences. Lisa M. Cuklanz in her study of how rape is depicted in the prime time (8 PM - 11 PM) television episodic shows between 1976-1990 has proven that television slowly but eventually reflects the society's changing opinion towards this crime[64]. However, some claim that one should not expect too much from the television: "social change does occur, ideological values do shift, and television is part of this movement. It is wrong to see it as an originator of social change, or even to claim that it ought to be so" (Gitlin, Fiske qtd in Cuklanz 13). I would challenge that by saying that television could become a source of stories that encourage the audiences to rethink various social problems. Perhaps shows like *The Handmaid's Tale* is one of the ways to challenge the existence of rape culture. One might argue that in case of the Hulu's adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* we are not dealing with a traditional TV show aired on a TV channel, but the streaming service instead. However, nowadays a large part of the audience is using exactly that entertainment platform. What was in the beginning an exclusive paid service becomes a

[64] The shows in the 1970s mainly depicted rape as a case of stranger violently attacking his victim, whereas the later shows in 1980s showed acquaintance rape, included more dialogue for the victims, examined multiple perspectives of the issue (Cuklanz 25). This change of rape depiction in the prime time television mirrored what was happening in the society: in the 1970 feminist activists started a rape reform movement which was challenging the traditional definitions of rape and attempted to draw public attention to the complexity of the problem (ibid 7-12).

mainstream product with millions of viewers[65]. To be able to reach such large audience with the content that induces critical thinking is hopeful.

8.4 Escaping the Imprisonment of the Body

Suffering violence induces another form of violence - a passive aggressiveness towards one's own body. When there is no escape from territorial limitations, or from ideology, there is one last escape - from one's own body. Right from the beginning the novel contains quite a few hints of a possibility of suicide. Offred explains that the reason the window is shatterproof is not to stop them from running away, but to prevent "those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge" (*THT*, 18). From Offred's point of view the suicide is the ultimate way out from her unfortunate situation. Throughout the book Offred continues mentioning various household items with which she could harm herself: she covets Serena's garden sheers (161), or wishes she could steal a kitchen knife (108). In the description of her room we learn that there is no lamp on the ceiling: "[…] in a centre of it a blank space, plastered over, like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out. There must have been a chandelier, once. They've removed anything you could tie a rope to" (*THT* 17). It is a terrible realisation to know that the rulers of Gilead are perfectly aware of the horrors the handmaids have to endure, and in what ways they might attempt to 'escape'. The absence of the chandelier can be understood symbolically - it represents the absence of light, the deprivation of the last chance to liberate oneself.

The comparison between the ceiling and a face without an eye becomes much more vivid and visual in the TV series adaptation. The creators of the series adapt the resemblance between those two objects by showing Janine lose her eye for disobedience (E1, 00:18:30 - 00:19:21). She is dragged out of the classroom, and the next time the audience sees her, she looks changed. The camera zooms out from Janine's eye, slowly revealing that in stead of the second eye there is a white patch (E1, 00:26:12 -

[65] Hulu claims 17 million subscribers, while Netflix - 52 million, which is almost three times more. (See https://qz.com/1175865/hulu-feels-good-about-its-subscriber-numbers-again/).

00:26:26). Janine is already dressed in red, she is staring into space, and her face looks completely spiritless. As if the light within her was literally extinguished by plucking out her eye. There is an inter-medium connection (it can be recognised only by those who have read the book and watched the series) created by Janine's suffered punishment and the theme of suicide. This connection continues further since Janine attempts to commit suicide later in the TV series (E9, *The Bridge*).

Elisabeth Bronfen, in her discussion of three novels[66] that contain female suicide, interprets the act of suicide as a form of empowerment. According to Bronfen, each work

> "[…] depicts a woman using death as a conscious act of setting a mark, as a form of writing with her body, a materialisation of the sign, where the sheer material factualness of the dying and dead body lends certainty, authority and realness to this attempt at self-textualisation" (141).

What resonates most from this quotation with my own interpretation of suicide theme in *The Handmaid's Tale* are the words "writing with her body" and "self-textualisation". Suicide becomes one of the ways to make a statement, and not to be forgotten. The hole in the ceiling is due to the incident that happened with the previous handmaid in the Waterford's house. In her case, her story is known to other houses and it certainly does not reflect well on the Commander. She is mentioned among the highest governmental officials (when Commander Price discusses Waterford with Nick, E8, 00:40:15 - 00:40:28), and among the wives (when Mrs. Putnam warns Serena to worry about her own husband, E9, 00:45:11 - 00:45:20). Even if the previous Offred was just a random girl with a forgotten name, after her suicide she is at least remembered as the one who lived in that particular household, and with her act disturbed the order.

The former Offred's suicide is disruptive in several ways. First of all, in the theocratic ideology, which strictly follows Scripture, the act of suicide is the worst sin. By committing it, one rebels against God's authority, and what is worse, sets a wrong example to the rest of the handmaids. Secondly, according to Bronfen, in cases of female suicides, "By undoing her body, she undoes the gender construction which places her in an inferior position […]" (143). The handmaids are defined by nothing

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[66] Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), Tennyson's *Lancelot and Elaine* (1859), Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857).

else than their bodies, thus, by eliminating the body the former Offred jeopardises the grand plan of Gilead, because there is one body less to torture, rape and utilise. Finally, the suicide can be understood as a way of emancipation in the rigorous regime:

> The choice of death emerges as a feminine strategy within which writing with the body is a way of getting rid of the oppression connected with the feminine body. Staging disembodiment as a form of escaping personal and social constrains serves to criticise those cultural attitudes that reduce the feminine body to the position of dependency and passivity, to the vulnerable object of sexual incursions. Feminine suicide can serve as trope, self-defeating as it seems, for a feminine writing strategy within the constrains of patriarchal culture (Bronfen 142).

In Gilead's society, where women are reduced to 'walking wombs', killing oneself can be interpreted as an act of desperation, but also as a means of denying one's body, because it is an entrapment and a tool that allows male members of society exercise violence upon women. Suicide becomes an act of violence that is considered by the handmaids since it does not only liberate the soul from bodily restrains, but also discredits the ideology.

9. Conclusion

While working on the three versions of *The Handmaid's Tale* - the novel, the movie and the TV series - I have discovered that adaptation is not only the product and the process, but it is also an art. With subtle changes, editions, new perspectives it can shape the story into something new. The form of adaptation influences how the story is recreated and what aspects of the story are removed or highlighted. Regarding the novel and the change from verbal to visual story telling, the 'rivals' in my research were Schlöndorff's movie (1990) and Miller's TV show (2017). While in both versions the main fabula from the novel has been adapted in comparably similar ways, those two screen adaptations differ when it comes to the chosen focus of the thesis - violence and its representations. Adaptation and seriality share one element - limitlessness: the versions of the story can have no boundaries similarly to how the principle of seriality expands the story's territory with new episodes, more characters, plot twists. The creators of the TV series, in comparison to the movie makers, made use of untapped potential in the story and explored wide range of creative possibilities because the medium allowed screen time and space.

To understand the mechanism of adaptation I first of all investigated the shift from the written to the visual forms. To get close to the violence in the story I analysed what type of the narrator Offred is by looking at the focalisation in the novel. Her first-person fixed internal point of view provides access to everything that happens to her, including brutality she experiences. The way Offred tells her story in the novel is fragmented, because the entire narrative is built from bits and pieces, as neither her nor the academics that compiled the story knew the real sequence of events. In the movie this fragmentation is not really reflected in any way, because the story is told in chronological order, and there are almost no flashbacks to Offred's past. The lack of fragmentation leads to eliminations, and eliminations change the meaning and the message of the story in the movie: with flashbacks gone the dystopian horror is less intense, because the warning message about the ways contemporary society works is lost. By removing the flashbacks the criticism of the society and its mores is removed. That is why the movie is less critically dystopian than the TV series, where the flashbacks are kept, and they especially focus on aspects of current society that later

backfire and cause the emergence of Gilead. Fragmented story telling of the novel is reflected in fragmented way the TV series's 10 episodes are composed. They are arranged by topic, each episode has a partial closure, but the entire story can be understood and appreciated once the audience watches the whole season. It is similar to the novel's composition: the story and the way it was told makes sense once the ending of the novel is read. The intimate connection that is established between the readers of the novel and the first person narrator is maintained in the TV series adaptation using voice-over technique and close-up shots. These techniques provide access to Offred's true spirit, as well as to her suffering, which was important to capture, because I analysed the visual representations of violence, and it was essential for me to know how the experience of violence is shown on screen.

After the close analysis of violent images in adaptations I have grouped them into two sections: violence inflicted on collective level, and violence suffered individually. The violence on collective level is possible because of ruling patriarchal ideology (biopower), the transition state the handmaids are forced into (liminality), and the powerful mechanism of manipulation and control through violence channeling (scapegoating). The core of Gideal's regime and its ideology is biopower, and the representations of it were found in all three objects of analysis. The horrors the handmaids experience in the state of liminality were reflected both in the movie and the TV series, where the handmaids are shown to go through identity crisis in the training centres and in the duties the regimes assigns to them. The theoretical frameworks of liminality and scapegoating allowed me to read into the public executions the handmaids have to participate in, and see how two screen versions presented these bloody events. There are two additions in the TV series which are connected to both liminality and the scapegoating. One of them is the failed Janine's execution, which shows that he handmaids as a group can have agency and possibility to rebel. Another addition is Offred's meeting with Mexican Ambassador, and how Offred in the isolation of the Commander's household, is easier manipulated within the state of liminality, and runs the risk to adapt the new 'ordinary'.

The second group of violent images entails violence inflicted on individual level, which includes confinement, mutilation and torture, rape, and suicide. In this

section the TV series proves to be the more advantageous form of adaptation, because its format allows to explore violence on individual level in much more details. While both adaptations show handmaids trapped symbolically by bright gowns, only the TV series allows Offred space and time to express her distaste towards her attire or the earmark issued by the regime. Even though in both screen versions Offred is shown living in a small attic room, the TV series demonstrates her being locked up in the room, and explores her physical and mental struggle with the spacial confinement. The torture and body mutilation is treated mildly in Schlöndorff's movie, while Miller's adaptation does not shy away from shocking images of injured, damaged or removed body parts. After analysing the rape scenes in the movie and the TV series I came to the following conclusion: the movie represents rape either as an eroticised sexual abuse of one woman, or as a forbidden pleasure. The opposite is done in the TV series, where rape is presented as a more complex problem, as rape culture: Offred is being raped repeatedly in the context of the ceremony and outside of it, she goes though traumatic self-contextualisation and together with other handmaids suffers the second rape - contempt from the female community for being handmaids. Finally, suicide theme is omitted from Schlöndorff's movie completely, but is adapted in few instances in the TV show, clearly indicating that this last form of violence - violence towards oneself - is ever present in the story as a form of ultimate rebellion.

The TV series proves to be the mode of story telling popular among professional film creators, but it also attracts huge audiences. After my detailed analysis I have discovered that it is a more advantageous medium for the screen adaptation of the selected novel. Due to its length the TV series can allow itself 'luxury' to explore serious themes such as inequality, misogyny, and rape in depth. This adaptation is a cultural objected full of potency, and it can raise social awareness regarding these alarming problems. The issue of violence, and particularly violence against women, is as old as Biblical tales, and because this topic has been a part of our culture for ages, the society might stop challenging it and might accept is as an inevitable part of life. But a new perspective on the issue in combination with attractive story telling mode wakes audiences up and makes them see the problem anew. The quality of the TV series was evaluated by numerous awards in 2017, and the upcoming season 2 scheduled to be aired in April 2018 is a sign of hope that this story will continue to provoke thought and

encourage audiences to question status quo. In the times troubled by political protests regarding women rights and scandals of harassment the stories like *The Handmaids Tale* play a crucial role to warn and perhaps even prevent the world from becoming an unbearable place.

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Abstract (English):

This paper focuses on visual representations of violence in two different adaptations of the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. The thesis attempts to compare how various violence occurrences present in the novel are transferred from written word to the screen in the movie and the TV series formats. By employing the close reading and comparative methods, this paper analyses different filmic techniques used in both adaptations, and evaluates each medium's advantages and disadvantages in regards to this particular novel adaptation. The study shows that the movie, due to its limited screen time tackles violent themes only from few angles, while the TV series format allows character depths and plot complexity, which leads to full exploration and representation of violence. The theoretical framework used to support the analysis and the interpretations consists of narratology and adaptation studies, as well as theoretical concepts such as biopower, liminality, scapegoating, and rape culture.

Abstract (German):

Diese Arbeit ist der Darstellung von Gewalt in zwei verschiedenen Adaptationen des dystopischen Roman *The Handmaid's Tale („Der Report der Magd")* gewidmet. Die Diplomarbeit versucht verschiedene gewalttätige Vorkommen aus dem Roman zu vergleichen und rauszufinden wie das Geschriebene in den Film und Fernsehserie umgewandelt wird. Durch sorgfältiges Lesen und komparative Methoden analysiert diese Arbeit die verschiedene Filmtechniken in beiden Adaptationen und bewertet die Vorteile jeder Technik aus der Perspektive von diesem spezifischen Roman. Die Studie zeigt, dass der Film, wegen seiner limitierten Dauer, die Gewalt nur von wenigen Sichtpunkten zeigt. Auf der anderen Seite, das Fernsehserien-Format erlaubt eine tiefere Darstellung von Charakteren und Handlung, was zur vollen Erkundung und Repräsentation von Gewalt führt. Das theoretische Rahmen das für die Unterstützung von der Analyse und Interpretation benutzt wird besteht aus Narratologie und Anpassungsstudien, aber auch aus Konzepten wie Biomacht, Liminalität, Sündenbockverhalten, Vergewaltigungskultur.

Anti-plagiarism Statement

I hereby declare that this research paper is my own work, and that it is not a copy of another person's published or unpublished work. For this paper I have used my own ideas, except for quotations from published or unpublished sources, which are indicated and acknowledged within the text and in the bibliography section according to the rules of MLA academic writing stylesheet.

Juste Stupuraite
26th of February, 2018

Appendix:

(1) List of Characters

This is the list of character I mention in my thesis. It is a combination of characters from the novel and the adaptations.

Offred/June/Kate - the main protagonist of the novel. His name is given to her by the regime, and it means belonging to a certain Commander - 'of Fred, the commander'. Her name before the Gilead's regime varies in different adaptations: in the movie version he name is Kate, while in the TV series adaptation it is June.

The Commander - Fred Waterford, the Gilead's official to whose household Offred is appointed.

Serena Joy - the Commander's wife.

Ofglen - a handmaid who is assigned to Offred as her shopping partner. Two different handmaids will take the name of Ofglen during the story (see footnote on page 53).

Janine - a handmaid that Offred meets in Rachel and Leah's Centre. Her name will change to Ofwarren and Ofdaniel in the TV series adaptation depending on the household she is assigned to.

Aunt Lydia - the main 'educator' in Rachel and Leah Centre.

Moira - Offred's close friend for 'before the regime'.

Ambassador de Castillo - the Mexican Ambassador visiting Gilead on diplomatic mission.

Luke - Offred's husband.

Nick - the Commander's driver.

Rita - the household maid.

Commander Putnam - Janine's Commander who is trialled and punished for misconduct towards his handmaid.

(2) List of Figures

These are the are screenshots taken from 1) *The Handmaid's Tale*: Screenplay by Harold Pinter. Dir. Volker Schlöndorff. 1990. DVD. Studiocanal, 2009. It is indicated with the directors name and the time stamp below the screenshot; and 2) *The Handmaid's Tale.* Creator Bruce Miller. TV series accessible online on HBO GO streaming service. 2017 - Present. It is indicated by the 'E' for episode, followed by episode number, and the time stamp.